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POLITICS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE RESEARCH GROUP

NEWSLETTER



PUG
Politics & Urban Governance
Research

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Citizens Assembly Facilitators Workshop | Photography by PUG



Research participants presenting their photographs and personal stories Photography by PUG

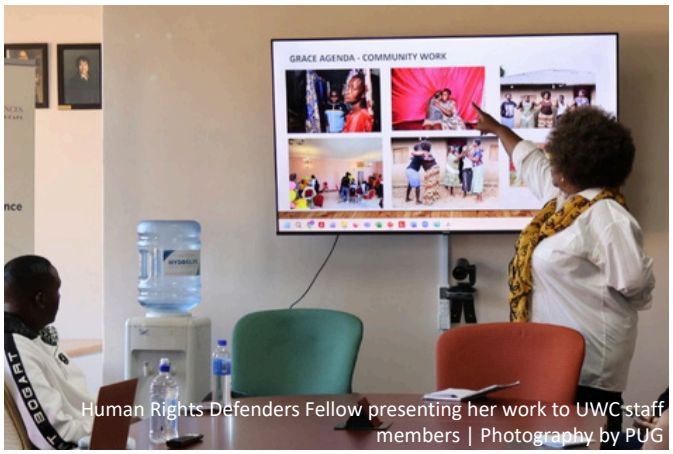
September 2026

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RESEARCH IN FOCUS

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

The African Universities Hub for Human Rights (The Africa Hub) is hosting its annual three-month Fellowship (Aug-Oct, 2026). Over the years, the number of fellows admitted into the programme has increased from three in 2024; six in 2025 and currently seven in the 2026 cohort. This year the seven Human Rights Defenders are from Egypt, Kenya, Tunisia, Tanzania x2, Uganda and Zambia. The Human Rights Defenders Protective Fellowship forms part of a protective intervention: temporary residency for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) working in stressful environments or who recently faced a traumatic event and need rest and respite.



Human Rights Defenders Fellow presenting her work to UWC staff members | Photography by PUG

SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST CITIZEN ASSEMBLY ON TRANSPORT AND CLIMATE

PUG Research, in partnership with the Centre for Research on Democracy (CREDO) at Stellenbosch University and the Western Cape Government, is proud to be hosting South Africa's first Citizens' Assembly (Sep-Nov, 2026).The initiative brings together a demographically representative group of residents to deliberate on climate resilience and adaptation, placing ordinary citizens at the centre of policy conversations that shape their lives. As the **first African-led project of its kind**, the Assembly reflects PUG's broader commitment to connecting rigorous academic research with meaningful democratic participation and positions UWC as a site of innovation in South Africa and the continent.



PROJECT UPDATES

CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRACY NICHE PHOTO EXHIBITION

On the 21st of April, the EMS Citizenship and Democracy Niche Area, with support from PUG, hosted a photovoice exhibition in the EMS foyer showcasing how small businesses in Khayelitsha access water and energy under difficult conditions. In addition to this, Prof. Anciano facilitated a workshop where participants were, introduced to photovoice, demonstrating how the methodology powerfully captures communities' lived experiences from their vantage point, and guiding participants through its practical application. An open discussion after the workshop further supported the participants to apply photovoice in their studies. The event was organised as part of EMS's Research Week.



Participants during the Photovoice Exhibition

URBAN MATTERS SEMINAR SERIES

On the 29th of April 2026, PUG hosted its Urban Matters Seminar Series in partnership with the Citizenship and Democracy Niche Area and the Department of Geography, Environmental Studies and Tourism. The session titled, "Cape Town Together? Community Action Networks and the (Re)production of Urban Subjectivities," was presented by Robynne Grant - Jepps, a PhD researcher in Security, Conflict and Human Rights at the University of Bristol and a Visiting Scholar at PUG.

It also featured Dr Anna Selmeczi, a Senior Lecturer at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, as a discussant. The discussion explored whether, and how, urban subjectivities—the discursively, materially, and affectively constituted ways in which people experience and navigate urban space—can be transformed through productive encounters across racial and spatial divides in post-apartheid Cape Town.

PROJECT UPDATES





CITIZENS ASSEMBLY FACILITATOR'S WORKSHOP & MOCK ASSEMBLY

Cape Town's Citizen Assembly Facilitator Workshop

On the 15th of May, PUG Research Group and the Centre on Research and Democracy (CREDO) from Stellenbosch University held a facilitators workshop at UWC in preparation for South Africa's inaugural citizens' assembly. It combined presentations, interactive group activities and applied learning. Sessions were led by Professor Fiona Anciano, Jonelle Naude and Kira Alberts who drew on their respective expertise in community-engaged research, trauma-informed facilitation and process design for citizens' assemblies.

Mock Citizen Assembly

A live practice session was hosted on the 23rd of May at UWC, in which the facilitators ran a deliberative 'mock assembly' with 27 UWC students. This was an opportunity for the facilitators and organising team to put theory into practice in a real group setting. All of this was in preparation for South Africa's first Citizens' Assembly, taking place between September and November this year at UWC.

CARING FOR THE OTHER HALF: PHOTOVOICE EXHIBITION

The Caring for the Other Half PhotoVoice Exhibition was held at UWC on Thursday, 28 May 2026, on Menstrual Hygiene Day. Women from Khayelitsha shared photographs and personal stories reflecting on their experiences of menstruation and sanitation in informal settlements. Held on World Menstrual Hygiene Day, the exhibition created space for dialogue between community members, government officials, academics, and other stakeholders on supporting menstrual health in contexts with limited infrastructure and services. The exhibition formed part of the Matariki Network-funded Caring for the other half project, which explored how the governance of publicly provided sanitation in urban informal settlements shaped women's experiences of menstrual health.

PROJECT UPDATES

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY WITH IBG ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The GoJUT team attended the Royal Geographical Society (RGS-IBG) Annual International Conference in London from 1–4 September, contributing to the conference through two hosted sessions and 10 presentations. The team co-convened the double session “Just Urban Transitions: Geographies of Inequalities and Governance Pathways to Sustainable Futures”, bringing together researchers working on the uneven and contested nature of urban sustainability transitions. The session explored how inequality, governance and justice shape pathways towards more sustainable urban futures, with contributions from cities across the Global South. The team also hosted a session on “Climate Apartheid: Meanings, Contexts, Politics, Legitimacy”, providing a space to interrogate the emerging concept of climate apartheid and its conceptual and empirical development, political implications and manifestations in practice.

GOVERNING THE JUST URBAN TRANSITION (GOJUT) WRITING WORKSHOP

The GoJUT team, including scholars from PUG, the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), the University of Cambridge, Cardiff University and the University of Sheffield came together at the University of Cambridge from 25–28, August 2026 for a writing workshop. The workshop was hosted by Prof. Charlotte Lemanski at Sidney Sussex College and it provided dedicated time for the team to reflect on the project’s key findings and contributions, develop papers for publication, and work collaboratively across the team.



Some of the Go-JUT team at the Cambridge Writing Workshop

SPATIAL JUSTICE IN THE UPGRADING OF SELF-PRODUCED TERRITORIES: ASSESSING EXPERIENCES IN BUENOS AIRES, SÃO PAULO AND CAPE TOWN

In July 2026, Prof. Anciano attended the two city workshops: "Spatial Justice in the Upgrading of Self-Produced Territories: Assessing Experiences in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, and Cape Town". Her visit included workshops with local researchers, meetings with faculty and field visits linked to debates on spatial justice and urban upgrading in both cities.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

PUG OUTPUTS

PHOTO ESSAY | Women's PhotoVoice stories of menstruation in Khayelitsha

RESEARCH BRIEF | Improving menstrual waste services and education in Cape Town's informal settlements

READ MORE



JOURNAL ARTICLES

Animated intersectionality: Deepening perspectives on elite research. Cooper-Knock, Culwick Fatti, Khanyile, Middelmann, Murahwa & Rubin. (2026). *Qualitative Research*.

The securitization of African immigrants in South Africa. Sibanda S and Nyere C (2026). *Frontiers in Political Science.*



BLOGS

Being stuck in limbo: the state of South African youth? By Sindisa Monakali. May 2026.

What does leadership in informal urban settings look like in the context of just urban transitions? By Kurisani Mdhluli and Rogini Naidoo. June 2026.

Can South Africa gets its First Citizens' Assembly right: Lessons from Ireland? By Zintle Zweni. May 2026.

Innovative qualitative methods workshop for early career researchers: By Prof. Charlotte Lemanski, Dr. Christina Culwick Fatti & Prof. Fiona Anciano. May 2026.

Afrophobia and South Africa's role in the protection of human rights defenders in Africa: By Sehlule Sibanda. August 2026.

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



AFRICA HUB WEBINAR

14 OCT

Championing African Solidarity: Universities' Responses to Anti-Migrant Mobilisation and Defence of Democratic Values and Human Rights.



Applications are open for a postdoctoral researcher to join our new project on Governing the Water–Energy–Food Nexus for Just Energy Transitions in Peri-Urban Africa. **Apply here.**

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