

The Chancellor of Ghent University has the honour of inviting you to attend the public defense of the doctoral dissertation of

## **Mariem Sghaier**

Title of the doctoral dissertation:

### *Assessing the role of community-based organizations in sustainable rangeland governance and pastoral development in Southeast Tunisia*

The public defence will take place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2025 at 5PM (CET) in Room A0.1 Azalea, Coupure links 653, 9000 Gent. The defence can also be followed online: click [here](#) for the link.

There will be a contiguous reception to which you are heartily invited.  
Please confirm your attendance before 17 May 2025 to: [mariem.sghaier@ugent.be](mailto:mariem.sghaier@ugent.be)

#### **Dissertation supervisors**

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**Dr. ir. Aymen Frija**  
International Center for Agricultural  
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#### **Board of examiners**

**Prof. Pieter De Frenne**  
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**Prof. dr. Mohamed Abdeladhim**  
*Jury Member*  
*Ecole Supérieure d'agriculture  
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#### **Abstract of the doctoral research**

Pastoralism remains central to livelihoods in arid southern Tunisia, where agropastoral communities face mounting pressures from climate change, land degradation, and resource scarcity. Despite numerous development initiatives aimed at improving rangeland governance and supporting local institutions, many interventions have failed to achieve lasting sustainability due to fragmented governance, weak institutional capacity, and limited community engagement.

This doctoral research explores the constraints and opportunities for sustainable pastoral development in Tunisia through a multi-scalar, integrated framework. It assesses three major pastoral development projects, revealing moderate effectiveness and highlighting the need for improved coherence, stakeholder participation, and capacity building. The study also investigates the potential of Territorial Intelligence (TI) to foster more inclusive and adaptive governance by addressing socio-economic disparities and enhancing coordination among actors.

A performance analysis of 31 community-based organizations (CBOs) shows that most remain dependent on public support, with only a few progressing toward autonomy. Interviews reveal challenges such as poor trust, weak networks, and limited institutional integration. Additionally, the research examines the adoption of traditional rangeland restoration practices, particularly grazing “resting,” finding that while ecologically beneficial, their success depends on proper planning and farmer involvement.

The findings underscore the need for long-term strategic coherence, stronger community institutions, and context-sensitive interventions. Strengthening CBOs, improving communication, and promoting inclusive decision-making are key to enhancing resilience and ensuring sustainable outcomes for Tunisia’s agropastoral systems.

#### **Brief Curriculum Vitae**

Mariem Sghaier holds a master’s degree in Economic Intelligence from University Poitiers. In 2021, she began her PhD in Socio-Economics at Ghent University, focusing on the sustainability and governance of collective rangelands in southeast Tunisia. Her research examines the role of community-based organizations, development projects, and local governance networks in shaping pastoral livelihoods and ecological resilience in arid regions. She employs mixed-methods approaches, including social network analysis and territorial intelligence, to explore the socio-ecological dynamics of pastoral systems. She has collaborated with local development organizations and international research initiatives, and her work contributes to policy design for climate adaptation and sustainable land management in North Africa.