PROJECT CONCEPT

PROVISIONAL NAME:
Forum of Young Scholars in International Relations and Water Governance

BRIEF DESCRIPTION:
The paucity of southern African research conducted in International Relations on water politics can potentially be reflected in the lack of southern African young scholars interested in this topic, the lack of awareness by young researchers that a community of young researchers exists in this field, and/or the lack of awareness that it is a viable branch of International Relations worth pursuing.

We therefore suggest the establishment of a forum that aims to provide solutions to these challenges. The forum would attempt to make a contribution to IR’s output of water-related research and would aim to develop an agenda for future research for scholars involved or interested in IR and water.

A forum of this nature is unique in that it encourages a proactive research agenda through the development of a theme based approach to IR and Water Governance, and has a specifically regional focus, with young scholars identifying challenges specific to the SADC region.

There are a number of key themes that can help to craft a specific focus and sense of direction for this forum. If this forum grows into a regular or annual event, a different theme can be explored each year.

Broad Themes:
- An empirical overview of IR and Water Governance in SADC (chronology of literature, amount of men vs women researchers, sub-themes etc).
- Sustainable knowledge transfer and the related issue of inter-generational learning to ensure a competent younger generation of professionals in the water governance sector in SADC. This theme aims to address the challenges of institutional memory loss and the consequences of skills flight in the region,
- Critical theory perspectives in IR. E.g. International Water Politics/Governance from a constructivist or critical theory perspective/ post-modern conceptualisation of transboundary waters, gendered water politics, the influence of language in regional water politics,
- Policy alignment not only of states but between River Basin Organizations in SADC,
- The consequences of multiple donor funding in the SADC water sector,
- The political and historical trajectory that SADC has taken in its development and evolution, particularly the Water Division, and how this has influenced the legislative framework of shared waters
New ways to build institutional capacity in SADC and the lack of capacity to engage due to political contexts
- The future of IR - IR’s response to water and climate change: adapting to uncertainty?

As such, we propose that a database of all young scholars/professionals who have worked/ or who are working in this field particularly, be designed. Following this, a list of 3-4 students/young professionals recommended by key tertiary institutions and organisations will be drafted and these students/professionals invited to participate in the workshop designed to identify current gaps in the area of International Relations and Water Governance.

The outcomes of this event will be threefold: Firstly, the conference will serve as a forum where papers pertaining to the theme can be presented and constructively discussed and criticised. Secondly, the results of this workshop will be published or made available online as conference/workshop proceedings. Thirdly, a database of young scholars/professionals who have worked/ or who are working in this field will be developed. This then lays the ground work for the development of an active network of young professionals interested in this specific field of research.

**INSTITUTIONAL LINKS:**
Collaboration is essential to the success of a project of this nature. Firstly, links with the political science departments of all South African Universities need to be made. This is a crucial element to the forum recruitment process and also to the utilization of the research agenda that will be developed. Secondly, collaboration with various research institutions is crucial in terms of gaining access to a community of established and emerging academics, gaining critical peer review and access to a community of scholars who will be interested in the written outputs of this forum. As such, we propose collaborating with institutions such as Centre for International Political Studies (CIPS) at the University of Pretoria and the African Institute of Southern Africa (AISA), as well as WISA, the WRC, IGD, ISS as well as the NRF.

**BENEFITS OF PROJECT:**
- Create an active community of young scholars interested in water politics and IR
- Establish links with universities and both water and IR/Politics institutions
- The forum is geographically and thematically SPECIFIC as well as GOAL ORIENTATED. This forum will not simply be a general ‘talk shop’ for young academics but encourages delegates to focus on Southern African water issues around a specific theme, with the explicit goal of producing a monologue series and an agenda for future research.
- A proactive research agenda. This contrasts with the way in which Water Governance in IR has been approached to date i.e. as a reaction to fashionable trends within IR. This will be done by deciding upon a different theme each year.
- Capacity building, by empowering a younger generation of researchers, academics and scholars to take ownership of their research environment and to aid in shaping its direction. An advisory team of experts would also guide this
process and help to equip a younger generation to better deal with future challenges.

A PLAN OF ACTION TO DEVELOP THE FORUM:

- Constitute an advisory panel of 5-10 experts in the field, to offer advice, guidance and expertise to the forum, to help to formulate the themes of the forum, provide keynote addresses at the seminar, assist in chairing debates at the November conference etc, and aid in the publication of conference proceedings.
- Present the project concept and working papers at an AISA and/or UNISA seminar to gain further critique and advice on the idea.
- Present a paper and have a panel discussion around the theme of the 2009 forum at the September Gauteng Colloquium of Young Scholars, happening under the auspices of the South African Association of Political Science (SAPS). This exercise serves the dual purpose of gaining early critique on the theme and ideas for the monologue series, and serves as an ideal place to recruit interested candidates for the forum.
- Hold the first conference of the forum in November 2009.

TIMEFRAME:

- April 2009 – proposal for project completed and themes for conference and monologue drafted. Advisory panel constituted.
- May 2009 – presentation of the project to AISA seminar
- June 2009 – project proposal and themes finalized
- August 2009 – funding secured
- September 2009 – presentation of early theme papers in a panel discussion at SAPS Gauteng Youth Colloquium.
- November 2009 - conference
- May 2010 – monograph proceedings finalized
- June/July 2010 – publication of monograph

DELIVERABLES/OUTPUTS:

1. Proposal put forward for a special edition of IR and Water Governance in the journals Politeia, Politikon, or the South African Journal of Political Science (SAJPS) where the theme for this year would be introduced and a collection of papers to be selected by us.
2. Workshop of young scholars to refine monograph papers and identify gaps in research on International Relations and the politics of water
3. A monograph series to be published of conference proceedings.
4. An official website which would contain information about future workshops, conferences, calls for proposals, current research/literature, training/course information, news and events etc.
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