

POLITICS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE RESEARCH GROUP NEWSLETTER

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AFRICA HUB SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS 2026



PUG

Politics & Urban Governance

Research

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PROJECT UPDATES

WRITING WORKSHOP FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

From 19 to 21 January 2026, the Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG), in partnership with Cardiff University and the African Studies journal, hosted a writing workshop for 21 early-career researchers from across Africa. Held in Noordhoek, Cape Town, the workshop supported emerging scholars researching and theorising how African cities are advancing Just Urban Transitions, and included paper presentations alongside practical guidance on academic writing, abstracts, and the journal publishing process. The workshop was funded through a British Academy grant. Find out more [here](#).

JUST-UP WORKSHOP

PUG researcher Boitumelo Papane and Prof Fiona Anciano recently travelled to Queen Mary University in London to attend the 'JUST-UP' workshop on participatory neighbourhood upgrading and just urban transitions. It brought together researchers working across Buenos Aires, São Paulo and Cape Town, providing a space to advance comparative work and reflect on how participation shapes urban transformations in contexts of inequality.



Participants and mentors of the Just Urban Transition in African Cities Writing Workshop

AFRICA HUB SYMPOSIUM

On 25-26 February 2026, the African Universities Hub for Human Rights, UNESCO Chair for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and the Expansion of Political Space, and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Chair on Citizenship and Democracy, hosted a symposium for universities and civil society organisations. The symposium examined pressing challenges, emerging research, and innovative practices related to the role universities play in the protection of democratic values and human rights. A total of 45 participants from 22 countries from universities and civil society organisations working in this space were in attendance. The symposium provided an opportunity to reflect critically on current challenges, shared new insights and research, and explored ways to strengthen approaches to contribute to the expansion of civic space and supporting human rights defenders (HRDs). Find out more [here](#).

PROJECT UPDATES CONTINUED

GOJUT PHOTOVOICE EXHIBITION

On 12 March 2026, the Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG), hosted a photovoice exhibition at Isivivana Centre in Khayelitsha. The exhibition gave an opportunity to 16 small business owners to share their photographs and stories depicting both vulnerability and innovation in the face of infrastructural challenges in informal settlements. The photographs depicted the daily challenges confronting the small business owners and their access to water and energy. The exhibition is part of the GoJUT project, funded through the National Research Foundation. Find out more [here](#).



Mayor of Cape Town, Geordin Hill-Lewis, giving his reflections at the GOJUT Photovoice Exhibition



GOJUT participant sharing her experience of experience with infrastructure challenges in Khayelitsha.

Innovative Qualitative Methods Workshop for Early Career Researchers

From 10–13 March 2026, we hosted the Innovative Qualitative Methods: New Approaches for Understanding Climate Resilience and Sustainability in Africa workshop in Cape Town, bringing together 13 early-career researchers from across Africa, representing nine nationalities. Over four days, participants engaged in hands-on training in participatory research methods, with a particular focus on storytelling and Photovoice as approaches to understanding and amplifying the lived experiences of communities affected by climate change. Find out more [here](#).



Participants and mentors at the PhotoVoice stories of Energy and Water Exhibition.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

– **SUBSTITUTING FOR THE STATE:** The Sovereignty Impacts of Diverse Citizens' Off-grid Infrastructure Strategies in South Africa

FIONA ANCIANO, CHARLOTTE LEMANSKI, CHRISTINA CULWICK FATTI AND MARGOT RUBIN

Abstract

In South Africa, citizens in both low- and high-income areas are increasingly providing their own services to mitigate the unreliability, unaffordability and inaccessibility of state services. This article examines diverse case studies across socio-economic and residential typologies to explore shifts in service provision responsibilities from the state to the citizen. Applying an interdisciplinary approach, this article considers the political impacts of these strategies, arguing that the ways in which citizens supplement and substitute for the state contests and (re)negotiates spaces of sovereignty. While urban studies overwhelmingly analyse these actions through the lens of informality, we argue that sovereignty (the supreme authority of a state to govern itself without external interference) offers a less binary analytical lens. State substitution is increasingly a daily act for many, not only in low-income settlements but also among elites. The article further examines state responses to citizen-led actions in supplementing or substituting services, demonstrating how they range from inaction to permissive negotiation and, rarely, repression. Thus, the political impact of service substitution requires deeper reflection, raising questions regarding the nature of the state and the social contract.

- [Climate Justice or Climate Apartheid? The justice trade-offs of private solar investments for South Africa's just transition](#) — Lemanski, Culwick Fatti & Anciano. (2026). *Political Geography*, 2026.
- [Substituting for the State: The Sovereignty Impacts of Diverse Citizens' Off-grid Infrastructure Strategies in South Africa](#) — Anciano, Lemanski, Culwick Fatti & Rubin. (2026). *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

- [Achieving the Human Right to Sanitation? Container based sanitation and intersectional vulnerabilities in a South African informal settlement](#) Forthcoming— Dube, Anciano, Ofori, Mabaso, & Barrington. (2026).



- [Beyond the grid: Navigating water supply and sanitation service ecosystems in informal settlements](#) — Casas et al. (2026) *A. PLoS One*, 21(3): e0342657.
- [Confessions of a PhD](#) — Mandioma. (2026) in Miles et al. *Real Stories from Doctoral Students Volume 2*, pp. 120–129.
- [The moral economy of sanitation provision in informal settlements in Cape Town and Nairobi](#). *Review of African Political* —Anciano, Dube, Mdee, and Ofori. (2026). p.20260008.

BLOGS

Human Rights Day: Democracy Must Be Lived, Not Just Remembered
By Fiona Anciano

READ MORE

When Research Meets Reality: The Challenges of Conducting Fieldwork in Khayelitsha Amidst Violence and Extortion
By Kurisani Mdhluli, Rogini Naidoo & Asemahle Mahlunwana

READ MORE

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PHOTOVOICE EXHIBITION

28 MAY 2026

.....
Caring for the other half Photovoice exhibition at the School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape



AFRICA HUB FELLOWSHIP

AUG - OCT 2026

..... The Fellowship supports Human Rights Defenders in stressful environments by providing a safe space to rest, recharge, reflect, and acquire new skills while expanding their networks.



AFRICA HUB SUMMER SCHOOL

28 SEPT - 2 OCT 2026

..... African Hub Annual Human Rights School Calls for Applications open soon. Look out for the announcement on our social media platforms.

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

AUG-OCT 2026

..... Politics and Urban Governance Research Group in collaboration with the Centre for Research and Democracy at Stellenbosch University



NEW STAFF PROFILES

We are delighted to welcome Meshay, Shamiso, Sehlule and Stacey to our team.

Dr. Meshay Moses



Dr. Moses is a research associate at PUG. Her research focuses on the politics of social protection, particularly social assistance in the form of social grants (i.e., state-funded cash transfers). [Read more here.](#)

Dr. Shamiso Mandioma



Dr. Mandioma is a Postdoctoral Fellow at PUG. Her research interests include social justice, participatory democracy, local governance, deliberative democracy, women’s participation and related aspects. [Read more here.](#)

Dr. Sehlule Sibanda



Dr. Sibanda is a Postdoctoral Fellow at PUG. Her research interests include the politics of labelling, transitional justice, migration, human rights, and peace and security on the African continent. [Read more here.](#)

Anastacia Odendaal



Anastacia is a research administrator at PUG. Her recent research focused on party politics and elections. Overall, she has a strong interest in all streams of politics. [Read more here.](#)

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