

OPPORTUNITY FOR MASTERS RESEARCH AT RHODES UNIVERSITY

Exploring stakeholder experiences of power relations in collaborative water resources governance



Join a diverse team committed to excellence, engagement and social justice, working across Africa to address some of the most challenging questions confronting sustainability science and practice.

Background to the project: 'Unlocking Resilient Benefits from African Water Resources' (RESBEN)

Sustainable water resource development remains elusive because development has largely externalized costs to the environment and vulnerable people. Novel research theory, methodologies and practice are needed to meet, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In response, the RESBEN project team has developed the innovative *Adaptive Systemic Approach (ASA)*. The ASA provides a coherent framework drawing on core concepts, with associated methods: complex social-ecological systems, transdisciplinarity, epistemic justice, and transformative social learning. The project uses the ASA to shift water development outcomes towards achieving the SDGs, focussing on the water development priorities of water supply and pollution, by involving multiple stakeholders in an iterative, learning-oriented process of collaborative water governance. The project is working on a range of research objectives in case studies across seven African countries.

RESBEN is a collaborative project, led by the Institute for Water Research at Rhodes University - the hub of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Water Centre of Excellence (CoE). The project includes UK partners, the University of Sheffield and Lancaster University, and Water CoE nodes in Universities across 7 African countries: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa.

Details of the opportunity to conduct Masters research:

Research objectives and approach: This masters research project will be situated within the RESBEN project. RESBEN is based on the Adaptive Systemic Approach (ASA), and practices engaged, transdisciplinary research. This project will have a specific focus on the social science questions related to *power relations and interactions among the participating stakeholders*. This study will focus on the stakeholder experiences in South African¹ and Ethiopian case studies, looking to compare experiences of collaboration and learning among stakeholders across the two sites through the lens of power.

In this project, power refers to the “diverse and mutually influencing power relations, such as sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism, at the interpersonal and structural levels that shape individuals’ social identities, position and lived experiences” (Agénor, 2020). Power analysis plays a role in understanding how proposed actions impact on different social groups, and how we can engage different stakeholders to reassess bottom-up approaches to achieving change (Hunjan, & Pettit, 2011). The study will employ primarily participatory, qualitative research methodologies, taking into account the limitations on field work due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature of Position:

The successful candidate will:

- Register in the Department of Environmental Science (DES) for a Masters degree (MSc/MEd/MSocSci/MA, to be determined).
- Be employed on contract as a Research Assistant (RA) in the Institute for Water Research (IWR). The salary will be taxed, and the candidate will be advised as to how to reclaim from SARS. University fees will be paid as a salary deduction (see below).
- Be co-supervised across DES and the IWR under the RESBEN Project for the duration of their Masters Study.

Salary package on offer:

The overall fixed amount available for this position is R337 500 over a two-year period (i.e. R168 750 per annum), which will be paid as a Research Assistant Salary. This amount will need to cover the costs of the candidate's Masters’ study fees, tax, UIF, and living expenses. The monthly net income will be approximately R8000-R9000 after deductions for fees, tax, and UIF (the detailed amounts of which will be confirmed). Arrangements will be made to set up the fees deduction, as well as tax and UIF deductions, from the candidate’s salary within the university salaries’ department. If the tax exceeds what is payable by the individual, arrangements can be made to reclaim the tax.

¹ The Tsitsa Project has been identified as a learning site for the RESBEN project and will form part of the comparative, participatory research proposed for this Masters study. See more on the Tsitsa Project here: <https://www.ru.ac.za/tsitsaproject/>

Start date: The position is available as soon as possible, to start no later than April 2021, and will run for 2 years.

Supervisors: The candidate will be supervised by Dr. Jessica Cockburn in the Department of Environmental Science, with a co-supervisor from the Institute of Water Research and/or the wider RESBEN project team, still to be appointed. See Dr. Cockburn's profile here for further information:

<https://www.ru.ac.za/environmentalscience/staff/staffacademic/jessicacockburn/>

Application process:

Minimum requirements: Candidates should have an interdisciplinary or social science Honours degree (or equivalent) in Environmental Science, Sustainability Science, Geography, Water Resources Sciences, Agriculture, Rural Development, Sociology, Anthropology, Education, or a related field. They should have a passion for working with diverse groups of people, an ability to work independently and also collaboratively, and a deep curiosity about complex social-ecological systems and related sustainability challenges. They should have good writing skills and an ability to engage across a diverse range of disciplines and areas of knowledge related to water and sustainability. Experience in qualitative research methodologies, community engagement and in facilitating multi-stakeholder social processes will be a significant advantage.

To apply: Interested candidates should submit a 2-page letter of motivation, a 3-5 page CV, and academic transcripts (combined into a single pdf document) by email, no later than **Monday, 1st March 2021.**

Application documents should be submitted to all three of the following RESBEN team members:

- Dr. Jessica Cockburn: Researcher in the RESBEN project and Lecturer at the Department of Environmental Science at Rhodes University. j.cockburn@ru.ac.za
- Dr. Sukhmani Mantel: Academic Manager (ARUA RESBEN Project), Institute for Water Research, Rhodes University. s.mantel@ru.ac.za
- Dr. Rebecca Powell: Large Grants Project Administrator (ARUA RESBEN Project), Institute for Water Research, Rhodes University. r.powell@ru.ac.za

Useful references and resources for further background reading:

Information about the project and studying at Rhodes University:

- *Department of Environmental Science* at Rhodes University: <https://www.ru.ac.za/environmentalscience/>
- *Institute of Water Research* at Rhodes University: <https://www.ru.ac.za/iwr/>
- *ARUA: African Research Universities Alliance*: <https://arua.org.za/about/>
- *ARUA Water Centre of Excellence* at Rhodes University: <https://www.ru.ac.za/iwr/aruacoe/>

- Rhodes University postgraduate studies information:
<https://www.ru.ac.za/postgraduategateway/>

Literature:

- Agénor, M., 2020. Future directions for incorporating intersectionality into quantitative population health research. *American Journal of Public Health* 110(6), pp.803-806.
- Cockburn, J., Palmer, C.T.G., Biggs, H. and Rosenberg, E., 2018. Navigating multiple tensions for engaged praxis in a complex social-ecological system. *Land* 7(4), p.129. [Available online.](#)
- Hunjan, R. and Pettit, J., 2011. Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change. Dunfermline: Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. [Available online.](#)
- Wolff, M.G., Cockburn, J.J., De Wet, C., Carlos Bezerra, J., Finca, A., Weaver, M.J., De Vos, A., Ralekhetla, M.M., Libala, N., Mkabile, Q.B. and Odume, O.N. 2019. Exploring and expanding transdisciplinary research for sustainable and just natural resource management. *Ecology and Society* 24(4):14. [Available online.](#)