

Fully Funded PhD Opportunity

WATERSHED PROJECT

PhD Program in International Relations

Based at: United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa), Department of International Relations, Nairobi, Kenya.

United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa) invites qualified and motivated candidates to apply for a fully funded PhD in International Relations research position under the WATERSHED program. Applicants should hold a graduate degree in a Social Science discipline such as Political Science, International Relations, Sociology, Gender Studies, Human Geography, Anthropology and Development Studies. The applicant's project will focus on flooding and community and gendered activities relating to climate-adaptive measures in informal settlements in Nairobi.

Project: WATERSHED: Climate justice, vulnerability, and informal urban adaptation in Kenya

WATERSHED is a Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) funded project that explores informal climate adaptation in relation to flooding in Nairobi. The project investigates the tension that exists between policies, interventions, and government actions that increase urban climate vulnerability at a structural level, and the everyday climate justice actions of community activists in informal urban communities. These tensions play out in the context of intensified climate disasters, explosive urban growth, and an ongoing global shift in development funding, where ordinary people's everyday actions are often overlooked for being too granular or inconsequential in comparison to the scale of the climate change vulnerability that the world faces.

WATERSHED seeks to understand how local adaptation and climate activism can contribute to climate change governance and decision-making amidst these global transitions. Specifically, the project investigates perceived vulnerabilities, concrete climate justice actions, and local adaptation initiatives with regard to increased risk of flooding in three densely populated informal urban settlements along the rivers in Nairobi (Mathare, Pumwani and Korogocho).

The advertised PhD project will focus on informal urban settlements in Nairobi, and will include long-term qualitative fieldwork.

WATERSHED is an international collaboration between Roskilde University, Denmark (Jacob Rasmussen, Somdeep Sen), the Technical University of Kenya (Melissa Wanjiru), USIU-Africa, Nairobi (Njoki Wamai), and DREAMtown NGO (Rasmus Bering).

The main supervisor will be Assistant Professor Njoki Wamai, the project lead at USIU-Africa with co-supervision by Associate Professor Somdeep Sen at Roskilde University and Professor Hussein Mahmood at United States International University-Africa. The PhD student will have the opportunity for a 3-month research stay at Roskilde University in the writing phase of the PhD program to gain insights from a different academic environment and to build an international research network. The PhD candidate will develop an independent research project under the broad theme of the WATERSHED project.

General conditions for the PhD position

- i. The position is fully funded and includes a competitive stipend and educational fees.
- ii. The successful PhD candidate will be enrolled at United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa), Department of International Relations.
- iii. The scholarships will run for four years, starting in September 2026, and include a research stay at Roskilde University in Denmark.
- iv. The candidates are expected to carry out at least 9 months of fieldwork in the specified project focus area. They are also expected to participate fully in WATERSHED activities and meet the requirements of the graduate school at United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa).

Candidate Profile and eligibility criteria

- i. Master's Degree in International Relations, Political Science, Sociology, Human Geography, Anthropology or Development Studies.
- ii. Bachelor's Degree in the above disciplines, with Upper Second Class and above from accredited universities
- iii. Experience working with communities in informal settlements, and/or exhibited passion and interest in the study areas.
- iv. Proficiency in mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis (e.g., NVIVO and SPSS).
- v. Self-motivated, open-minded, and a team player.
- vi. Willing to travel and actively participate in the project activities.
- vii. Available for full-time commitment for the 4-Year period starting September 2026.

Language proficiency: Oral and written English at academic level; Swahili and one other Kenyan vernacular language.



Requisite Documents (To be sent as one PDF except for the Reference Letters):

- i. 3 Page Concept Note of your proposed research topic in line with the Project Theme
- ii. 1 Page Motivation Statement
- iii. Degree Certificates and Academic Transcripts (Master's and Bachelor's)
- iv. Maximum 3 Page Resume (with 2 Referees)
- v. 2 Reference letters from one of your Referees (to be sent directly by them via email).

All application documents must be organized into a single PDF file.

PLEASE NOTE:

Concept notes generated through AI or featuring AI in their content will not be considered. The panel will use AI detection tools to identify generative AI.

Enquiries and Submission

For more information and enquiries, please contact Njoki Wamai - nwamai@usiu.ac.ke
All applications should be sent to: watershedscholar@usiu.ac.ke

Application Deadline

August 17, 2026 (Late and incomplete applications will not be considered)

All applications will be considered by late-August 2026 and **ONLY** successful candidates will be notified by August 25, 2026. If you do not hear from us, please consider your application as unsuccessful. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview late August or early September 2026.



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