



Call for applications: PhD bursary for 2021

## Seeds of Good Anthropocenes Initiative: Fostering sustainable, just and resilient futures in southern Africa

**Deadline for applications: 3 July 2020**

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### Project background

It is increasingly apparent that a fundamental reorganization of our societies is necessary to achieve a just society for all, while maintaining the environmental conditions that underlie human prosperity. As highlighted by major global initiatives such as Future Earth (<https://futureearth.org/>), 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, led by Prof Elena Bennet at McGill University in Canada, Prof Garry Peterson at the Stockholm Resilience Centre in Sweden, and Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs at the Centre for Complex Systems in Transition (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<sup>1</sup>).

Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, who holds the DST/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience, and a team of researchers at the CST including Dr Rika Preiser, a leading complexity thinker, and Dr Nadia Sitas, a science-policy and social-ecological equity specialist, have played a lead role in the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes Project and related scenarios work. We are specifically interested in 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. The CST team pioneered the novel Manoa mash-up method used to develop visions of sustainable futures (see Pereira et al 2018<sup>2</sup>) and have developed a novel set of regional scenarios using this approach (see Hamann et al 2020<sup>3</sup>).

### Centre for Complex Systems in Transition, Stellenbosch University

The Centre for Complex Systems in Transition (CST, <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, transdisciplinary, sustainability science that hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in an interactive 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

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett E et al. 2016. Bright spots: Seeds of a good Anthropocene. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 14(8): 441-448.

<sup>2</sup> Pereira LM et al. 2018. Using futures methods to create transformative spaces: Visions of a Good Anthropocene in southern Africa. *Ecology and Society* 23(1): 19.

<sup>3</sup> Hamann M et al. 2020. Scenarios of Good Anthropocenes in southern Africa. *Futures* 118: 102526.

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 transitions, an interest and ability to 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.

The study will be linked to ongoing projects at the CST (e.g. GCRF Equitable Resilience Project, and the USAID Resilient Waters Project) and grounded in the southern African context. Supervisors will include Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, and one or more CST researchers, depending on the topic. Degrees will generally be registered within the School for Public Leadership in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University, but other options can be considered.

### **Funding**

Bursaries will be funded from the DST/NRF SARChI chair held by Prof Biggs, topped up to the following values: PhD full-time over 3 years: R 138,000 pa (R 11,500 per month)

Tuition and reasonable running and travel expenses will also be covered.

Successful completion and defense of a research proposal within the first year will be a pre-requisite for continuing with the PhD.

### **Requirements**

Potential PhD candidates should have completed a Masters degree or equivalent. 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**

This is the first year of implementation of the NRF's new Postgraduate Funding Policy, and all students should apply directly at: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za> by **3 July 2020**. It is essential to link your application to Prof Biggs' SARChI Chair funding using the ID: **SARCI150210113970**.

Guidelines for applications are available at:

<https://www.nrf.ac.za/sites/default/files/NRF%20Postgraduate%20Scholarships%202021%20Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.pdf>

In addition, we request all interested candidates to email the following documents to [cstenquiries@sun.ac.za](mailto:cstenquiries@sun.ac.za) by **5 July 2020** with the subject line "**PhD application: Seeds of Good Anthropocenes**":

- a motivation letter (detailing your previous experience, your general area of interest, as well as an outline of potential research topics of interest),
- 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).

Any enquiries can be directed to [cstenquiries@sun.ac.za](mailto:cstenquiries@sun.ac.za). Please use the subject line "**Enquiry: PhD in Seeds of GA**".