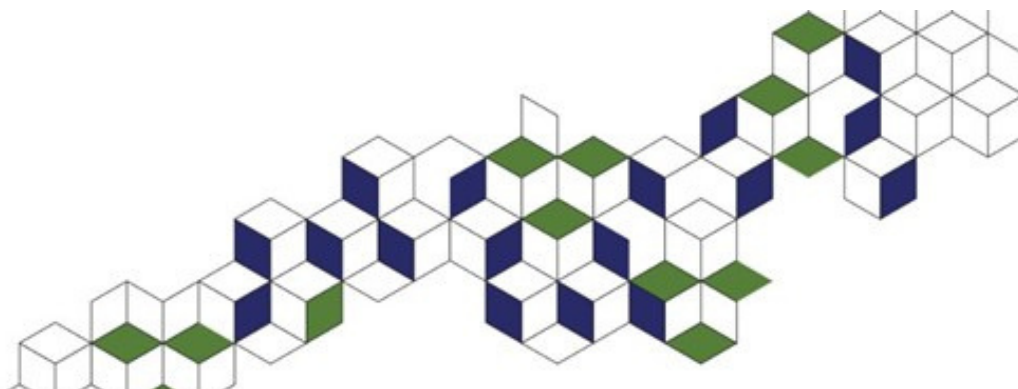


## THE WESAF DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

Newsletter  
Issue 01

## A Message from our Academic Directors

We're excited to share this first newsletter for the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Doctoral Programme. We will be sharing these twice a year to capture programme highlights, celebrate the accomplishments of the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, and share updates.

It's been a busy few months for all of us as we've kicked off the PhD in Sustainable African Futures in January 2025. We are incredibly proud of the hard work of the 24 Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows who have got to this point, and we are excited to see their research ideas continue to take shape over the coming years.

We had a great time during the recent Sustainability School 2025, with the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows and 12 University of the Witwatersrand ('Wits') supervisors coming to Edinburgh for nine days of social and academic activities.

The next few months will be busy ones for the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, as they prepare to present their research proposals to a review panel before advancing to the data collection phase. We are excited to see how their research ideas have taken shape!

Enjoy the newsletter!

*YOURS TRULY*

Prof Brett Bowman, Dr  
George Karekwaivanane,  
and Dr Jean-Benoît Falisse

In this newsletter  
you can expect:

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Updates

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Upcoming

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Mastercard  
Foundation WESAF  
Fellows'  
Accomplishments

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PhD Wellbeing Tips  
& Tricks

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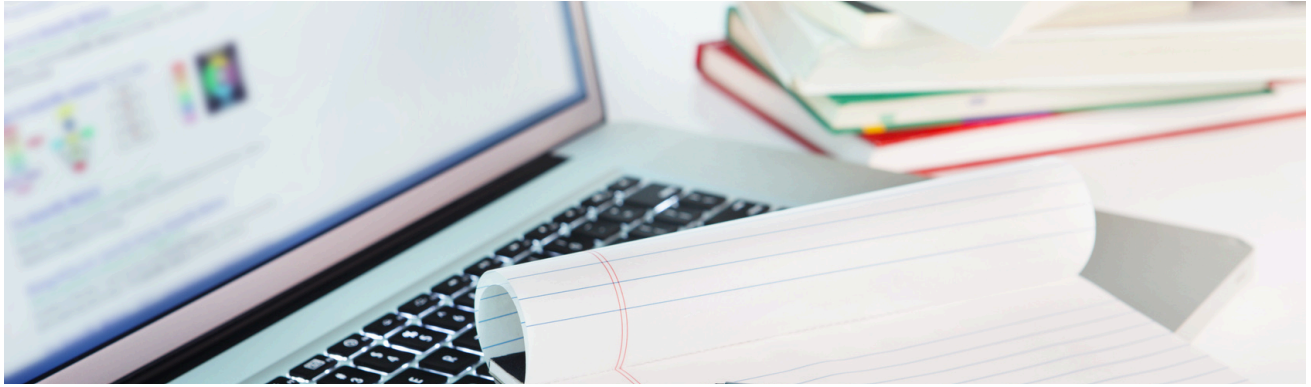
Stories of Impact

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HEI Collaborator  
Spotlight

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## Updates

### Launch and Orientation

In January 2025 we had an online orientation for the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, as well as for their supervisors from the University of the Witwatersrand and University of Edinburgh.

### Leadership Team News

Prof Gillian Drennan from Wits joined the WESAF Management Team in January 2025 as the Workplace Emplacement Coordinator. Welcome Prof Drennan!

Dr Ian Russell (UoE), former Programme Director for the MScR Sustainable African Futures, has joined the WESAF Advisory Board. Welcome, Dr Russell!

We are saying a fond farewell to Matsidiso Bambo, who will be leaving her role as WESAF Administrator to begin a PhD at Wits. Matsidiso, we are grateful for all the support you've provided, and wish you all the best!

In April, Dr Thea De Gruchy (Wits) joined the team as WESAF Administrator. Welcome, Thea!

### Mentorship

We kicked off an exciting new collaboration with the [Royal Society of Edinburgh \(RSE\)](#) to launch the pilot RSE x WESAF Doctoral Programme Mentorship Scheme. All 24 Fellows have signed up to be mentees, and mentors are based at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland, Italy and South Africa.

### PhD Seminar Series

We started the monthly WESAF PhD Seminar Series in February, with the topic "Budgeting for your PhD". Topics for these seminars were brainstormed with the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, and the meetings will be co-delivered by members of the WESAF Leadership Team, the Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, and guest speakers.

### Sustainability School 2025

We just completed the 2025 Sustainability School, held in Edinburgh from 23 April - 1 May. We were joined by 12 Wits WESAF supervisors, and Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows had opportunities for in-person team-building, developing academic and entrepreneurial skills, and working on their research proposals.

The WESAF Doctoral Programme also collaborated with the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at UoE for their annual CAS Conference. The theme this year was "Climate Dynamics and the Politics of a Post-Carbon Africa". Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows participated in various ways and had the opportunity to network with climate-focused researchers and academics.

More details about the 2025 Sustainability School will be included in the next Newsletter.



## Upcoming

### 1st Year Board Reviews

The Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows will present their research proposals to a review panel around June/July 2025. Following approvals, they will apply for ethics review (via Wits) and then commence data collection.

# Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellow' Accomplishments

## Nabeelah Bemath

*University of the Witwatersrand*

- Accepted into the Emerging Psychologists' Programme associated with the International Congress of Psychology 2024, and presented at the International Congress of Psychology 2024, Prague, Czech Republic.

- Co-Authoring an article in Jan 2024: Hassem, T., de Andrade, V., Laher, S., Bemath, N., & Bain, K. (2024). Postgraduate psychology students' mental health and coping during COVID-19: Lessons learnt: Santé mentale et adaptation des étudiants des cycles supérieurs en psychologie pendant la période de la COVID19: leçons tirées de l'expérience. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 12(1), 47-67.

- Received a Gold Professional Development Certificate from the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh.

Follow Nabeelah on LinkedIn [here](#).

## Joshua Ibanda

*St Lawrence University*

Joshua won the Una Europa Student Award 2024 with his original artwork. The jury were impressed by Joshua's holistic approach to representing sustainability through art.

You can see his winning artwork [here](#). You can follow Joshua on LinkedIn [here](#).

## Thembanani Mkhize

*Guateng City Regional Observatory*

- Graduated from the MScR Sustainable African Futures (UoE) with a distinction.

- Attended the 23rd Biennial International Congress of the Names Society of Southern Africa (NSSA) held at the University of Eswatini, and presented a paper titled 'Place Renaming as Place Rebranding in South Africa: Pretoria's proposed name change and approved street name changes' - which was well received.

Follow Thembanani on LinkedIn [here](#).

## Amy Mutua

*University of the Witwatersrand*

Publications:

- Federica Duca, Amy Mutua, Lucille Tetley-Brown et al. Smart cities governance in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region: A systematic review of the literature, 21 May 2024, PREPRINT (Version 1) available at Research Square [<https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4382210/v1>]

Conferences:

- African Urbanisms Conference 2024 <https://www.urban-sdg-school.org/african-urbanisms/programme/session-8-duca>

-AfricaLics 2024: Presented the paper "Health of Innovation Ecosystem in South Africa" <https://africalics.org/event/6th-research-conference/>

Follow Amy on LinkedIn [here](#).

## Fred Kasalirwe

*Makarere University*

Fred has won the Vice Chancellor's Research Excellence Award 2025 at Makerere University, following outstanding evaluations from students, showcasing his commitment to delivering high-quality education.

Follow Fred on LinkedIn [here](#).

## Richard van Rensburg

*University of the Witwatersrand*

- Has a chapter, titled "Questioning and queering digital communities", accepted for publication in a volume on Community Psychology. Published by Juta, the volume will be available before the middle of the year.

Follow Richard on LinkedIn [here](#).

## PhD Wellbeing Tips & Tricks

It is important to find a balance between research, deadlines and personal life. Managing expectations, discuss challenges with peers or mentors and always appreciate the small achievements, such as writing a draft.

Brendah Kemboi (Moi University)





## Stories of Impact

In the spirit of collaboration and knowledge exchange on sustainability issues, Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows Thembani Mkhize and Yashena Naidoo were invited to present their respective MSc dissertations and/or PhD proposals in a hybrid workshop titled “Co-producing Sustainable African Futures”. Held at Heriot Watt University, the hybrid discussion was part of a collaboration between The University of Edinburgh, Heriot Watt University and the Gauteng City Regional Observatory (GCRO). It was preceded by a discussion titled 'Co-Producing Sustainable African Urbanism', with the GCRO hosting scholars from both universities in June 2024.

The hybrid discussion offered Naidoo, whose research seeks to develop a novel approach to quantify and understand Gauteng's economy at a granular spatial scale, the opportunity to present her proposed doctoral study. Mkhize's doctoral study proposes using the case of Zandspruit - one of six settlements that the City of Johannesburg has earmarked for formalisation - to explore the link between unofficial toponymy and in situ upgrading. Both presenters benefitted from the feedback - clarification questions, remarks, and recommendations - that they received from the audience, which will go a long way in shaping their respective studies going forward.

## HEI Collaborator Spotlight

### University of Mauritius

Two Mastercard Foundation WESAF Fellows, Punyagandhaa Jankee Bissoon and Leckraj Nagowah, are staff faculty members of the University of Mauritius. Founded in 1965, it is the country's oldest and largest university in terms of student enrollment and academic offerings. The University has systematically incorporated sustainability principles across its degree programs to ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable development.

“We aim to encourage and support sustainability-related initiatives with more social, environmental and corporate responsibility projects that contribute to the fight against poverty, promote care for the planet and respect our diversity.”

Punyagandhaa Jankee Bissoon  
and Leckraj Nagowah (University of Mauritius)



Martin Weller, Flickr

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