

**COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS (CFS) PRACTICUM DESCRIPTION**  
**PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN MALAWI**  
**SOILS, FOOD, and HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**  
**2017**

- 1. Practicum Title: Participatory Research with Smallholder Farmers in Malawi**
- 2. Practicum Host Name:** Soils Food and Healthy Communities Organization (SFHC), Ekwendeni, Malawi.
- 3. Practicum Host Agency/Organization Description:**  
SFHC is a non-profit organization was established by farmers, whose overall aim is to build sustainable, healthy, equitable, resilient communities in Malawi. The organization was born out of long-term participatory research addressing high levels of child malnutrition, household food insecurity due to rising costs of synthetic fertilizers leading to low crop yield, dietary diversity, higher gender inequality and soil degradation.

Farmers working with SFHC experiment with agroecological approaches such as legume diversification, agroforestry, mulching, and animal manure that have resulted in improvements in child nutrition, food security, and soil management. The farmers also engage in participatory educational activities related to nutrition, health, climate change, gender, and social equity. Participating farmers choose what they want to experiment with, including growing edible legumes intercrops, diversifying their farm with crops such as sorghum, finger millet, sweet potatoes or cowpeas, adding compost manure or legume residue to their soils and mulching. These agroecological and participatory approaches have been tested extensively by SFHC. SFHC farmers and staff collaborate with agricultural, nutritional, and social scientists, identifying different agricultural, nutritional, and social practices that improve soil fertility, food security, and child nutrition for smallholder farmers.

SFHC has worked with over 15 thousand farmers testing legume intercrops and other agroecological methods in a collaborative process which has led to improvements in child nutrition, increased crop and dietary diversity, more stable yields with reductions in the need for synthetic fertilizers, increased profitability, and a trend towards greater soil organic carbon and fertility.

The transformative approach focuses on dialogue, local knowledge and attention to social inequalities to foster change

**4. Community Partner Supervisor & Faculty Advisor:** Laifolo Dakishoni is one of leads coordinators of SFHC in Malawi and will be the community partner supervisor. Dr. Rachel Bezner Kerr will be the faculty advisor.

**5. Student Responsibilities & Expectations:** (both on site and on-campus)

a. On-site

- Familiarization with the community, SFHC staff and volunteers
- Understanding the concept of the project and its goal
- Involvement in training taking place at the site such as; manual making, crop residue incorporation, group dynamics training, nutrition trainings, gender training and HIV/AIDS trainings.
- Taking part in the research activities with the farmers and getting to understand why each farmers has chosen the particular research
- Getting involved in monthly Farmer Research Team meetings, cooking demonstrations and nutrition /gender discussion groups
- Specific activities will vary based on student interest, experience and current activities taking place within SFHC. There may be an emphasis on nutrition, HIV/AIDS, gender, farmer leadership, agroecology, theatre – there are many possibilities and the specific tasks will be worked out in dialogue with the student.

b. On-campus: Regular check-ins via web conference or alternative venues with faculty advisor and other students completing a practicum (standard across all practicums). And, specific to SFHC practicum:

- Planning different activities.
- Data collection.
- Staff meetings.
- Report writing.

**6. Expected Learning Outcomes:**

- Increased understanding by students in social and ecological dimensions of agri-food systems.
- Increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable and just food systems development, grounded in engagement with local communities and SFHC.
- Increased skills in reflecting and analysis of current and historical food system controversies in the southern African context.
- Increased experience by students in community food systems work in rural Africa.

**7. Location:** SFHC, Ekwendeni, Malawi.

**8. Pre-requisites:**

**Housing**

- The students will use the guesthouse within the mission station or other housing as determined by SFHC. They should be prepared to live in modest conditions.
- Students should ideally have some prior international travel experience.
- Students should be prepared to work in collaboration with rural farmers, treating them with respect and dignity.

**9. Performance Evaluation Methods:**

- Students will be assessed using a CFS Minor standard evaluation that will be tailored to each respective practicum; the assessment will address both the overall learning objectives for the practicum and site-specific outcomes. There will be opportunity for farmers and staff to give input into the student evaluation using participatory methods.