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Bursary Opportunity: “Governance models implemented in biosphere reserves: Progression towards social-ecological systems for sustainability”

The Universities of the Witwatersrand, Venda and Nelson Mandela University are calling for all interested postgraduate students to apply for a MA and/or MSc position in the broad field of environmental governance and sustainability science.

Background to the Project

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) currently comprises 714 biosphere reserves in 129 countries, with South Africa home to 10 of these. Biosphere reserves are the implementation instrument of UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), attempting to align development objectives with those of biodiversity conservation through more inclusive natural resource management and decision-making. Biosphere reserves are considered to be ideally positioned to support the practical implementation of sustainable development goals in the landscapes in which they are embedded.

However, how well a biosphere reserve can do this is closely tied to the effectiveness of their individual governance systems and management structures. There is considerable variation in how biosphere reserves are managed, and not only do governance systems and management approaches vary from country-to-country, but they also vary within countries, with some more successful than others. Understanding this management variability and the factors that contribute to an individual biosphere reserve ‘management success’ is thus of great importance.

The successful applicants will have a fantastic opportunity to contribute to the practical application of MAB as it is implemented in South Africa and beyond. Their research will contribute to a larger research programme focused on governance systems across the full extent of WNBR. Successful applicants will be joining a larger, existing research programme, and together with other students appointed will play an important role in the South African component of this bigger research programme. The successful candidates’ research will focus on the exploration of South African biosphere reserves as social-ecological systems, exploring the enabling / disabling factors to their success.

The bursary is a National Research Foundation bursary inclusive of tuition fees and living stipend, renewable for the duration of the chosen degree, dependent on progress. **Bursaries will only be awarded for full-time study.**

Requirements

Interested candidates should have some understanding of social-ecological systems, particularly when applied to natural resource management or sustainability issues. Interested candidates should be comfortable engaging with qualitative data collection methods and willing to develop any necessary statistical or technical competencies. The candidate will be required to publish the findings in a peer-reviewed journal. Familiarity with UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Reserve Programme will be considered advantageous. Female applicants are encouraged to apply. Appointments will be in-line with the NRF funding requirements. Successful candidates will be required to submit progress reports each year, with continued funding support dependent on progress made.

Minimum requirements for Masters Applicants:

A Natural or Social Science Honours degree (*or equivalent*). *Preference will be given to candidates with a previous degree in Environmental Science, Sustainability Science, Geography or Governance.*

Location: The Masters candidate will be hosted at the Department of Ecology and Resource Management, University of Venda, with a supervisor committee comprised of broader project team members from the Global Change Institute (University of the Witwatersrand) and Sustainability Research Unit (Nelson Mandela University, George Campus).

Appointments are to be made in May 2021, to commence as soon as possible thereafter.

For enquiries contact: Dr Kaera Coetzer-Hanack (kaera.hanack@wits.ac.za) for general enquiries about the research programme or Dr Lutendo Mugwedi (Lutendo.Mugwedi@univen.ac.za) for specific enquires linked to the Masters post at the University of Venda.

Application documents: a cover letter, CV with a copy of an identity document, academic transcripts, and a 1 page statement of interest in the research as attachments in a single email. Important: The statement of interest should relate to the role of MAB/biosphere reserves can play in the governance of sustainable landscapes and should be approximately ~350-500 words (1.15 line spacing, 11 font).

Applicants to clearly please indicate the title of their Honours dissertation from previous studies in their cover letter. CV must include at least 2 contactable references.

Submission: Interested applicants to submit their applications to: Ms Heidi Robertson on Heidi.Robertson@wits.ac.za by the **21 May 2021** with the email subject line: Bursary Application (Readvertised): Governance models of biosphere reserves. All required documents to please be combined in a single PDF file if possible. No applications will be accepted after the closing date.

Please note that feedback will only be given to shortlisted candidates. Incomplete applications will not be considered. The Universities of Witwatersrand, Venda and Nelson Mandela University retain the right not to make an appointment / re-advertise and to verify all information provided by candidates. Re-application from candidates who applied under previous calls will be reconsidered.

Closing Date for applications: 21 May 2021