

WESTMINSTER ACADEMICS AWARDED £500K FOR URBAN TRANSFORMATION PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA



Informal settlement called Namibia Stop 8 near Durban, South Africa

Westminster academics from the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment have been awarded a major £500k grant to develop and test an environmental and construction management toolkit helping local communities in informal settlements in South Africa to be self-reliant and resilient over the long-term future.

The grant is part of a wider £1.8 million package of funding provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of the [Newton Fund](#), in collaboration with the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa. The overarching aim is to analyse how South African cities can shape a sustainable future for the nation and the wider African continent.

The Westminster team will be working within a multidisciplinary partnership between the UK and South Africa starting in February 2016. The project will run for three years, and is entitled 'Community-led Upgrading for Self-Reliance in South Africa: Integrated Construction and Environmental Management Systems in Informal Settlements'.

The researchers will develop and test an integrated 'Collaborative Environmental and Construction Management Toolkit' to enhance community self-reliance. The project will use a novel action research methodology, which will involve the co-production of knowledge with local people, community organisations, South African policy makers and practitioners. Community members will benefit from access to the finalised toolkit and training to improve technical, management and communication skills.

The international team is led by Dr Maria Christina Georgiadou from the [Department of Property and Construction](#) at the University of Westminster, together with Dr Isis Nunez Ferrera and Ben Fagan Watson from the University's [Policy Studies Institute](#) and Dr Priti Parikh from University College London's [Department of Civil Environmental and Geomatic Engineering](#). In South Africa, the team is made up of academics from the [School of Built Environment and Development Studies](#) and the [Pollution Research Group](#) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal led by Dr Claudia Loggia, Prof Chris Buckley and Dr Alfred Odindo.

Collaborators from [uTshani Fund](#), a local South African NGO, are also joining the team from the outset and advisory services will be provided by [EcoLtd](#), an independent consultancy focusing on international development and project formulation, and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria.

The project team hopes that the Toolkit will be incorporated into the community development process in both Durban regionally and South Africa nationally, and will support informal settlements transitioning into legally recognised settlements with improved service provision. The findings will be of direct use to the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, which includes the city of Durban, as well as the South African Department of Housing and the Department of Human Settlements.

Once the project team consolidates findings from Durban and the wider KwaZulu-Natal province, a comparison with other South African or wider African cities will be carried out. This will facilitate discussions on how the Toolkit could be implemented in other regions globally.

Dr Maria Christina Georgiadou, Project lead and Senior Lecturer in the [Department of Property and Construction](#) at the University of Westminster, said: “We are a team of experts spanning from international development, built environment, policy research right through to construction and pollution research. Having such a diverse team provides us with a wonderful opportunity to generate fresh insights in grassroots upgrading mechanisms. Through this project we can help local communities build their capacity and ultimately generate socio-economic and environmental benefits; a triple-win for the local context.”

[Learn more about the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster.](#)