

DOCTORAL BURSARY OPPORTUNITY (2021–2023):

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF RANGELAND USE IN A TRANSBOUNDARY MOUNTAIN CONTEXT FROM A HERDER PERSPECTIVE, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY AND WATER SECURITY – QWAQWA-LESOTHO

(QWAQWA, FREE STATE, SOUTH AFRICA)



Background

The Afromontane Research Unit (ARU) is the flagship research unit of the University of the Free State-Qwaqwa Campus (UFS-QQ), and seeks to become a continental leader in African mountain research.

The ARU has recently been awarded a Risk & Vulnerability Science Centre (RVSC) by the Department of Science & Innovation (DSI)/National Research Foundation (NRF). The RVSC: UFS-QQ seeks to contribute relevant research to the Global Grand Challenges from a South African perspective around the theme *The Sustainable Development of Phuthaditjhaba as an African Mountain City*. This theme has direct applications to other high elevation high-density conglomerations (“ruralopolis”) of planned and unplanned settlements in former homelands in South Africa, with relevance to unstructured urban-rural development in other developing countries.

Phuthaditjhaba, and the former homeland of Qwaqwa (now part of Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality, MAP, eastern Free State, South Africa), has a population of c.400,000 people that is facing increasing water security challenges. Implicated in this crisis is the impact of communal rangeland use by herders along the Lesotho-South African international border above QwaQwa; the health of these mountain catchments along this border are vital to supplying QwaQwa with sustainable water, as well as in supporting other benefits in the form of conservation and tourism (e.g. the Tugela Alpine Wetlands that feed the second largest waterfall in the world, Tugela Falls – a major international drawcard in adjacent KwaZulu-Natal). Currently, Lesotho and South Africa experience a passive border dispute along the summit edges of the Maloti-Drakensberg, driven in part of by herder incursions into South African natural alpine pastures seasonally; with increasing water scarcity under climate change, this might become an increasing source of geopolitical conflict between the two countries.

To understand herder perspectives in this scenario, the ARU has established the project: “EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF RANGELAND USE IN A TRANSBOUNDARY MOUNTAIN CONTEXT FROM A HERDER PERSPECTIVE, WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY AND WATER SECURITY – QWAQWA-LESOTHO”. The study will feed into a wider collaborative research programme focusing on water security for Phuthaditjhaba and the wider MAP area. The project will also be a collaborative endeavour between the ARU and the Global Mountain Safeguard Programme (GLOMOS), as well as with the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Programme (MDTP). GLOMOS emphasises the role of the United Nations International Frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in such regional studies and interventions, including water security in transboundary contexts. The MDTP emphasises good bilateral relations between South Africa and Lesotho, in the context of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The ARU has a close relationship with GLOMOS and is a member of the MDTP – this will offer the candidate international exposure and opportunities for co-supervision and broader learning

experience. While the focus of this Doctoral programme is Phuthaditjhaba/Qwaqwa, it speaks to the global implications of transboundary resource management in mountains worldwide, with implications for encouraging improved diplomatic relations and the role of traditional authorities (South Africa and Lesotho) in encouraging achievement of the SDGs.

Research focus

The RVSC: UFS-QQ seeks a suitably qualified, non risk-adverse, and motivated doctoral candidate from 2021. The successful candidate will be affiliated to the RVSC: UFS-QQ, and will be an integral component of an interdisciplinary team that explores water security in the Phuthaditjhaba/QwaQwa/MAP region. The Bursary is R120,000 per year. Project running will be covered by the research consortium.

Eligibility:

1. The bursary is open to South African and non-South African students for full-time research at the University of the Free State, QwaQwa Campus.
2. A Masters degree in a relevant background discipline (e.g. Social Science, Anthropology, Sociology, Human Geography or motivated other).
3. An ability to use interdisciplinary logic and thinking in research.
4. The candidate must be willing and able to handle arduous and extremely challenging environmental conditions for days to weeks during the summer months (September to April) in the QwaQwa Malotis (elevation 2000–3300 m), including lack of amenities, absence of cell signal, unpredictable weather, and some elements of personal danger, in an extremely remote area. There may be a need to undertake long treks (10-20 km) in rugged mountains with elevation difference of >1 vertical km to reach the study sites.
5. The candidate must be willing to spend significant time with the herders in their context; fluency in Sesotho would be ideal, but if not this can be accommodated.
6. Applicants who intend to complete their Masters degrees in 2020 may apply.
7. Valid passport.
8. Self-driven and be able to set and meet own deadlines.
9. A valid driver's license is preferable.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- Potential students need to apply through the current NRF Post Graduate Call by the 30th June 2020 (UFS internal closing date) <https://www.nrf.ac.za/division/funding/call-nrf-postgraduate-scholarships-2021>, referencing the Risk & Vulnerability Science Centre – University of Free State-QwaQwa.
- Applicants should advise Dr Grey Magaiza magaizag@ufs.ac.za AND Dr Ralph Clark ClarkVR@ufs.ac.za of their intentions to submit, by the 25th June 2020, with a copy of their CVs, academic transcripts, 3 referees, and a motivation letter.

The appointment will reflect the NRF and UFS's equity and diversity imperatives, including those for gender, racial/cultural and intellectual diversity. A bursary is currently available for this position through the NRF, and will be awarded on a competitive basis, taking into account the applicants' academic achievements and research potential. Application through the NRF does not automatically assume acceptance by the RVSC: UFS-QQ.

For further details, please contact:

Dr Grey Magaiza, Community Development, University of the Free State, QwaQwa Campus: magaizag@ufs.ac.za; Landline 058 718 5419 and Cell number 062 418 6445.