

The Student Reporters' Report

Tropentag 2025



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Overview

Tropentag is the annual interdisciplinary conference focusing on research in tropical and subtropical agriculture, natural resource management, and rural development. It is jointly organized by a consortium of European universities, including the universities of Berlin, Bonn, Göttingen, Hohenheim, Kassel (Witzenhausen), ZALF e.V. (Germany), Ghent University (Belgium), Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (Czech Republic), the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) (Austria), as well as the Council for Tropical and Subtropical Agricultural Research (ATSAF e.V.) in cooperation with the GIZ Fund International Agricultural Research (FIA).

This year, *Tropentag 2025* was hosted by the University of Bonn, Germany, from 10th to 12th September 2025, under the theme “*Reconciling land system changes with planetary health*”. The conference brought together more than 1,000 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and students from across the world to exchange insights on sustainable solutions for global challenges.

As student reporters, we formed an interdisciplinary team of 12 international students, tasked with covering the conference through various media formats. Prior to the event, we participated in preparatory workshops where we received hands-on training in journalism, photography, videography, blogging, and social media communication. This training equipped us with the skills to document, report, and share the highlights of *Tropentag* with a wider audience.

During the conference, we actively managed ATSAF’s communication channels, publishing 25 blog articles, 16 Instagram posts and reels, 12 TikTok videos, and 6 YouTube videos, reaching a total of more than 15k views and interactions across platforms (as of 6 Dec. 2025). These outputs not only showcased the conference’s scientific discussions but also brought visibility to the diversity of voices and perspectives represented at *Tropentag*.

Following the conference, we participated in a reflection session where we received professional feedback on our work and gained valuable insights into potential career pathways in journalism, science communication, and media.

In this report, we present an overview of our activities, achievements, and challenges as student reporters at *Tropentag 2025*, along with recommendations for future student reporter teams.

Media Coverage

Social Media

Instagram

As for the social media team, composed of two members, our strategy was designed to capture both the professional essence of the event and the dynamic atmosphere experienced by participants. To achieve this, we shifted away from traditional photo posts and focused primarily on short-form video content, specifically Instagram Reels. This approach allowed us to showcase the conference in a more fun and engaging way, highlighting not only the key activities but also the overall mood and energy of the venue — “Research is fun!”

Our content combined professionally oriented material with more personal, human-centred visuals. On the professional side, we produced short recaps of conference sessions, featured selected poster presentations, included time-lapse clips of ongoing activities, and offered brief explanations of notable research findings. These videos were kept concise, usually between 30 to 60 seconds, to make complex information accessible while maintaining viewer engagement. The goal was to present scientific content in a format that was informative yet easy to understand.

Furthermore, *CapCut* enabled us to produce clean transitions, cohesive visual styles, and polished edits quickly and efficiently.

Alongside these formal highlights, we intentionally incorporated behind-the-scenes moments to provide audiences with a more relatable perspective of the conference. This included documenting our journey as student reporters, capturing candid interactions during breaks, and showing participants preparing for their talks or posters. These elements helped convey the enthusiasm that characterized the event, giving followers a fuller sense of what it felt like to attend.

Stories, providing real-time updates, quick highlights, and spontaneous moments throughout each day of the conference. This ensured continuous engagement and allowed viewers to stay connected to the flow of events as they happened.

In addition to the Reels, we created a longer video of approximately one minute and thirty seconds featuring just 4 conference participants from different countries. In this piece, they explained their projects in simple terms, shared their aspirations for the future of agriculture, and reflected on their conference experience. This format proved effective in communicating technical content in a way that was accessible to the general public, while also inspiring interest in agricultural research and sustainability.

Over the course of the conference, our team published a total of 16 posts on the @ATSAF_ev Instagram channel, 12 of which were Reels, exceeding last year's output. By combining engaging footage, catchy captions, and striking storytelling techniques, our social media coverage successfully highlighted the event's key moments and extended its reach to a broader audience beyond those in attendance.

Table 1. Number, types and content of Instagram posts

Number of Posts	Type	Content
1	Reel	See you at Tropentag
1	Reel	Day 1/Registration
1	Link Photo	Tree Link for social media
1	Reel	Conference Mood
1	Reel	Welcoming Event
1	Photo	Happy Face of Tropentag
1	Reel	Meet the Two Teams
1	Video	Meet the Student Reporters
1	Video	Conference Overall Recap
1	Reel	Poster Presentation
1	Reel	Behind the Scenes
1	Reel	Oral Presentation
1	Reel	Participants' Glow
1	Reel	Closing Ceremony
1	Reel	Journey as Student Reporter
1	Reel	Interview with Participants
16		

TikTok

For TikTok, our team continued the work initiated by the previous social media group by maintaining the platform as an integral part of our outreach strategy. We primarily reposted the Reels created for Instagram, ensuring that the same content was shared across TikTok.

Our TikTok content placed emphasis not only on speakers but also on participants, capturing their smiles, laughter, and authentic conference experiences. Highlighting the people behind the research helped create relatable, human-centred content. Looking ahead, several content ideas could further strengthen our TikTok presence. Short videos featuring ATSAF heads or members, and brief interviews with selected speakers, can add depth while remaining concise and engaging. Additionally, profiling a participant's research journey, from initial inspiration and the challenges faced to the resulting innovation or solution, could serve as powerful storytelling content for the platform. These are the suggested ideas for next year's content.

On-the-spot interviews offer another opportunity to enhance engagement. A consistent interview format, potentially aligned with an existing TikTok trend, would also help make these videos easily recognizable and more likely to be shared.

Audience interaction is another key element of TikTok success. Utilizing TikTok's interactive features such as polls, Q&A tools, or engaging caption prompts, encourages participation and builds a stronger connection with viewers. Leveraging trending audio and popular content formats helps align videos with TikTok's algorithm, increasing visibility. Again, we also used the TikTok stories for updates and more engagement.

In total, we produced twelve (12) TikTok videos during the conference, accumulating a combined 4,071 plays. This reflects a strong foundation on which future teams can continue to build and expand the conference's social media impact.

Table 2. Content and number of views on TikTok posts

Content	Views
1. See you at Tropentag	916
2. Day 1/Registration	266
3. Conference Mood	260
4. Welcoming Event	266
5. Meet the Two Teams	269
6. Poster Presentation	262
7. Behind the Scenes	261
8. Oral Presentation	0
9. Meet the Student Reporters	254
10. Closing Ceremony	256
11. Conference Overall Recap	260
12. Interview with Participants	801
Total	4,071

Challenges Faced

One of the main challenges during the conference was the limited social media team size. With only two members handling the entire content creation process—filming, editing, writing captions, and posting the photos—the workload was intensive. Most of our time had to be allocated to recording and editing Reels, which made it difficult to simultaneously manage other platforms such as LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) for real-time updates. Adding at least one more team member focused specifically on selecting photos or handling professional platforms would greatly improve efficiency and allow for more consistent and timely updates across all channels.

Another challenge emerged during the social media feedback workshop. While the session was valuable and the feedback was appreciated, some of the suggestions reflected more traditional or technical viewpoints rather than insights aligned with current social media practices. To enrich the learning experience, future workshops should provide practical, up-to-date guidance and help the team tailor content more effectively to modern audience expectations.

Working under time pressure at a live event also presented challenges. Capturing high-quality content in real time while ensuring accuracy and professionalism required strong coordination and quick decision-making.

Key Learnings

One of the most important lessons learned was how to communicate the conference atmosphere in a way that is not only technically accurate but also engaging and enjoyable for viewers. Although this balance can be challenging, it encourages us to think outside the box, experiment with new ideas, and develop content that resonates with both experts and the general public.

We also learned that social media success requires a strategic, long-term approach. If the goal is to increase followers, reach younger audiences, or build a stronger digital presence, additional investment may be necessary. Making videos catchy, visually appealing, and relatable before transitioning to more serious research messages can help attract more engagement, especially from younger scientists and students.

Moreover, this experience reinforced that social media is not simply a task but a creative and enjoyable form of communication. Engaging directly with participants, capturing spontaneous moments, and showcasing authentic interactions made the process more rewarding.

Finally, staying updated with platform algorithms, trending formats, audio, and audience behaviour is essential to remain relevant. Moving forward, incorporating more structured planning, real-time updates, and diverse content formats will help the social media team grow and deliver even stronger coverage in future conferences.

Interviews & Videos

The video team, composed of three student reporters, was formed during the pre-conference workshop. Our main responsibility was to film, edit, and publish videos that captured key moments of the conference — from major sessions and interviews to participant impressions. Most of our content was shared on the official *YouTube* channel.

During the workshop, we received hands-on training in (video) camera techniques, professional video shooting, and video editing using *DaVinci Resolve*. These sessions equipped us with the practical skills needed to cover the conference effectively. Throughout the event, we applied what we learned by documenting sessions, interviewing keynote speakers and organizers, and creating video features. While we initially divided tasks such as filming, editing, and publishing among team members, we often rotated roles to gain a well-rounded experience across all aspects of production.

In total, we produced and published six videos on *YouTube*. These included an introductory video presenting the Tropentag student reporter team, short impressions from participants, and several interviews with keynote speakers and awardees. Among them was an extended interview (around 20 minutes) with Dr. Sunday, recipient of the Justus von Liebig Award for Nutrition 2025, as well as shorter interviews averaging about four minutes with experts such as Dr. Jonas Osei-Adu (Consultant, CORAF) and Dr. Simeon Ehui (Regional Director, IITA). The videos provided both informative and engaging insights into the conference's themes and atmosphere.

Key Learnings

The experience at the Tropentag was not just a chance to cover the event but also a great opportunity for both professional and personal development. During the pre-conference workshops, we acquired a versatile set of technical and soft skills critical to creating high-quality media content. Alex's session was exciting, as he offered detailed insights into the technical side of filming and editing, thereby helping to create a sound background before the conference proper began. We were also able to shoot our intro vid during the session under his tutelage, which was incredibly useful as he offered real-time comments and guiding directions during the filming itself.

We also had first-hand exposure to new tools and workflows, particularly video editing in *DaVinci Resolve* and professional handling of cameras. Two members of the group already had experience with videography prior to this event, which helped with an easier workflow and streamlined coordination throughout the event. Collaborating as a group reinforced teamwork and flexibility. As we switched positions—filming, interviewing, editing, and publishing—we each got to work on the full production process. This not only enhanced our technical skills but also encouraged group-based trust, responsibility, and autonomy. Despite hectic schedules and restricted resources, we developed the ability to think creatively to

overcome problems and the ability to work under pressure with consistent production quality. Apart from our main video work, we also assisted other student reporter teams with photography and blogging, which provided us with good interdisciplinary exposure.

Equally fulfilling were the networking opportunities that accrued with our job. Interacting with keynote speakers, experts, and other students widened our professional network and increased our exposure to world agricultural research subjects. By the end of the event, we had significantly enhanced our storytelling and video skills, became confident with public speaking and professional communication, and received favorable comments both from organizers and participants—making the experience very rewarding.

Difficulties Faced

While the Tropentag experience was immensely rewarding, it also came with its fair share of challenges—both technical and organizational. Working with complex camera equipment and professional editing software such as *DaVinci Resolve* required significant time and effort to master. Although the pre-conference training provided a solid foundation, we often had to troubleshoot on the go, especially during tight filming schedules.

From a technical standpoint, lighting conditions in certain venues were not ideal, and our available equipment limited how much we could compensate for that. Post-production brought its own difficulties. Editing was often time-consuming and mentally demanding, requiring long hours and focus.

Finally, the limited promotion of our videos on social media platforms meant that viewership remained lower than expected. While this was slightly discouraging, it also emphasized the importance of coordinated outreach and digital engagement in maximizing the impact of our work.

Recommendations

For future video teams covering the Tropentag conference, it's essential to start by focusing on the training session and practice using the equipment and editing software, as this can save you a lot of time and frustration later. Make sure to create a clear plan and divide responsibilities so everyone knows their role, which will help avoid coordination issues and ensure all key events are covered. Take time to agree on event selection and formatting early on to prevent disagreements mid-conference. Using a tripod or stabilizer will make a big difference in the quality of longer videos, and using a microphone will solve the sound issue. You can also use your smartphone to record and edit videos with user-friendly apps like Splice and iMovie, which can simplify the process. Don't forget to add subtitles—they not only make the videos more accessible but also more engaging for viewers.

Lastly, actively promote the videos on social media and through partnerships to reach a larger audience and get the recognition your hard work deserves.

Photography

The Photography Team was established with three members for the event, though five individuals initially signed up. This limited size meant a heavy workload, though the concentration on photography allowed the lead to focus on quality work.

The team's success was greatly aided by the positive pre-event environment. The tutorial sessions were highly praised for being interactive and informative. The workshop led by Felix was highly effective, providing hands-on experience that immediately improved the team's skill set and practical application during the event.

The team's primary responsibility was capturing a comprehensive visual record of the conference. Key operational procedures included:

- **Watermarking:** The official watermark was created using *Canva*.
- **Storage & Sharing:** *Google Drive* was used for initial file transfer and collaboration, alongside **Flickr** for final, high-resolution public sharing.
- **Event Coverage:** The Schedule coordination was done via a shared *Google Document* with the Blogging Team to track event coverage, fostering inter-team communication. Final image sharing was done via *Flickr*.
- **Editing & Processing:** **PhotoScape** (utilized for batch processing) enabled quick standardization and optimization of large sets of images.
- **Data Management:** Raw and processed photos needed to be backed up onto the external hard drives provided by ATSAF.

Challenges Faced

The team faced significant operational and technical hurdles:

- **Staffing and Coverage:** The team of three people was not enough to cover the entire scope of the event. While coverage was successful, it was intensive.
- **Team Dynamics:** Although some team members started with limited photography knowledge, they made significant, visible progress throughout the event and quickly adapted to the fast-paced rhythm of the content creation process.
- **Outdated Equipment & Technical Incompatibility:**
- The cameras were old, and the Automatic mode was not working well. This necessitated relying on Manual mode and constant setting adjustments for different subjects.

- The provided external hard drives were incompatible with MacBooks. The required workaround involved moving files to a flash drive, then using a Windows laptop to transfer them to the hard drives, a process that took hours.
- **Platform Disconnect:** The photography team largely worked separately from the social media team, leading to missed opportunities for real-time visual syncing on platforms.

Future Recommendations

Based on the challenges and key experience, the following recommendations are suggested for the next conference:

- **Optimize Team Size and Roles:** Increase the team to at least four members and assign specific coverage angles (e.g., covering the stage versus the audience) to ensure comprehensive coverage, especially in large venues like the opening ceremony hall.
- **Audience Engagement:** A key piece of advice was to capture the audience at the beginning of sessions, before people get tired - bad mood!
- **Composition Best Practices:** Prioritize Landscape orientation (from which portraits can be cropped) and trying to capture the corner of the room into the grid (golden ratio) were vital compositional takeaways.
- **Equipment Upgrade:** If possible, provide upgraded cameras, and ensure that all external storage devices and other peripherals are also compatible with MacOS.

Blogging

The blogging team for Tropentag 2025 was formed in advance based on the reporting interests each student shared. Our team consisted of six members who worked together with a clear purpose: to provide timely and accurate coverage of the conference. We focused on summarizing key sessions, highlighting important discussions, and conveying the main ideas presented by researchers and practitioners. Along with reporting the content, we also aimed to give readers a sense of the overall atmosphere and the diversity of topics addressed throughout the event.

Before the conference, we attended a writing workshop hosted by the *ATSAF Academy*. This workshop introduced us to the core principles of scientific journalism — how to observe sessions effectively, how to structure information clearly, and how to communicate scientific content in a straightforward manner. The session helped align our writing approaches and gave us a shared understanding of what was expected from the blogging team.

Over the three conference days, we collectively produced 25 blog posts. To manage the workload efficiently, we divided sessions and themes among the team members so that each person had a defined area of responsibility. This structure helped ensure broad coverage and

avoided duplication of content. Anne served as the editor-in-chief, reviewing and approving every draft to maintain coherence and consistency across all posts.

Key Learning

Serving as student reporters provided hands-on experience in communicating scientific content to a general audience. We learned how to extract key messages from presentations quickly, summarize discussions without losing accuracy, and write under tight time constraints. The experience also improved our teamwork, as we had to coordinate session schedules, share notes when needed, and discuss how best to approach certain topics.

Challenges Faced

Although the experience was constructive, it came with several practical challenges. None of us had previous professional experience in scientific journalism, so adapting to this style of writing required attention and practice. Communication within the team sometimes needed additional coordination, especially when multiple sessions ran in parallel and decisions had to be made quickly. Balancing attendance, note-taking, interviews, and drafting blog posts within the same day demanded careful time management.

Despite these challenges, the team remained committed to delivering reliable coverage. The structure we set up early on and the support within the group helped us work efficiently. The experience provided a clear understanding of the effort involved in scientific reporting and strengthened our confidence in communicating research-related content.

Future Recommendations

This section presents a compiled summary of all future recommendations made by the student reporter teams, even though some points may have been mentioned previously within the respective working area reports.

Social Media Recommendations

Balance Content Formats: Diversify and balance the use of photos, videos, and Reels on social media. Using all three strategically will create a more complete and visually engaging representation of the conference.

Expand the Social Media Team: Increase the team to at least three members to significantly improve efficiency. This will allow the team to optimize platform-specific content and explore additional social media channels.

Use Trends Creatively and Purposefully: Establish a strong audience with light, relatable content, and then gradually integrate more serious and technical messages ("fun first, serious second" approach).

Optimize Hashtag Usage: Employ clear, relevant, and targeted hashtags to significantly improve content discoverability.

Develop Structured Interview Content: Interview ATSAF members, organizers, or prominent figures for credibility and inspiration. Create short Reels featuring technical insights, such as a participant's project from the problem to the solution.

Invest on TikTok and Instagram: Given the current low views, invest more resources, time, and creativity into platform-specific content. This may include experimenting with investing money for more engagements, hiring influencers, using trends, using interactive features, posting more frequently, and collaborating with participants

Interviews & Videos Team Recommendations

Focus on Training and Practice: Start by focusing on the training session and practice using the equipment and editing software, as this can save a lot of time and frustration later.

Create a Clear Plan: Make sure to create a clear plan and divide responsibilities so everyone knows their role. This will help avoid coordination issues and ensure all key events are covered.

Early Formatting Agreement: Take time to agree on event selection and formatting early on to prevent disagreements mid-conference.

Use Proper Equipment: Use a tripod or stabilizer for better quality in longer videos, and use a microphone to solve sound issues.

Alternative Editing Tools: Use smartphones to record and edit videos with user-friendly apps like Splice and iMovie, which can simplify the process.

Accessibility: Don't forget to add subtitles, as they make videos more accessible and engaging.

Promotion: Actively promote the videos on social media and through partnerships to reach a larger audience.

Photography Team Recommendations

Optimize Team Size and Roles: Increase the team to at least four members and assign specific coverage angles (e.g., covering the stage versus the audience) to ensure comprehensive coverage, especially in large venues.

Audience Engagement: Capture the audience at the beginning of sessions, before people get tired.

Composition Best Practices: Prioritize Landscape orientation (from which portraits can be cropped) and try to capture the corner of the room into the grid (golden ratio).

Equipment Upgrade: If possible, ASTAF can provide upgraded cameras. Ensure that all external storage devices and other peripherals are compatible with MacOS.

Conclusion

The Tropentag 2025 student reporter experience proved to be an invaluable success, not only in effectively covering the conference theme, “Reconciling land system changes with planetary health” , but also in providing significant professional development for the team of 12 international students.

The report highlights the substantial reach achieved through strategic media engagement. The Social Media Teams successfully shifted focus to short-form video content, publishing 12 Reels on Instagram and 12 TikTok videos, accumulating a combined 4,071 plays on the latter platform. The Videos Team produced and published six videos on YouTube, including interviews with keynote speakers and awardees. Meanwhile, the Blogging Team ensured broad, timely coverage, collectively producing 25 posts summarizing key scientific discussions.

Across all teams, participants gained practical, hands-on skills in journalism, videography, photography, and scientific communication. The process fostered essential soft skills, including teamwork, flexibility, and the ability to work under pressure. Furthermore, the role facilitated valuable networking opportunities with experts and researchers in world agricultural research subjects.

While the event was highly rewarding, key challenges—such as limited team sizes , technical equipment limitations , and the need for more up-to-date guidance in social media workshops —were identified. To build upon this success, the following critical recommendations are offered for future teams: expanding the social media team size to optimize platform-specific content , investing in equipment upgrades, particularly compatible external drives , and actively promoting video content across all social media channels to maximize reach.

In summation, the Student Reporters’ Report confirms that the program successfully showcased the diversity and depth of Tropentag 2025 while significantly empowering the next generation of science communicators.