

Call for Applications: 6 PhD candidates for the new CONNECT (“Transdisciplinary Research to Connect Conservation and Development through Basic Income Support”) research project

Overview

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the search is on for effective, scalable and sustainable approaches to improve the well-being and livelihoods of residents in lower-income countries. One option would be to provide the target group with a regular stream of cash transfers. CONNECT is a new research collaboration between an interdisciplinary team at Wageningen University and Research (WUR) and the University of Rwanda (UR), funded by the Wageningen Global Sustainability Programme (WGSP), that explores this potential. The project aims to connect conservation and development objectives by investigating the **economic, socio-political, and ecological impacts** of cash transfer programmes implemented with communities living next to two national parks in Rwanda (Nyungwe and Volcanoes). **We are now looking to recruit 6 PhD candidates to conduct primary research on this project.**

The projects are intended to start in **September of 2024**, and will last for a period of 4 years (the start date may be flexible depending on candidates’ individual needs). We offer a full-time "Sandwich" PhD position with an average working time of 38 hours per week, for an initial duration of 18 months, after which a "go/no-go" decision will be taken whether or not to proceed with a subsequent extension of 30 months (to complete the PhD). Sandwich PhD candidates are international PhD candidates who only spend part of their time at Wageningen. As a sandwich PhD candidate you will not be employed by the university. You will have a grant and you will likely spend the initial and last six to nine months of the four-year PhD programme in Wageningen. In the intermediate period you will conduct your research in Rwanda. (For more information on sandwich PhD grants look [here](#)). Allowance per month is around 2200 Euros in the Netherlands and 800 Euros when abroad. Research and travel budgets will also be available.

PhD researchers will be offered a course program, which can be tailored to the desires of the candidates and the research team.

General REQUIREMENTS for all positions:

- Conversational proficiency in local languages (minimally Kinyarwanda and English, but French also desirable)
- Written and spoken English language proficiency at a high academic standard (a minimum of CAE 1 (Advanced); TOEFL 90/IELTS Academic 6.5 are also accepted). (If you are selected for an interview we will pay for the language exam if needed). For more information about this proficiency level, please visit our [language page](#)
- Good scientific writing skills and experience with appropriate disciplinary theory, research methods and modes of data handling and analysis
- Commitment to finalise a PhD within four years
- Ability and willingness to conduct fieldwork in rural Rwanda
- Ability to work effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary research team, and carry out independent individual research

The specific position descriptions are as follows:

PhDs 1 and 2: Economics

PhD 1 aims to evaluate the impact of an intervention bundle consisting of cash transfers, a training component and a microfinance intervention on livelihood and conservation outcomes near Nyungwe National Park. The project will also examine the mechanisms linking the interventions to outcomes. The empirical analysis will be based on a randomized controlled trial (RCT) that will be implemented by our civic society partners. The project will also develop a generalizable and validated theoretical model to think about upscaling bundled cash transfer interventions to other contexts.

PhD 2 aims to rigorously assess the impact of a similar cash transfer bundle on livelihood outcomes and land use in northern Rwanda, and on the mechanisms linking the intervention to these outcomes. The livelihood analysis will be based on survey data and the land use analysis will be based on satellite imagery. Both types of empirical analysis will be based on econometric methods (e.g. matching). The project will also include a deep dive in the role of a microfinance innovation on mediating the impact of the cash transfer program. For this purpose administrative records of so-called village-savings and loans associations (VSLAs) will be combined with focus group discussions and survey data.

Both PhDs are embedded within the chair group [Development Economics](#) (DEC) at Wageningen UR under the direction of Prof. dr. E.H. (Erwin) Bulte along with additional staff.

Additional REQUIREMENTS for both positions:

- A successfully completed MSc or equivalent degree in economics (e.g. development economics, agricultural economics, environmental economics)
- Experience with quantitative research methods in social sciences, in particular econometrics/statistics and impact evaluation

PhDs 3 and 4: Anthropology/Geography/Sociology

PhD 3 focuses on the social and political dimensions of conservation around Nyungwe National Park. It will deploy sociologic and anthropological research methods to understand how the cash transfer intervention influences people's relationship with the park and surrounding environment. This research will be attentive to the specific history of the region and the people, as this influences how people relate to the park and surrounding environment. It will also focus on how people perceive the governance and effectiveness of the cash transfers, and how the aim to appropriate or negotiate the project and the methods it applies. The candidate is expected to undertake long-term ethnographic field research entailing participant-observation and semi-structured interviews.

PhD 4 will work around Volcanoes National Park and focus on the social and political dimensions of conservation in the region. It will analyse how a cash transfer intervention implemented near the park over the past two years has influenced park-community relations. This PhD project will explore the relationship between the park authorities and local residents and how, if at all, the cash transfer intervention has influenced this relationship on the part of programme participants. It is also important to analyse if and how the people that were part of the cash program, will be affected by the extension of the park envisioned for 2025. The candidate is expected to undertake long-term ethnographic field research entailing participant-observation and semi-structured interviews.

Both PhDs are embedded within the chair group [Sociology of Development and Change](#) (SDC) at Wageningen UR under the direction of Dr. Esther Marijnen and Dr. Robert Fletcher along with additional staff.

Additional REQUIREMENTS for both positions:

- A successfully completed MSc or equivalent degree in socio-cultural anthropology, human geography, political science, sociology, or related social science field
- Experience with qualitative research methods and forms of data analysis in social science, in particular ethnographic methods including participant-observation and interviewing

PhDs 5 and 6: Ecology and Human-Wildlife Conflict

PhD 5 aims to determine the nature and extent of human-wildlife conflicts along the border and buffer zones around the two national parks. It will further focus on selected cases of human-wildlife conflicts in and near the buffer zones. It will integrate data from behavioural ecology with data collected on human perception of this conflict, aiming to identify and develop improved approaches to mitigate the conflict. We will integrate data collected on animal presence and behaviour with data on buffer zone characteristics and the socioeconomic interventions, linking to the other PhD projects.

PhD 6 will use extensive georeferenced patrol data, and human and animal activity records, to understand patterns, trends, and the various factors influencing illicit activities and resource use within the protected areas. One goal is to integrate these analyses with a detailed assessment of the local interventions examined in the other PhD projects. From these analyses we will also develop data-driven models to predict high-risk areas and times. We will determine the primary biodiversity impact causation, facilitating more effective mitigation strategies that deter and reduce threats. We will also assess the benefits of community involvement in conservation monitoring efforts. We will assess the different mitigation strategies and their implications for tangible conservation gains.

PhD 5 is embedded within the chair group [Behavioural Ecology](#) (BHE) under the supervision of dr. Lysanne Sniders and Prof. dr. Marc Naguib. PhD 6 is embedded in the chair group [Forest Ecology and Management](#) (FEM) under the supervision of Prof. dr. Douglas Sheil (FEM) along with additional staff.

Additional REQUIREMENTS for both positions:

- A successfully completed MSc or equivalent degree in biology or related field
- Experience with / willingness to learn quantitative research methods in ecology, in particular in behavioural ecology, landscape analyses, or global methods of biodiversity assessment.

Interested?

Please respond before **1 June 2024**. Send a 1-2 page motivation letter, your CV and an Msc level writing sample (10-20 pages) via e-mail to office.sdc@wur.nl, and provide the names and contact details of two professional references. Please clearly indicate in your letter which specific position(s) (you may apply to more than one simultaneously) you wish to be considered for.

We will also be traveling to Rwanda in mid-May to conduct preliminary interviews with potential candidates, so if you are interested in meeting with us during this time please reach out as soon as possible to the project leader listed below.

Further Information

For more information, please contact project leader Dr. Robert Fletcher (robert.fletcher@wur.nl)

Wageningen University and Research centre

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For further information about joining our Wageningen PhD programme, take a look at <https://www.wur.nl/en/education-programmes/phd-programme.htm>