



SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME OF STRATEGY 2 UNDER THE SUB-REGIONAL PROJECT ResilienSEA - SEAGRASSES OF WEST AFRICA

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Introduction

Under the MAVA-funded sub-regional project ResilienSEA on Seagrasses of West Africa, GRID-Arendal and Wetlands International are hereby providing full scholarships for Master's degree students potentially from seven countries in the West African sub-region. Geared towards building capacities of West Africans and setting up a network of experts, the scholarship program will include at most one candidate per country in order to ensure representative benefits and appropriate support for each of the target countries. This programme will allow for focalizing research effort on the sensitive and highly understudied coastal ecosystems, with special reference to seagrass beds, their associated ecosystem goods and services in West Africa. Thus, promoting sustainable approaches to conserving and managing the soon-to-be-identified priority/pilot sites.

Context and Justification

Information on seagrasses of West Africa is highly deficient, and as a result, conservation measures for protecting these important seagrass beds are largely inadequate. This lack of information has also led to the limited number of experts actively involved in seagrass conservation, as their interest in the subject matter has not been sufficiently peaked to pursue careers in seagrass conservation. The ResilienSEA project is here to improve knowledge on seagrasses of West Africa and to fill the aforementioned information gaps. Thereby equipping West African conservationists the necessary tools and expertise to better protect/conservate the pilot seagrass sites in the coastal areas of the seven target countries (Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Cape Verde and Sierra Leone).

Notwithstanding the above, a few studies have been done in sites such as Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania and Ile de Bijagos in Guinea Bissau. The current information from these sites (albeit little) will serve as a basis for knowledge exchange on research techniques, management best practices and data production which will be invaluable to both the academic journeys and practical experiences of our potential scholarship recipients. With these in mind, the scholarship programme's main goal is to train young West Africans in the field of coastal ecosystems management and to eventually set up an expert network for the sustainable use and protection of seagrass beds.

Specific goals

The specific goals of the scholarship programme are as follows:

1. To train at least three young West Africans from the ResilienSEA target countries on coastal ecosystems management and seagrass conservation.
2. To set up an expert regional network for the conservation of seagrass beds in West Africa.
3. To set up a knowledge an exchange platform that will facilitate mentoring and supervision, supported by renowned experts in coastal ecosystems and seagrass ecology.

Expected results

1. To produce at least three highly trained MSc graduates from the project target countries by the end of 2020.
2. To successfully have launched an expert network whose membership is representative of the project target countries, with a verifiable sub-regional presence in the domain of seagrass conservation.
3. To have carried out successful collaborations with world-renowned researchers/research institutions, backed by a visible presence in global platforms such as Seagrass watch.

The call for candidature

It is envisaged that the project will work with its indirect partners, mainly national institutions and academia to identify and collate the datasets that are currently available (even if with limited distribution). This available data, together with the results of the project's Scientific Research component will be used as a basis for developing and endorsing relevant research topics of the prospective scholarship recipients.

University admissions, full tuition, and research budget will be guaranteed for successful candidates at one of the following universities:

1. University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar (Senegal)
2. University of Cape Verde in Mindelo (Cape Verde)

The candidates sought must be highly motivated and competent individuals interested in the management of marine and coastal environments, who will carry out a Master's degree on the topic of coastal ecosystems of West Africa, with keen interest in specializing in seagrass ecosystems. At the end of the scholarship programme, thesis reports must be written in or translated to French or English, depending on the original language of the student.

Profile of prospective students

1. Prospective candidates must be from one of the project's seven target countries in West Africa (Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Gambia and Sierra Leone).
2. Ideal candidates must have a Bachelor of Science in Environment, Marine Biology, Aquatic Sciences or related fields.
3. They must demonstrate an excellent academic standing of at least a B+ average.
4. They must have at least basic scientific skills such as writing strong research proposals linking coastal ecosystems, biodiversity and human livelihoods.
5. Knowledge of basic statistical analyses is also desirable.
6. Candidates must not be more than 35 years of age by the commencement of the scholarship programme.
7. Experience working in conservation of coastal ecosystems of West Africa is an added advantage.
8. Preference will be given to applicants who have contributed to relevant research reports in internationally recognized journals/platforms.

Application procedure

Interested persons may send their applications by e-mail, no later than **31 May 2019** at 17:00 GMT, mentioning as subject "**ResilienSEA Scholarship**", to the following E-mail: hrrsiliensea@wetlands-africa.org

They must also submit the following:

1. A letter of motivation summarizing the student's aptitude for the stated Master program (maximum 1 page), accompanied by a most recent official transcript/degree award.
2. A detailed CV with the contact details of two external referees (including an academic supervisor) and one (where applicable) from the most recent employer.
3. A short study/research plan stating applicant's interest area and relevance to one's country (maximum 2 pages).
4. A letter of commitment from a professor at the targeted university expressing willingness to supervise prospective student will be an added advantage.
5. Any other relevant document showing the candidate's motivation and interest in marine and coastal ecosystems, especially seagrass beds

Selection: Only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.