



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**



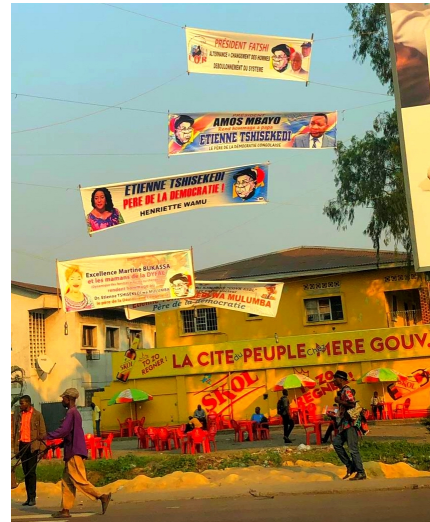
Africa
Research &
Engagement
Centre

Doing fieldwork in Africa

Interactive panel discussion

Friday 2 August 2019, 12.00-1.30pm

UWA [Social Sciences Building](#), room SSCI:2203



For Africa-focused researchers conducting primary research, doing fieldwork on the African continent is often a necessary aspect of the research process. Despite the importance of fieldwork for the generation of new knowledge, several challenges confront Africa-focused researchers based in Australia and, more generally, in the “Global North”. These challenges are not only logistical (obtaining institutional ethics approval, negotiating access to research participants and/or their respective organisations or communities, navigating new and complex environments, budget and risk management, etc) but also normative. Normative considerations require us to think about the very practice of fieldwork itself and the relationship that emerges between the researcher and “the field”. Does fieldwork cultivate an extractive, objectifying, and short-termist relationship to the places, organisations and people that are the subject(s) of our research?

This interactive panel discussion provides researchers with the opportunity to reflect on both the logistical and normative challenges and tensions that they have encountered in the planning and conduct of research fieldwork on the African continent. Participants are invited to share their diverse experiences and lessons learned from conducting fieldwork. We are seeking a diverse panel and audience, including both postgraduate researchers and senior academics, those who have both been in the field and those yet to do so, and people from a range of disciplinary backgrounds.

Discussion themes

- The researcher’s relationship to ‘the field’ and how to conceptualise ‘the field’;
- The impact of official country risk ratings on research conduct;
- Planning and/or conducting fieldwork in countries facing various forms of conflict;
- The process of securing ethical clearance to conduct fieldwork;
- Negotiating access to research participants, communities, organisations or other actors and navigating the ‘insider/outsider’ dilemma;
- Building sustainable relationships with research interlocutors, participants, stakeholders;
- Selecting appropriate field research methodologies;
- The impact of a researcher’s disciplinary background on fieldwork approaches;
- Key lessons learned from fieldwork experiences.

PANELISTS

Professor Erika Techera is a Professor of Law and member of the UWA Law School and Oceans Institute at The University of Western Australia (UWA). She was previously Director of the Oceans Institute and Dean of the UWA Faculty of Law. Erika is an international and comparative environmental lawyer with particular emphasis on marine environmental governance. Her research explores a range of global and Indo-Pacific island issues including shark conservation and management, marine protected area governance, marine spatial planning and marine pollution, as well as law for the conservation and management of natural and cultural heritage associated with the sea. Her most recent projects include transnational crime, technology and IUU fishing; decommissioning offshore infrastructure and its conversion to artificial reefs; and intangible marine heritage and its protection.

Dr Tina Lavin, an NHMRC Research Fellow in the School of Population and Global Health at the University of Western Australia, is an early career researcher specialising in maternal, child and perinatal health with a focus on low resource settings. She holds a National Health and Medical Research Council Early Career Fellowship focused on improving maternal and child health in low-resource settings adopting a multi-country mixed-methods approach. Dr Lavin is the lead of Asia-Pacific Region Worldwide Universities Network for African Child Health in the Context of Migration and Displacement. She is involved in several research projects based in Africa which target improving maternal and child health. These projects include reducing maternal deaths due to obstetric emergencies in Botswana; investigating the impact of global public health strategies to reduce maternal mortality and stillbirths in South Africa; improving care for preterm babies using Kangaroo Mother Care in South Africa; and several projects in Nigeria and Ghana investigating sexual and reproductive health of women who are internally displaced or refugees. The newest project led by Dr Lavin is funded through Australia-Africa Universities Network investigating food security and nutrition in internally displaced and refugee families in South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria. Dr Lavin is also involved in evidence synthesis for World Health Organization guidelines development on sexual and reproductive health.

Muhammad Dan Suleiman recently completed his PhD at UWA. His research focuses on violent extremism and state-society relations in Western Africa, peace and security in Africa and Africa's IR. He has published extensively on his research interests in leading international journals such as *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, *Peace Review*, *Australian Review of African Studies*, *African Identities* and *African Security* among others. He also presented at numerous domestic and international conferences. He is an analyst for a number of think tanks and has also received few awards including the 2018 Khalifa Al-Falasi Prize in Muslim Studies, awarded by the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia. Before commencing PhD studies, Muhammad received training in Political Science and Geography (Ghana), International Law (Sydney Law School) and Politics and International Relations (Macquarie University).

Alicea Garcia is a PhD Candidate with the School of Agriculture and Environment, University of Western Australia. In 2015 Alicea completed an Honours Degree with the University of Adelaide focusing on innovative approaches for addressing gender inequality in international agricultural sectors. This inspired her to pursue a PhD with the University of Western Australia, with a specific focus on rural agricultural communities in Ghana, West Africa. Alicea's current research addresses the gendered dynamics of climate change adaptation processes in Ghana's Central Region. The project specifically examines how related processes of power and social norms can affect the adaptive capacities of rural farmers. Alicea is also currently working with Universities in Ghana to plan and implement educational workshops in rural farming communities that will offer inclusive education on climate change processes and adaptation approaches. Alicea aims to continue to build research relationships in Ghana and Africa for building knowledge on opportunities for emancipation from inequality and improved strategies for elevating the adaptive capacities of rural farmers.

Dr Gloria Rupf is a postdoctoral research fellow at Murdoch University with a passion to facilitate sustainable implementation and use of energy technologies, particularly in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). She completed her PhD in Renewable Energy Engineering in October 2018. Her research focused on helping improve biogas technology dissemination in SSA through the development of a decision-making tool that can be used to help identify the optimal biogas system design based on the context and priorities of the intended user. She was able to test her decision-making tool using data from a household biodigester study that she assisted with in Rwanda in collaboration with SNV (the Netherlands Development Organisation) and the University of Rwanda. Gloria also has had experience interning with the World Food Programme (WFP) at their headquarters in Rome, to explore how WFP can integrate more energy activities into its programmes due to the strong links between energy access and food security. Aside from her current research project, which is focused on energy planning in a local council setting, Gloria also wants to see more collaboration between Australia and Africa, particularly to encourage social enterprises in the region, and therefore is part of A2 Future Directions.