**Title**

***Social media platforms in sub-Saharan Africa: their role and potential in shaping urban water resilience narratives.***

**Closing Date for applications**

31st July 2020

**Project Description**

Building resilience to water crises is recognised as one of the primary challenges facing human society today. The pressures are particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa where rapid rates of urbanization and economic growth - combined with the challenge of climate change and unsustainable water management practices - are creating both slow burn and rapid onset water stress. In the case of water stressed cities, the relative role of individual actions in framing collective resilience outcomes to water shocks is particularly underexplored. Whilst some writers point to the potential for altruistic and morally-informed outcomes from such collective action, others highlight the risks of vulnerability being transferred between groups or over time.

The role of different media in influencing individual actions, through the construction of framing narratives, is well recognised, but the part played by social media in shaping water supply choices in urban Africa is less understood, particularly in the role it may play as a space for collective reflection. Traditionally, community groupings formed spaces for reflection but social media is now leading to the creation of new spaces. Online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have been referred to as part of a new public sphere,where individuals and organisations can participate in debate, discussion and other forms of political or civic action, such as mobilising support for campaigns. Social media can act as focal points for online discussion of contentious topics and the organising logic of these platforms (particularly Twitter) around ‘trending’ topics and hashtags means that conversations and debates can easily – and rapidly – develop over time. Not all social media platforms are the same and this PhD studentship is offered to undertake a comparative analysis of how water shocks are addressed on various social media platforms across four cities in sub-Saharan Africa. The cities are Lagos, Nigeria; Dodoma, Tanzania; Cape Town, South Africa; and Windhoek, Namibia.

Within this context, applicants have the scope to develop an independent project assessing the extent to which social media analytics can be used to examine the following broad themes:

* The potential offered by various social media platform in African cities to improve awareness of public perceptions of water shocks.
* The extent to which different social media platforms provide collective spaces of reflection that influence individual perspectives on water topics and how this may vary by location
* Whether disruptive water shocks act as critical junctures (or moments of change) which change the framing narratives attached to urban water supplies
* Which forms of water supply gain traction/exposure at different points in time and the sentiments attached to different water sources
* The potential role of social media in the framing of governance narratives

**Methodological considerations**

It is suggested that the PhD studentship may examine three social media platforms. The focus will be on how these platforms are used, what shapes these patterns of usage and, where feasible, what content is shared. The suggested platforms are Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp. Each offers different levels of accessibility, has different use profiles and, potentially, is used in different ways. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in each of the countries included in the study, Twitter is less prevalent but with rising levels of usage. Data for the usage of Whatsapp is not available but users in the cities report that it is the most common platform for group exchange.

Key milestones for the research will be:

* Establishing methodologies to interrogate how different platforms are used, and by whom, at the city level
* Establishing protocols for the collection of relative social media content across key platforms
* Where feasible, creation of analytical databases of relevant social media content
* Analysis of available databases to identify the sentiments expressed and the narratives exposed in social media debates.

The PhD will contribute to a wider research programme examining urban resilience to water shocks in sub-Saharan Africa funded by a UKRI [Future Leaders Fellowship](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/1883310-water-stressed-cities-individual-choice%2C-access-to-water-and-pathways-to-resilience-in-sub-saharan-africa).

**Eligibility**

You will have a first class or strong second class honours degree and appropriate masters degree in human geography/social sciences or cognate discipline related to social media analytics. Training will be provided in requisite digital skills or social science perspectives dependent on background.

**Supervisory team**

The successful candidate will be jointly supervised by Dr. Adrian Healy (School of Geography and Planning and Cardiff University Water Research Institute); Dr. Wil Chivers (School of Social Science and Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods) and Dr. Luke Sloan (School of Social Science and Cardiff University Social Data Science Lab).

**How to Apply**

We welcome applications for both full and part-time study, and the studentship is available as either '1+3' (i.e. one full year of research training Masters followed by three years full-time Doctoral study, or the part-time equivalent), or '+3' (i.e. three years of full-time doctoral study or its part-time equivalent), depending on the needs of the applicant.

Applicants should apply to the Doctor of Philosophy in Geography and Planning using the following link:

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/programmes/programme/geography-and-planning>

Please apply for the programme Doctor of Philosophy and enter a start date of October 2020. Please select whether your application is for full-time study or part-time study (we will give equal consideration to each). Please enter the title of this Studentship in the funding section. The closing deadline for applications is **31st July 2020 at 12 noon.** Incomplete applications or applications received after the deadline will not be accepted. Your application should contain the following:

**1. Covering letter** Set out your reasons and motivation for applying to study at Cardiff University and the pathway; your understanding and expectations of doctoral study; your academic interests generally, and particularly of those relating to your proposed research. The letter should be no more than two pages.

**2. Academic / Professional Qualifications** Where appropriate, this should also include proof of **English Language Competency** (7.0 IELTS minimum).

**3. References** Two academic references. **Candidates must approach referees themselves** and include references with their application.

**4. Curriculum Vitae**It should be no longer than two pages.

**5. Research Proposal**. Referring to the context of the study your application should consist of a short (maximum 1000 words excluding bibliographic references) outline of your contribution to the outlined proposal above. This should be structured as follows:

- aims and purpose of the research (including research objectives and research questions)

- critical overview of the academic literature relevant to the field

- proposed methodology (we accept this will not be highly detailed)

- academic contributions of your research

Please be aware that you will need to demonstrate sufficient competence in the English language. If students have completed an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in the UK in the past 3 years then they are usually exempt from presenting language evidence via IELTS.

**Funding Notes**

Full UK/EU tuition fees will be paid, and the post is eligible for a Doctoral stipend matching the UKRI (UK Research Council) National Minimum. UKRI eligibility conditions will apply where appropriate. In addition, modest project support costs are available for consumables, travel, minor equipment, training and conference attendance.

**Further information**

To discuss this position please contact:
Dr. Adrian Healy at: Healya2@cardiff.ac.uk