

Call for Applications: ASCEND Postdoctoral Research Fellowship

Blue Africa: Evaluating Africa's Marine Biodiversity, Carbon Sequestration Potential, and Expected Livelihood Outcomes

Application Deadline: Sunday 19 January 2025 or until the position is filled

Call for applications

The African Synthesis Centre For Climate Change, Environment and Development (ASCEND) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is seeking a Postdoctoral Research Fellow (PDRF) on African marine data on carbon, biodiversity and livelihoods.

This PDRF is a unique and excellent opportunity to expand your network with researchers and decision-makers, as well as deliver cutting-edge research to inform policy and practice. ASCEND provides specialised infrastructure for hosting collaborative synthesis teams that accelerate solutions-oriented research for climate action across Africa and globally.

Synthesis team project description

The PDRF will join the [Blue Africa synthesis research team](#) hosted by ASCEND. The team has up to 15 members from research, policy, and practitioner backgrounds who will travel to ASCEND for up to four in-person working meetings over 2 years. The PDRF will be based full-time at ASCEND as a core member of the team, working closely with the team's co-leads to deliver actionable research.

The overall aim of the project is to provide improved information to decision-makers (including government agencies) about the various carbon-social-ecological trade-offs and co-benefits of different marine and coastal actions and interventions, and identify the most pressing research gaps to be filled. The focus is on marine social-ecological systems, with a strong emphasis on bringing an equity and justice lens to the more quantifiable analysis, but candidates will be encouraged to develop their own research ideas within the goals of the project.

Project research will address the following key objectives:

- (1) Collect, assess and analyse existing data on Africa's marine carbon sequestration potential, biodiversity richness, and coastal livelihood and food security data across a range of spatial scales and ecosystem types;
- (2) Build and maintain an open access database for this information and, where appropriate, generate maps using the data
- (3) Facilitate the process to build action pathways for achieving climate, biodiversity and livelihood co-benefits for African marine social-ecological systems to enable improved decision-making and investments from local to national and regional level.

Roles and responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Research Fellow

The PDRF will be highly motivated to work as part of a transdisciplinary research team, grow their research expertise, engage with climate change researchers and decision-makers, and generate peer-reviewed publications.

The PDRF will be based at ASCEND at UCT and advised remotely by **Prof Laura Pereira**, at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in South Africa, **Dr Odirilwe Selomane** at the University of Pretoria (UP) in South Africa and **Dr Joachim Claudet** at the National Centre for Scientific Research

(CNRS) in France. ASCEND will also appoint a mentor to the PDRF based locally to provide professional development support in consultation with the academic mentors at Wits, UP and CNRS. ASCEND will support, when possible, travel for short visits to work with the academic mentors at their host institutions.

The PDRF will also be part of a larger cohort of PDRFs at ASCEND working on climate change and development-related topics with other synthesis teams.. The PDRF will participate in career development activities organised by ASCEND for the wider cohort of ASCEND PDRFs to develop transdisciplinary skills, share knowledge on what works for actionable research, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration.

Other responsibilities of the PDRF will be discussed and assigned collectively with the Blue Africa synthesis team. It is expected that these responsibilities will result in specific outputs, such as policy briefs and toolkits.

Resources provided by ASCEND

The PDRF will be given the necessary resources for their work, including:

- Desk and office space
- IT and communication infrastructure
- Career and professional development activities as part of larger ASCEND PDRF cohort.

Value and tenure:

- The value of the fellowship is ZAR 450,000 – 480,000 per year for up to 2 years, with potential extension for a 3rd year based on performance and funding availability.
- Application for tax exemption of the fellowship stipend will be made by the University.

Academic / experience criteria:

Required

- A PhD, awarded within the previous five years, in a related discipline (e.g. biology, climate change, economics, ecology, geography).
- Demonstrated ability to produce peer-reviewed research articles in international journals.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English.
- Desire and ability to work in an interdisciplinary research team setting.
- Experience of handling large datasets
- Experience of researching marine social-ecological systems
- Excellent technical ability to code in *R*, *Python*, and/or other statistical programming language, ideally including analysis of carbon, biodiversity and livelihoods data, and/or other geospatial datasets.

Desired

- Experience in building and maintaining databases.
- Interest and experience in engagement with decision-makers
- Experience in giving oral presentations and interest in public communication of science.
- Experience of source control of computer code and working in collaborations using *GitHub* and *RStudio*.
- Excellent data visualisation skills
- Project management skills.

Conditions of award:

- Applicants may not previously have held a full-time permanent academic post.
- The successful applicant will be required to register as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cape Town and will be expected to join the synthesis team at a mutually agreed date that is ideally **no later than early March 2025**.
- The successful applicant will be required to be a full participant in the Blue Africa synthesis research team.

- The successful applicant will be required to comply with the university's approved policies, procedures and practices for the postdoctoral sector.

Application requirements:

Applicants should submit as a single PDF: (i) an application letter no longer than 2 pages that includes a description of research interests, research expertise, and explanation on how they can work as part of the transdisciplinary synthesis team in line with the project objectives described above; (ii) a CV including a publication list; (iii) copies of academic transcripts and/or certificates; (iv) an example of written work; (v) email addresses of two references who have been directly involved in their PhD and/or previous postdoctoral research.

Applicants must submit the PDF application document to ascend.info@uct.ac.za . Please type "Baobab PDR Application: Blue Africa" as the email subject line.

Closing date

Midnight (GMT+2) on Sunday 19 January 2025 or until the position is filled.

Selection process

Eligible and complete applications will be considered by ASCEND and we will communicate with short-listed applicants. ASCEND in consultation with the synthesis team academic mentors will conduct interviews of the short-listed applicants.

If you have not heard from ASCEND within two months of the deadline, please assume your application has been unsuccessful.

Contact details for enquiries about the PDRF and ASCEND: farai.kapfudzaruwa@uct.ac.za

Additional information on ASCEND can be found at: <https://ascendclimate.org/>

The University of Cape Town reserves the right to

- *Disqualify ineligible, incomplete and/or inappropriate applications;*
- *Change the conditions of the award or to make no awards at all*