



Call for applications: PhD bursary for 2024

Seeds of Good Anthropocenes in Southern Africa

Deadline for applications: 18 June 2023

Project background

It is increasingly apparent that a fundamental reorganization of our societies is necessary to achieve an environmentally sustainable and just society for all. Escalating global challenges such as climate change, food and water security, biodiversity loss, socio-political conflict and economic volatility demand new approaches to researching and governing our environment and societies. It has become critical to recognize the complex inter-relationships between human well-being and ecological sustainability, combined with the power of human imagination and agency, while dealing with new and ongoing changes that may be fundamentally unknown and unpredictable.

The Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative (<https://goodanthropocenes.net/>) aims to inform and contribute to deep, systemic transformations towards socially and ecologically desirable, just, and sustainable futures. This initiative is an international collaboration, co-led by partners at McGill University in Canada, the Stockholm Resilience Centre in Sweden, and the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST) at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The underlying premise of the initiative is that any “Good Anthropocene” that emerges will be radically different from the world as we know it today, and cannot be fully predicted, planned for, or created. Rather, it will emerge through ongoing creation and adaptation of enabling conditions that allow more sustainable and just societal processes and institutions to become the dominant way of doing things. The starting point for the project is that examples of initiatives that could contribute to creating more desirable futures - which we call “Seeds of Good Anthropocenes” - already exist in the world around us, and under the right conditions, these seeds have the potential to grow, change and combine in surprising ways to create a variety of possible, radically alternative, positive futures (see Bennett et al 2016).

We seek a critical and imaginative systems thinker to continue cutting edge research linked to this initiative. The CST team helped pioneer the Manoa mash-up method (Schulz 2015) used to develop visions of sustainable futures in this project (see Pereira et al 2018) and have developed a novel set of regional scenarios using this approach (see Hamann et al 2020). We are interested to further advance the approaches being used, as well as to further explore visions of sustainable futures and pathways to sustainability from a southern African perspective, and how these may differ from perspectives and approaches in other parts of the world.

Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST), Stellenbosch University

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions (<http://www.sun.ac.za/cst>) builds on a strong history of transdisciplinary research and complexity studies at Stellenbosch University, providing a vibrant hub for solution-oriented sustainability science that hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in a state-of-the-art research centre. The primary objective of the CST is to provide transformational knowledge on the dynamics of multi-scale social-ecological change, and strategic insights into the new modes of research and governance that can bring about a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable society, in southern Africa and globally.

Call for applications

We seek motivated individuals interested to pursue a PhD linked to the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes initiative, who have a keen interest in sustainability and sustainability transformations, an interest and ability to think systemically and integrate across the social and natural sciences, and who enjoy collaboration and working in teams. Interested individuals should have a strong academic track-record, participate in the events and activities of the CST, and be interested in developing a career around topics such as social-ecological systems, resilience and risk, complexity thinking, social innovation and sustainability transformations. A variety of potential topics could be pursued, relating to one or more of the following:

- *Exploring the values underlying different seeds and how those may shape different potential future scenarios with different types of trade-offs and tensions.*
- *Advancing the participatory Manoa mash-up scenarios method initially piloted in southern Africa (see Pereira et al 2018), to better explore the potential obstacles and opportunities (i.e. pathways of change) for fostering and combining different seeds to generate more sustainable and just futures.*
- *The use of arts-based approaches in developing scenarios of sustainable futures.*
- *Developing participatory games or competitions to engage wider audiences, especially the youth.*

Studies will generally be registered within the CST's PhD in Sustainable Development in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, but other options at Stellenbosch University can be considered.

Supervisors will include Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs and Prof Rika Preiser. Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs holds the DST/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience, and is the co-director of the CST. Prof Rika Preiser co-hosts the UNESCO Chair in Complexity and Transformative African Futures.

Funding

Bursaries will be funded from the DST/NRF SARChI chair held by Prof Biggs. The NRF minimum academic requirement for PhD funding is 65% average for the preceding Masters degree. Applicants for doctoral funding must be 32 years of age or younger in the year of application.

Successful applicants will be funded either at Full Cost Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS). The FCS funding will be awarded to South African citizens and permanent residents only, who are either financially needy (i.e., those whose combined household family income is less or equal to R350 000 per annum), living with a disability, or exceptional academic achievers. PCS funding will be awarded to 5% of international students including South African citizens and permanent residents who could not be funded under FCS but meet other minimum requirements for the NRF scholarship funding criteria.

Subject to availability of funds, CST aims to top-up NRF funding to R 150,000 pa (R 12,500 per month). Tuition and reasonable running and travel expenses will also be covered where possible. Successful completion and defense of a research proposal within the first year will be a pre-requisite for continuing with the PhD.

Requirements

We are looking for a critical systems thinker who show a strong aptitude for learning new skills, problem-solving, and working in teams. Potential PhD candidates should have completed a Masters degree or equivalent. Familiarity with complexity, social-ecological systems, and/or futures thinking approaches would be advantageous, as would experience with qualitative or post-qualitative

inquiry, data analysis and coding. All candidates should show evidence of strong scholarly performance. Based on the National Research Foundation's funding guidelines, strong preference will be given to South African nationals and under-represented groups.

To apply

Applications will follow a 2-step process:

Step 1. Apply to CST

All interested candidates should first apply to the CST by emailing the following documents to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za by **18 June 2023** with the subject line "**PhD application: Seeds of GA**":

- a motivation letter detailing your previous academic and work experience, and how your experiences, education and skills speak to the proposed research topic, as well as your specific interests with regard to the proposed project,
- a detailed CV that includes your academic record, previous work experience, any scientific publications on which you have been an author, and the names of at least two academic referees,
- transcripts of academic qualifications,
- at least one example of recent written work (e.g. a paper, report, thesis chapter).

We will conduct interviews with shortlisted candidates between **21-23 June 2023**.

Step 2. Apply to NRF

Selected candidates will then be instructed to apply on the NRF system by **22 July 2023**, and link their application to Prof Biggs' SARChI Chair. Instructions on this process will be communicated to successful applicants in step 1.

Please note that funding will only be awarded to candidates selected and approved by the NRF in step 2.

Enquiries

Enquiries can be directed to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za. Please use the subject line "**Enquiry: Seeds of GA**".