

Interactions between Biodiversity and Climate Change Request for a Synthesis Team

Website: <https://ascendclimate.org/opportunities/>
For inquiries email ascend.info@uct.ac.za

Summary

- Proposal deadline is **14:00 South Africa Standard Time on 14 March 2025.**
- This request seeks to identify teams consisting of a mix of researchers, policymakers and/or practitioners addressing interactions between Biodiversity and Climate Change in Africa and globally.
- The selected synthesis research team will synthesise, integrate and analyse existing data and knowledge to deliver new research insights and enhance policy and/or practice on interactions between biodiversity and climate change.
- The team will be funded to hold in-person working meetings of up to 15 people at [ASCEND](#) at the University of Cape Town in South Africa up to 3 times over a 2 year period (accommodation, travel, meals) & scientific support for meeting preparation.
- A Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ASCEND will also be funded for the team.
- The focus is on synthesis of existing data and knowledge. New data collection from lab or field work will not be funded.
- ASCEND partners provide some support for team facilitation, transdisciplinary research, and translating research knowledge into climate action.
- **Please read this Request for Proposals carefully and download the Climate and Biodiversity [proposal template](#).**
- **Register for the [online submission portal](#) to submit your application**

Idea of the Call

Climate change and biodiversity loss threaten our planet at all socio-ecological and socio-economic levels. Climate change and biodiversity change are inherently interlinked. Each can worsen or improve the effects of the other, depending on the direction of change, making their combined management critical for having a habitable climate, self-sustaining biodiversity, and good quality of life for all. Although climate change and biodiversity change influence each other in complex, interdependent ways, they are often individually addressed in their own research disciplines, such that the interlinkages are often not fully addressed. Understanding the social determinants and the implications of climate-biodiversity interactions provides opportunities to mitigate mutually harmful effects for people and nature, with implications for equity both within and across generations.

Even more importantly, climate change and biodiversity change are mostly independently addressed in policy decision-making, which often leads to unnecessary competition of attention and resources and can drive negative outcomes when solutions are implemented considering only biodiversity or climate rather than leveraging their interlinkages to deliver co-benefits.

Given the global nature of the tightly linked climate and biodiversity crises, several synthesis centres around the world have joined forces to synthesise knowledge linking the biodiversity and climate change crises ([see the global call](#)).

ASCEND will fund a synthesis team as part of this global call. The team should start work in the second half of 2025, and will form part of ASCEND's BAOBAB project – an initiative that convenes teams consisting of researchers, policymakers and/or practitioners to synthesise diverse existing data and knowledge on climate change.

This Request for Proposals invites potential team leaders to propose:

1. A [transdisciplinary team](#) of up to 15 people;
2. To use [synthesis research](#) approaches to produce [actionable research](#);
3. On interactions between biodiversity and climate change in Africa and globally.

All proposals must address a synthesis topic on interactions of biodiversity and climate change.

ASCEND acknowledges insights developed from a focus on Africa may also be relevant for other regions and globally, and encourages these connections to be made where relevant.

Proposals are expected to identify a need for innovative synthesis of relevant data and knowledge that delivers new research insights and can enhance policy and/or practice on interactions between biodiversity and climate change, especially considering marginalised and vulnerable groups¹.

¹ Economically, socially or politically marginalised groups – including but not limited to women, young and elderly people, Indigenous Peoples, people living in informal settlements, marginalised ethnic groups, migrants and displaced people – are often more vulnerable and worse-affected by climate change, and lack opportunities to use their agency and voice in planning and implementation. For this reason, we ask teams to articulate how they will integrate equity and social inclusion considerations into their research.

ASCEND is seeking a team proposing in-depth synthesis of data and/or knowledge to produce peer-reviewed research articles and other outputs (e.g., policy briefs, toolkits, newly integrated qualitative and/or quantitative datasets). Teams proposing to meet only once or do only rapid synthesis (e.g., for a single narrative literature review or a single policy brief) are not eligible.

Synthesis Research

The focus is on synthesis of data and knowledge from existing sources. This can be one or more quantitative and/or qualitative datasets or knowledge sources (e.g., satellite imagery, climate model data, completed experiments, climate impacts data, existing social surveys, case studies, text mining from online sources, integration of existing conceptual or theoretical frameworks etc.). In their applications, teams must outline expected outputs and knowledge dissemination strategies to reach targeted knowledge users and translate knowledge into action.

Research must include synthesis of data and knowledge on Africa but this may also involve data and knowledge beyond Africa.

Synthesis often requires substantial data processing and harmonisation that can lead to development of new, integrated datasets or knowledge frameworks as important research products.

See the [‘What is Synthesis Research?’ FAQ](#) for further details.

Transdisciplinary Synthesis Research Teams

The synthesis research team will bring together up to 15 participants for 3–4 in-person collaborative working meetings at ASCEND. The Team does not have to include the maximum number of 15 people if a smaller number of participants is better suited for the work.

The transdisciplinary synthesis research team is expected to be diverse, including individuals from multiple disciplines, from outside academia, and from a mix of backgrounds and career stages (including early career researchers). The project should be co-developed by researchers with those from policy and/or practice backgrounds.

The Team will have two co-leads. Each team must be African-led, and should also strive to have at least 80% of participants from Africa or Africa-based institutions².

Between in-person working meetings at ASCEND, team members will collaborate remotely, participate in ASCEND-supported activities relevant to the team’s actionable research, identify and utilise opportunities for moving knowledge into action, and publish research and results.

² Team co-leads must be African or from Africa-based institutions. Africa-based institutions include institutions with head offices in the global North but with members of the synthesis team based in offices in Africa. Citizens of an African country based at institutions outside Africa are eligible as team co-leads and as other team members. For further details on team composition please read the *Eligibility* and the *Evaluation Criteria* sections later in this document.

Over time, synthesis teams should ensure that the ideas, research, and relationships developed through the synthesis process will have high potential to influence policy and practice, and may enhance climate action and support, at local, national, and international levels.

Collaboration across synthesis centres

Related synthesis efforts taking place at different centres have the potential to shed light on how the two crises interact and affect each other, and provide information and models to tackle the enormous challenges of our time.

As synthesis centres joining this call, we aspire to facilitate and encourage joint interactions among the different teams working on different aspects of the same overarching topic. In addition to centre-specific synthesis teams, we will provide opportunities for cross-project fertilization that includes seminars, training, symposia, and an “ubersynthesis” final in-person meeting for some participants from each team.

Funding, Support, and Timelines

ASCEND will fund team travel, accommodation, and per diem expenses for up to 3 in-person meetings of 5–15 experts at ASCEND, for up to 5 days per meeting over a 24 month period (**starting in mid-2025**). The team is expected to have at least 2 onboarding meetings with ASCEND before the first in-person meeting to discuss their meeting agendas, and the checklist for the team science process. The team is expected to continue meeting and working remotely as needed when not at ASCEND. The team will be expected to share plans for their engagement and synthesis process when they are not meeting in-person at ASCEND. At least 2 check-in sessions will be done with ASCEND in-between in the in-person meetings.

A full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ASCEND will be part of the team. The Postdoctoral Research Fellow will be a full participant in the team, and will be funded for up to 3 years. When a team is selected, ASCEND will work with the team co-leads to identify the specific requirements for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow position, and then advertise for and hire the Postdoctoral Research Fellow in collaboration with the team leads and according to University of Cape Town process. There will be an emphasis on recruiting early career African scholars for these Postdoctoral Research Fellow positions. The team will be expected to nominate an academic mentor for the postdoc fellow from within the team. As part of the cohort of ASCEND postdoctoral research fellows, ASCEND will provide professional mentorship in liaison with the academic mentors. Funding may be made available for the Postdoc to visit synthesis team leads at their home institutions. An ASCEND postdoctoral research fellowship guideline document will be shared to provide guidance to the team in providing support to the postdoc.

Funds are held and managed by ASCEND for expenses for team meetings, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, and other support and cannot be used to cover salaries of team leaders or other team members. For the technical and research synthesis we expect each team to assign the responsibilities equitably across the team. ASCEND has a partnership with the Climate & Development Knowledge Network ([CDKN](#)) and the African Group of Negotiators Expert Support

(AGNES) for capacity and training support for moving knowledge into action and for knowledge brokering strategies.

Research Methods, Analysis, and Data Management

Proposals must clearly articulate their methodology for (1) data and knowledge synthesis and (2) analysis. This methodology must also clearly outline the data and knowledge sources to be used and the capacity within the team to analyse such these. If the team needs heavy computing for their synthesis or analysis they should articulate any IT infrastructure support they will require from ASCEND.

ASCEND complies with the data management policies of the University of Cape Town that is “open by default” recognising legitimate limitations on availability as they apply to restricted data types, such as human-subject data³.

Synthesis teams will be supported to share research methods (e.g., code) and publish findings as open access (following best practice in other synthesis research programs), and to share project data using findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR) principles while recognising legitimate constraints for restricted data types. Data management guidelines will be shared with the selected team.

To Apply for a Synthesis Team

Download the BAOBAB [proposal template](#).

Submission: Please submit your application via the [online submission portal](#). You will have to register an account for the online submission portal. When you sign up, you will receive an email from the portal with further instructions.

We encourage those interested in this Request for Proposals to attend a webinar (or watch a webinar recording which will be uploaded to the [ASCEND website when available](#)). This will help in ascertaining whether or not your proposal aligns with BAOBAB aims.

If you have further questions, please email ascend.info@uct.ac.za. We ask that you please include a paragraph or short concept document about your project even if not fully developed (e.g., your research questions; what kind of data you plan to synthesise; what outputs you envision). This will help us put you in contact with the right person at ASCEND.

Key Proposal Dates and Deadlines

Proposals are due by **14:00 South Africa Standard Time (12:00 GMT) on 14 March 2025**. Late or incomplete submissions will not be reviewed. We will confirm receipt of your proposal by email within 72 hours; if you do not receive a confirmation, please inquire by emailing ascend.info@uct.ac.za and include the Team lead name.

³https://www.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/uct_ac_za/39/files/TGO_Policy_Research_Data_Management_2018.pdf

For queries, please email ascend.info@uct.ac.za and we will reply or set up a short online call.

Information Webinars	21 January 2025 at 13:00 South Africa Standard Time (11h00 GMT) - Register here
Proposal due date	14:00 South Africa Standard Time (12:00 GMT) on 14 March 2025
Proposal review period	March/April 2025
Awards announced	June 2025
Team begins	August 2025 – October 2025

Proposal Review

Proposals will be evaluated for their research quality, their relevance to a clear challenge or need for decision-making or action, and their potential to inform improved policy and/or practice. Proposals will also be evaluated for their research methods and availability of data and/or knowledge for synthesis, on the inclusion in synthesis teams of appropriate scientific, technical, and other policy or practice expertise needed to co-create knowledge and improve its use in decision-making and practice, as well as commitment to team diversity and inclusion.

The proposal review panel includes experts in climate change and biodiversity research and moving knowledge into decision-making and action. The panel may request additional reviews from experts with special relevance to the proposed research. Based upon panel reviews, ASCEND may request proposal modifications (e.g., inclusion of additional data resources, or adjustment of team size or composition) and a short interview with team leads before funding is awarded. All evaluation criteria (see below) are weighted equally in the review process. Limitations in staff time prevent ASCEND from providing lengthy feedback to declined proposals, but ASCEND may share limited feedback (usually summarized bullet points) about these proposals. ASCEND reserves the right to rescind its selection of a project if it is deemed that the information provided in the application is false or misleading.

Eligibility criteria:

Proposals that have no focus on biodiversity and climate change in Africa will not be considered.

Teams must use synthesis research approaches. New primary data collection using fieldwork or laboratory work is not supported.

Each team must have two co-leads. Team co-leads must be African or from Africa-based institutions. Africa-based institutions include institutions with head offices in the global North but with the synthesis team participant based in offices in Africa. Citizens of an African country

based at institutions outside Africa are eligible as team co-leads and as other team members.

Other team members can be of any nationality.

Teams must have a minimum of 2 early career researchers (PhD student or Postdoctoral researcher less than 5 years after PhD). This is in addition to the Postdoctoral position at ASCEND that will be provided to the team.

Teams proposing to meet only once or only do rapid synthesis (e.g., for a single policy brief) are not eligible. Teams where the only research output is a narrative literature review are not eligible. We are seeking teams proposing in-depth synthesis of data and/or knowledge to produce multiple outputs (e.g., policy briefs, research articles, newly integrated datasets).

At least one team lead and one other participant within the team have proficient English language skills to communicate with the ASCEND team throughout the project.

Evaluation Criteria:

- **Actionable research:** innovative research question(s) that address clear challenges for decision making and/or action on interactions between biodiversity and climate change in Africa.
- **Equity and inclusion:** the proposed work integrates issues linked to equity and social inclusion given marginalised and vulnerable groups are often more negatively impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss ([see FAQ](#)). If integration of equity and inclusion issues in some aspects of the work or a specific equity and inclusion focus is not possible, then the reasons for this must be clearly explained, as well as how equity and inclusion considerations may be meaningfully integrated as the project evolves.
- **Data availability and methods:** the data and/or knowledge to be synthesised are known and are available to be mobilised, and the proposed methods and activities for synthesis and analysis are clearly articulated and are appropriate.
- **Contribution to synthesis:** the proposed research is an important opportunity for synthesis of existing knowledge and data to provide novel insights and lessons that will be relevant beyond a single discipline or locality, with potential for impactful contributions to research. Research can be focused on any geographical scale, from local to continental or global, but if research includes more localised synthesis (e.g., focus on a specific city or locality as opposed to synthesis across many cities or localities) then relevance for importance for other African or global contexts should be clearly articulated.
- **Knowledge into use:** there is potential for high-impact contributions to policy and/or practice with clear approaches for achieving this. Projects should be co-developed by researchers with participants from policy and/or practice backgrounds. This includes clear demand and need for the research. It also includes the team having participants across research, policy and/or practice to ensure co-creation of research and improve the potential for use of research in enhancing decision-making and climate action. Synthesis team proposals are strongly encouraged to include a letter of support from one or more policy or practice organisations whose staff will participate in the synthesis

team, stating why the synthesis team's efforts are important and outlining how they could apply the results.

- **Outputs and Outcomes:** clearly describes the expected research and other outputs (e.g., research articles, policy papers, serious games), and how the outputs are important for improving policy and/or practice outcomes.
- **Team Composition:** Projects co-developed by researchers and non-academic knowledge users such as civil society organisations, private, or government sectors are encouraged and team composition should reflect this with confirmed participation from members representing research, policy and/or practice. Team participants should have experience relevant to the actionable research and come from a diversity of career stages and backgrounds. Teams should strive to have at least 75% of participants from Africa or Africa-based institutions and to have at least equal representation of women in team leadership and in the overall team. Citizens of an African country based at institutions outside Africa are eligible as team leads and as other team members. Synthesis team membership is encouraged beyond African or Africa-based participants where it is important for team success. Team composition is an important evaluation criteria and it is important team participants are committed to the duration of the synthesis team's work plan. Team changes after the start of a project will only be allowed with the agreement of ASCEND.
- **New partnerships:** the team includes new partnerships between individuals and/or organisations. If multiple team members have a history of collaboration then teams are expected to also include members who have not worked together previously. ASCEND places priority on teams where some members have not had extensive prior collaborations with one another.

What this call will not support

- New primary data collection, such as fieldwork or laboratory work. The focus is on synthesis of existing data and knowledge to create new insights and integrated datasets;
- Teams proposing to meet only once or do rapid synthesis (e.g., for a single policy brief). The focus is on more in-depth synthesis of data and/or knowledge to produce multiple outputs (e.g., policy briefs, research articles, newly integrated datasets).
- Teams where the only research output is a narrative literature review.

For More About ASCEND visit <https://ascendclimate.org/>

FAQs

For other updated FAQs please visit [our website](#)

What topics are covered by this call?

ASCEND is interested in proposals from teams with a focus on interactions between biodiversity and climate change.

What is synthesis research?

For the purposes of this call, synthesis research includes integrating existing data or knowledge from different sources to answer a question or questions that will support climate and development policy and/or practice. Synthesis typically integrates across multiple disciplines, and transcends academic boundaries to include associated knowledge from policy or practice. Research can be focused on any geographical scale, but if your research includes very localised synthesis (e.g., a focus on a specific city or locality as opposed to a synthesis across many cities or localities or cases) then the research should be relevant by being able to inform research, policy and/or practice in other contexts more generally. Examples of synthesis research include, but are not restricted to: (i) combining data from many independent research projects or data sources to produce insights across different contexts; (ii) integration of diverse quantitative and/or qualitative data such as multiple case studies, government datasets, satellite data, climate model data, commercial data or other data and knowledge types to undertake a novel analysis; (iii) convening experts from different backgrounds to address a question through expert elicitation, delphi processes, or other approaches; (iv) conceptual synthesis of different theories or frameworks, or integration of different existing methods or models (e.g., integration of different approaches to vulnerability assessment); (v) extracting and processing data from reports and research articles or other sources such as social media or remote sensing to generate large, newly integrated datasets and analysing the resulting data to produce new insights or evidence; (vi) using machine learning to assist with synthesis of large datasets; (vii) large systematic reviews, evidence mapping, or meta-analyses that combine statistical results from multiple separate studies. Teams might often propose to adopt multiple approaches to generating synthesis results, such as integrating diverse quantitative data coupled with synthesis of qualitative frameworks. Proposals should provide evidence that sufficient data and appropriate analytical tools are available or will be developed to tackle the research questions. This synthesis of existing data may often require substantial data processing (e.g., for cleaning climate impacts data, or aggregating social survey data) and can often lead to the development of new, integrated datasets or knowledge frameworks as important research products. This request for proposals will not support new data collection using fieldwork or laboratory experiments.

Does this call support new data collection?

This call does not support new primary data collection using fieldwork or from laboratory work. The focus for this call is the synthesis of data and knowledge from existing sources. See the [“What is Synthesis Research” FAQ](#)

What is actionable research?

The defining characteristic of actionable research is that it is solution-oriented. It goes beyond understanding an environmental or social problem, or the bounds of a narrow academic debate, and launches us into the challenging realm of what can be done, how and by whom. This may require a change in mindset for many researchers – an expansion of thinking into the messier (and often more exciting) issues associated with decision-making, public discourse, and on-the-ground practice. Actionable research is for those who want their work to make a difference in the larger world. Such research typically requires expertise from multiple disciplines and often requires thinking about social and environmental systems because it is rare for a

single discipline or perspective to have the answer to a real-world problem. Actionable research also typically requires that we listen to evidence needs, bring together diverse types of knowledge and experience and work with experts and decision-makers outside the world of academia to co-produce research that can improve policy and practice outcomes.

What is a synthesis team?

Synthesis teams are typically composed of 5–15 participants from a range of backgrounds, disciplines, sectors, career stages, and institutions. By integrating diverse perspectives and data sources, synthesis teams can discover gaps in knowledge and reveal new insights. The synthesis team model is designed to accelerate discovery and increase the impact collaborative research can have on decisions and actions to enable people and nature to thrive.

Why do we encourage a focus on marginalised and vulnerable groups?

Marginalised groups represent people who have been systematically or historically excluded from participation or influence in society and/or who frequently experience exclusion from exercising rights and freedoms. Economically, socially or politically marginalised groups – including but not limited to women, young and elderly people, children, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, people living in informal settlements, marginalised ethnic groups, migrants and displaced people – are often more vulnerable and worse-affected by climate change and biodiversity loss, and lack the opportunity to use their agency and voice in planning and implementation processes. For this reason, we ask teams to articulate how they will meaningfully integrate equity and social inclusion considerations into their research. Advancing inclusion can improve the terms on which individuals and groups take part in social, political, economic and environmental development processes.

Who is eligible to apply?

Researchers, policymakers and practitioners of any nationality can be members of a team. However, teams must have two co-leads who are African or from Africa-based institutions. Africa-based institutions include institutions with a head office outside Africa but with the members participating in the synthesis team based in offices in Africa. Citizens of an African country based at institutions outside Africa are also eligible as team co-leads.

What is a transdisciplinary team?

Your team should include a transdisciplinary mix of up to 15 individual experts. This group should include researchers, policymakers and/or practitioners from a relevant mix of sectors and institutions; some strategy or application experts who can facilitate the translation and integration of knowledge across disciplines; and individuals with strong connections to the target audience (decision-makers and other related stakeholder groups), who can help the group maintain a clear focus on those communities' needs and expectations.

Members should work together from the beginning of the project to design and co-produce its knowledge products. Gaining strong participation commitments from the outset will help maximise project success, since the group's proposal and first meeting will set the project research questions and a clear plan for all remaining work.

Synthesis team proposals are encouraged to include a letter of support from one or more policy or practice organisations whose staff may participate in the synthesis team, stating why the synthesis team's efforts are important and outlining how they intend to apply the results.

What funding is provided?

Successful synthesis team proposals will be funded for up to 24 months to support team travel, accommodation, and per diem expenses for up to 3 in-person meetings of 5–15 experts at ASCEND, for up to 5 days per meeting. Teams will also receive funding for a full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ASCEND for up to 3 years. Funds are managed by ASCEND and cannot be used to cover salaries of team leaders or team members other than the full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ASCEND. Funding may be made available for the Postdoc to visit synthesis team leads at their home institutions.

Is a budget required?

No, the proposal does not require a budget.

Who will be the Postdoctoral Researcher funded for a team?

Teams will receive funding for a full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ASCEND for up to 3 years. The Postdoctoral Research Fellow will be a full participant in the team. You do not have to list a person in the role of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow funded by ASCEND at this application stage. You may indicate a team member who could be suitable for this role, but when a team is selected, ASCEND will work with the team co-leads to identify the specific requirements for the Postdoctoral Research Fellow position, and then advertise for and hire the Postdoctoral Research Fellow according to University of Cape Town processes. There will be an emphasis on recruiting early career African scholars for these Postdoctoral Research Fellow positions. Funding may be made available for the Postdoc to visit synthesis team leads at their home institutions.