



Name of the project

Shifting grounds – Controversies around sand extraction and trade in Kenya

Position

As part of the VR-Swedish Research Links initiatives on “Shifting grounds – contestations around sand extraction and trade in East and West Africa”, we invite applications for two minor field study grants for graduate students currently enrolled at Maseno University. Each grant is worth 1500 – 2000 € and is supposed to cover a 2-3 months long explorative field study on undesirable outcomes of illegal sand mining at a specific site in Kenya. The field study, which involves in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, and which will result in a short report, will be supervised by Dr Micheal Owiso under the School of Development and Strategic Studies at Maseno University.

Project description

The minor field study grants are part of a “Swedish Research Links” grant funded by the Swedish Research Council (VR). Principal investigators are Dr Per Knutsson, Dr Jan Bachmann (U Gothenburg, Sweden), Prof Kennedy Mkutu (USIU), Dr Michael Owiso (Maseno University) and Dr Kate Dawson (Huddersfield University, UK). The non-governmental organization “Natural Justice” acts as a strategic partner. The aim of the project is to establish a network of scholars who systematically inquire the social, economic and ecological impact of unregulated sand mining and trade across Eastern and Western Africa. The minor field study grants constitute the groundwork for a subsequent set of public stakeholder engagements that aim at informing policymakers about the scope of the challenges regarding unregulated sand harvesting in areas that are both ecologically fragile and rapidly urbanizing.

Sand, as the pivotal ingredient of most “landmarks of modernity” (from concrete, to glass, to solar panels and fiber-optic cables), is the world’s most extracted solid resource. Annual consumption of sand and gravel is between 30 and 50 billion tonnes, and increasing. While long considered an abundant resource, demand in rapidly urbanizing areas in both Asia and Africa outgrows the natural replenishment of sand. Journalists, human rights organizations as well as the UN have recently pointed to the harmful effects of uncontrolled sand extraction. Environmentally, unregulated sand mining upends important ecosystem services, diminishes biodiversity, contributes to coastal and riverine erosion. Socially, it has led to conflicts between miners and authorities, to inter-communal disputes as well as to serious labour issues. Economically, illegal mining leads to loss of public revenue as well as increasing corruption, and in addition, escalating conflicts around sand may leave rural livelihoods even more fragile.

This project hopes to be able to cast a wide net and engage stakeholders from public authorities, the industry, civil society as well as communities to raise awareness, to deliberate, and to identify sustainable solutions for the extraction of one of the most important resource for development.

Qualifications of the research student

- Must be enrolled in postgraduate studies in any of the social sciences at Maseno University
- Interest in, or experience in studying divisive political issues connected to environmental/resource questions and international relations;
- Ability to work both independently and in a (research) team.

The research student's tasks

- Together with Dr Michael Owiso identify a relevant field site
- Familiarize yourself with the key readings on the socio-economic-ecological impact of unregulated sand-mining (will be provided)
- Identify the background to the contestations emergent at the site (document research; background interviews with key informants)
- Empirical data-gathering: through field visits carry out observations, in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews with key informants (these may include sand miners, sand traders, truckers, local villagers, local and county administration, relevant civil society organizations)
- Map adverse dynamics (these can be economic, social, political, ecological) emergent around sand mining sites
- Map the political economy of sand-mining at the site (supply and value chain; who gets what and at what stage along the chain)
- Map the claims different parties involved in sand contestations make
- Compile the findings in a 15-page report

Deadline and Address for Application

October 1, 2022

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Contact info

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