



University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

PhD Candidate 2022: Future Ecosystems for Africa

Associate Professor Laura Pereira, Global Change Institute, Wits University is advertising for a PhD candidate to undertake research under the Oppenheimer Generations Future Ecosystems for Africa program (FEFA). FEFA aims to drive policy strategies to enhance the resilience of African ecosystems, and the wellbeing of its people through thought-leadership and evidence-based research on the continent. The PhD candidate will be expected to develop a project in line with Work Package 1: Futures thinking for identifying vulnerabilities/tipping points and leveraging opportunities for African informed transformative change.

This work package aims to draw on futures thinking methodologies that allow stakeholders to imagine more desirable futures for Africa away from business-as-usual. It aims to construct a theoretical and overarching framework for prioritising ecosystem-based interventions in Africa, including what to protect and how, what to rehabilitate, and whose voices need to be included in decision-making. This approach will build on findings from the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) regional assessment for Africa that emphasized that Africa's rich bio-cultural heritage and diverse value perspectives for nature needed to be brought more strongly to the fore in science and decision-making, as well as the Nature Futures framework developed by the IPBES Task Force on scenarios and models. As such, it will take a multiple evidence base approach that appreciates diverse knowledge systems and will work closely with a wide range of stakeholders. A core aspect will be to provide African specific examples to complement ongoing research initiatives, explicitly emphasizing decolonial approaches to futures thinking, as well as engaging with alternative paradigms, such as the post-growth discourse. As such, it will offer a strong empirical and theoretical foundation for research on African futures and on sustainability and regenerative transformations in the African context. Finally, the research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how to enable sustainability transformations from a bottom up perspective, and will complement ongoing work within the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes project.

The PhD candidate's project will be fully funded for 4-years in line with university standards, with money included for extensive fieldwork, and there will be ample opportunity to take part in workshops and other activities, including international conferences. The candidate will be expected to take a lot of initiative in their work and to produce research of the highest quality, publishable in internationally recognised journals, as well as contributing to other project deliverables such as policy briefs. The successful candidate will be working in a world-class interdisciplinary team, and will be given opportunities to develop their own research program, grow their networks, and produce impact-driven research.



Keywords:

Indigenous knowledge systems, biodiversity conservation, human wellbeing, scenarios, ecosystem services/NCP, Africa, transformation

Minimum requirements:

1. MSc in Sustainability Science, Geography, Environmental Science, Development studies or a related field
2. Experience working on inter-disciplinary projects, preferably across the sciences and humanities
3. Experience with and a keen interest to work on impact-driven projects on the African continent

Additional requirements:

Experience with the following would be advantageous:

1. Facilitation, especially using scenarios and other futures techniques
2. Qualitative data analysis
3. Quantitative data analysis
4. Evidence of having published in peer-reviewed journals
5. A thoughtful engagement with theories of sustainability transformations and trans-disciplinary research

Duties and Expectations:

1. Complete a PhD within 4 years;
2. Publish focused and high quality research;
3. Undertake other activities related to the academic programme and the professional development of the individual;
4. Help to coordinate diverse activities across the FEFA WP 1

Contact:

To apply, please send the following to Jacqui.coelho@wits.ac.za:

1. a letter of motivation,
2. your CV,
3. a 1 page project proposal outline, drawing on the description of the project above, and
4. a sample of written work

Application deadline: Friday, 14 January 2022