



## AFD-GDN Biodiversity and Development Awards Program

### CONCEPT NOTE

November 2020

The AFD-Biodiversity and Development Awards Program in a nutshell :

- It consists of **4 competitively selected individual research grants of up to 24 months**, one of which earmarked for Francophone Africa, **plus 2 additional grants** for winners that successfully develop a multi-disciplinary project together (in pairs); **the Awards program thus encompasses a maximum of 6 research grants.**
- It **recognizes excellence in both disciplinary and multidisciplinary endeavors on biodiversity and development;**
- It provides **dedicated support to the selected researchers through tailored workshops and mentoring;**
- It supports **interactions between research and policy actors** from the earliest stages of the selection throughout the competitive selection and the implementation of the winning research projects, to ensure projects are rooted in efforts to address local development issues;
- It **benefits from the guidance and quality control of a high-level Scientific Committee** whose members will be chosen in consultation with AFD.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. FOCUS &amp; RATIONALE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. SCOPE OF THE AWARDS PROGRAM</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. HOW IT WORKS</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1. Call for submissions	6
4.2. Two-stage selection (and pairing mechanism)	6
4.3. Implementation & monitoring	8
4.4. Quality Control	9
4.5. Dissemination	10
4.6. Evaluation	10
<b>5. GDN'S ROLE &amp; EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1. GDN's relevant technical experience on research-practice collaborations	10
5.2. GDN's and AFD's role in the initiative	11
<b>6. BUDGET</b>	<b>12</b>

## 1. FOCUS & RATIONALE

The interaction between biodiversity and development is complex and under-researched, especially in developing countries. The implications of what we know about this relationship for development policy are equally poorly researched and understood, particularly at the local level. The argument that biodiversity – its products and services – is central to human survival has been proven beyond doubt, and it is enshrined in a number of international conventions. The last *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), released in May 2019, argues for “urgent and concerted efforts in fostering transformative change” in this area.<sup>1</sup> Though sustainability is inextricably tied to development, including in the Sustainable Development Goals’ formulation (SDG15 reproduces the 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets<sup>2</sup>), action in this domain faces difficult tradeoffs (including important time-horizon tradeoffs) between socio-economic development initiatives on one hand, and the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems on the other.

Research has a critical role to play to address these challenges. The interface between biodiversity and development spans physical, political, social, economic dimensions, and action calls for collaboration between diverse stakeholders. This program promotes opportunities for such collaborations to take place and reach high standards of analytical quality. It incentivizes and recognizes effort by researchers in different disciplines to engage with each other and with policy communities to advance local understanding of the relationship between biodiversity and development in developing countries, as a necessary step towards evidence-based action in this area.<sup>3,4</sup>

Future work in this area is urgently needed, including to better inform the October 2020 deliberations on a post 2020 global biodiversity framework, scheduled to take place at the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Beijing, China<sup>5</sup>.

The research proposals can adopt a theoretical, empirical as well as a case study approach. The scope of the proposals can be either sector-specific such as agriculture and rural development, urban challenges and the greening of cities or propose more transversal investigations such as valuation approaches of biodiversity, design of conservation initiatives and the management of protected areas, measurement issues linked with land degradation and restoration or the role of education to avoid environmental degradation.

More specifically, this program calls for innovative and original research projects on the following aspects:

- Understanding the ‘pressure’ development activities exert on biodiversity. This includes (but is not limited) to quantifying and measuring biodiversity loss. Social science research can be instrumental to identifying incentives (positive and negative), documenting practices and

---

<sup>1</sup> IPBES. 2019. *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES Secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

<sup>2</sup> The Aichi Biodiversity Targets, a set of 20 targets grouped under 5 strategic goals, were adopted in the COP10 in Nagoya in October 2010 as part of an updated Strategic Biodiversity Plan for the 2011-2020 period (<https://www.cbd.int/sp/>)

<sup>3</sup> Dilys Roe et al., “Which Components or Attributes of Biodiversity Influence Which Dimensions of Poverty?,” *Environmental Evidence* 3 (February 19, 2014): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/2047-2382-3-3>.

<sup>4</sup> “Interdependence of Biodiversity and Development Under Global Change,” CBD Technical Series (Montreal: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See the [decision 14/34](#) the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

analyzing the socio-economic, legal and cultural context of biodiversity loss and degradation across a number of sectors.

- Formulating and documenting the 'value' at large of ecosystems and biodiversity for social and economic systems, to build clear messages, increase public awareness and open up spaces for evidence-based decision-making. This includes natural capital accounting, and national ecosystem assessments for instance.
- Analyzing the means put in place by public actors (State, local governments, Biodiversity agency, etc..) to manage biodiversity, including institutional mechanisms, financing, legal frameworks and power distribution. This includes the review of policy instruments and frameworks, the design and use of budgets, the governance of biodiversity across sectors, analysis of successful or failed initiatives aiming at mainstreaming biodiversity into public policy and decision
- Documenting strategies and modalities for inclusive and participatory decision-making, involving private actors, civil society, indigenous communities and local actors, analysing what works and what does not in specific contexts, as well as conditions for scale-up of inclusive co-ordination between stakeholders that rely or impact biodiversity.
- Designing and populating baselines and monitoring and evaluation tools to guide the generation of information accessible to relevant stakeholders.
- Understanding evidence generation and use on biodiversity mainstreaming-related action, including learning networks and infrastructures that can boost awareness among key stakeholders and their links to society at large, including through media.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The Awards Program creates a high-quality and high-visibility opportunity for researchers based in developing countries of AFD operations (who are also citizens of these countries, henceforth referred to as eligible local researchers) to produce and disseminate quality research that is independent, of high quality, and policy relevant on the link between biodiversity and development. The awards aim in particular to identify and support opportunities for productive multidisciplinary engagements on the link between biodiversity and development. The Awards Program described below supports these with tailored and innovative tools from the early stages of the award selection, throughout the implementation of the funded research.

The objectives of the initiative are to:

- a) **Expand global knowledge** on the link between biodiversity and development through new, high quality research conducted by researchers in developing countries of AFD operations, with a strong focus on multi-disciplinary efforts;
- b) Support the **mainstreaming of the topic in local development policy** debates and decisions, through increased visibility of the topics researched and by putting an international stamp on quality research-practice collaboration at the local level;
- c) **Convene high quality academic thinking from a range of relevant disciplines** on the link between biodiversity and development, through the active involvement of globally prominent scholars, with direct reliance on French research institutions to capitalize on French expertise in the topic;
- d) **Mainstream high-quality research-practice collaborations** between local researchers and the policy community, including civil society, creating incentives and formats that enable productive

and sustained interaction **between local demand and local supply of knowledge on the topic**, including as part of the selection process.

- e) **Raise the profile and capacity of promising Southern researchers** committed to advance policy debates on the topic through their analytical contributions, by giving them international visibility and the legitimacy to work with local decision-makers and other stakeholders, but also primarily to develop multi-disciplinary collaborations and agendas on the topic;
- f) **Strengthen the global visibility of the AFD** as a champion of work on biodiversity and development, locally as much as globally, including by using the initiative as source of ideas for AFD programs and projects.

### 3. SCOPE OF THE AWARDS PROGRAM

The Program includes a two-stage award mechanism that, in the first place, recognize and encourage quality in individual scientific proposals and, as a specific add-on, promote and incentivize multidisciplinary collaborations. A unique feature of the Awards Program is the integration in the multi-stage selection process of a pairing mechanism and of dedicated incentives to match pairs of PIs working on the same issue from different disciplinary proposals, who can then benefit from an additional joint award to implement joint activities and conduct a multidisciplinary synthesis of their scientific work. Furthermore, the program incentivizes and supports engagement with policy actors for both levels, as a precondition for all awards. In terms of financial support, the Award Program consists of 4 competitively selected individual research grants of up to 24 months (at least one of which earmarked for Francophone Africa), and 2 additional grants for winners that successfully develop a multi-disciplinary project together (in pairs).

*Promoting diversity of approaches.* At the core of the initiative is a competitive 2-year research grant targeted at promising researchers with a growing output of quality academic publications on the topic of biodiversity and development<sup>6</sup>. Eligible local researchers acting as Principal Investigators (PIs) can apply as individuals or as leaders of a small research team and are shortlisted based on the academic quality of their submissions, through a traditional, double and blind, single discipline-based peer review process.

*Promoting multidisciplinary collaborations.* The selection process is thereafter geared towards achieving the double objective of competitively improving the quality of research proposals on the one hand, particularly through a Research Design Lab where they interact with global experts in the field (see below), and enabling researchers, on the second hand, to explore the multidisciplinary potential of their research agenda, in interaction with other PIs.

A dedicated online platform open to all shortlisted PIs, specifically, will allow the program to actively broker contacts and conversations between pairs of researchers working on the same topic from different disciplinary angles – including researchers working on the same issue in the same country, on the same issue at different governance levels, or on the same issue across two different countries. The online platform will allow to share essential information about the project to enable substantive interaction, while protecting the applicants' original work and the competitive nature of the Awards Program.

*Promoting interactions with key local stakeholders.* The Awards Program aims to support developing a research culture on this topic, especially in places where research-policy interactions on the topic are

---

<sup>6</sup> The eligibility criteria, and more specifically the number of years of post-doctoral studies, will be discussed in close collaboration with AFD. In addition, we may want to dedicate one of the awards to Francophone Africa researchers.

still minimal. Accordingly, the Program will reach a wide range of actors and offer tailored opportunities to organize and sustain effective interactions with local demand-side actors (practitioners and the policy community in the biodiversity and conservation community, including civil society), starting from the earliest stages of the selection, through dedicated formats such as the Research Design Lab (see below).

*Promoting global connections.* Finally, the winners will also benefit from intellectual and scientific guidance of the members of a **dedicated Scientific Committee**. Specific members of the Scientific Committee will be invited, based-on their interest and expertise, to act as mentors to single awardees. In addition to guidance to the PIs, the Scientific Committee as a whole will be mobilized at key moments: at the outset of the program to define the Call for the Awards Program's first edition, at the time of the Research Design Lab to provide scientific feedback to the shortlisted researchers, at the Final Selection stage as part of the Awards Program Jury, and finally during mid-term and final events of the Awards Program. Through these engagements, this body will provide the Program with a central quality control. Public events will be held in conjunction with these meetings, in close coordination with major GDN and AFD events, to boost the visibility of the Awards Program and leverage the visibility of the Committee's members.

## 4. HOW IT WORKS

The basic modules of the Awards Program are a global competitive open Call, a multi-stage Selection process focusing on building strong basis for multidisciplinary collaborations, the Implementation of the research with a specific focus on quality monitoring, and finally support to Dissemination and visibility throughout the program. Scope to develop and sustain productive collaborations with relevant actors is integrated at every step.

### 4.1. Call for submissions

GDN and the research team at the AFD will jointly draft a call focused on a specific intersection of biodiversity management and development policy. The call will be validated by the Awards' dedicated Scientific Committee (see above) and will describe the different steps of the selection process, and the focus of the support provided on improving proposal at once in terms of academic quality, policy relevance, and multidisciplinary vocation.

As a first step, the call will request from eligible local researchers the submission of independent expressions of interest (up to 8 pages) that include:

- a) the justification of the research in terms of the existing literature globally, but also a justification in terms of the local policy challenges the research aims to inform;
- b) a list and a summary of early interactions with demand-side actors (policy community, including civil society), and a preliminary mapping of key counterparts the team wishes to engage in the research;
- c) a draft research question;
- d) a draft methodology, with an indication of the disciplinary tradition of reference;
- e) a working hypothesis;
- f) a justification of the reason why this question would benefit from the contributions of other disciplines and potential academic partners, working in different disciplines, the PI has identified, if any.

In addition, applicants will need to submit

- the CVs and publication lists for the PI and other team members.

- A 2-page description of track record including the link between the submitted EoI and past work
- A support letter from the Institution of primary affiliation of the eligible local researcher, stating the scope and extent of support available to the project (in kind/matching contribution)

The dissemination of the call will be global in scope and will follow a dedicated outreach strategy agreed by GDN and AFD. This will include, but will go beyond, dissemination through AFD's and GDN's channels and those of partners, as well as through prominent media outlets at the global and regional level (these can include The Economist, Nature, etc.). GDN considers that a dedicated outreach effort is essential from the earlier phases of the Awards Program, to build its brand and visibility globally and across developing countries.

#### 4.2. Two-stage selection (and pairing mechanism)

GDN will design a multi-stage selection process that focuses on : (i) rigorously assessing the scientific quality of the proposals received, and (ii) developing the potential of a project to contribute to complex knowledge generation, in a dialogue with demand-side actors (policy community and civil society) and in collaboration with PIs from other disciplines.

In this spirit, the proposed selection process will include the following activities:

- i. **SCREENING:** expressions of interest are shortlisted based on set criteria (thematic relevance to the call, academic credentials, feasibility within a 2 years period and within the maximum financial limit of the awards, i.e. USD 40,000). The screening would be conducted by external evaluators from the discipline of reference, through a double and blind review process. The screening should shortlist no more than 10 high-potential independent proposals, and a reserve list of up to 10 further proposals. Though identifying partners from other disciplines is not mandatory at this stage, proposals which have mentioned potential partnership with other disciplines or other applicants will be given priority, provided they both score highly.
- ii. **ONLINE PLATFORM (PAIRING MECHANISM):** as a unique feature of this Awards Program, all 20 proposals that have passed the screening stage (including up to 10 from the reserve list) are invited to join an online platform, where they will be able to access, contact and interact with the other shortlisted eligible local researchers: synthetic information about the PIs and their proposed research that will be made visible to everyone, and PIs will be able to network bilaterally. The program will stress the opportunity for finalists to apply for a multidisciplinary pairing grant, which allows PIs working on the same topic from different disciplinary traditions to develop joint activities, including a multidisciplinary synthesis that draws on their respective research. The multidisciplinary pairing grant will consist of additional scientific and financial support (up to USD 15.000 over two years). Up to 5 proposals from the reserve list that find a strong pair during this phase, will be given a second chance and included in further steps of the selection. The relatively small number of shortlisted proposals is instrumental to enable a high-quality and pro-active moderation of the platform and will be conducted by qualified staff at GDN with expertise on the topic of biodiversity and development and strong brokering skills. The platform would be active for 3 weeks, and applicants will be given another 2 weeks to develop their proposal and expand points c) to f) of the expression of interest before entering the the next phase of the selection with a revised proposal.
- iii. **RESEARCH DESIGN LAB:** up to 15 PIs are invited to a 2-day workshop designed to offer opportunities to strengthen the proposals in terms of academic content, methodological approach, policy relevance and potential contribution to a multidisciplinary collaboration. The expectation is that highly-structured interactions with peers, academics and practitioners in the biodiversity and development fields will provide the researchers with important inputs that will help develop full

proposals in the aftermath of the Lab, i.e. before a final submission of individual projects. PIs who have found a potential pair will be able to meet and develop their application for the multidisciplinary pairing grant. The Lab is instrumental to reduce information asymmetry between the award organizers and the candidates, clarify expectations, and provide both capacity building opportunities and the right incentives and spaces for research collaborations to be explored. The Lab would combine:

- a. presentations of the research (in 'elevator pitch' format) at the beginning (and at the end) of the Lab, in front of a mixed audience of high-profile academics and practitioners working on biodiversity and development (including AFD and GDN staff, but also policy actors, broadly defined, from the corresponding shortlisted countries and relevant global institutions selected in partnership with AFD), with an open Q&A;
  - b. bilateral feedback sessions with experts and peers;
  - c. bilateral feedback from policy actors from the pool of countries of the participating teams, identified by GDN based on the lists provided by researchers in their expressions of interest and in close interaction with AFD local offices;
  - d. half-day methodology masterclasses (defined during the screening phase, based on the nature of the submissions)
  - e. mini-lectures by resource people, including on the management of multi- and trans-disciplinary research processes;
  - f. independent work time to integrate the feedback received before the final presentation of the research 'pitch' at the end of the workshop;
  - g. work time in pairs, with 'surgery sessions' offered by dedicated resource people (from the Scientific Committee or external) to deepen the scope of multidisciplinary pairing.
- iv. FULL PROPOSAL: after the lab, researchers will be given 6 weeks to develop a full independent research proposal and two further weeks to submit (if applicable) a joint proposal in pairs for the multidisciplinary pairing grant.

Individual proposal would include the following sections:

- literature review;
- policy review that identifies concrete opportunities to operationalize the research;
- research question;
- methodology;
- hypothesis;
- team composition (CVs and narrative description of roles);
- details of demand-side actors that will be involved in the project and a narrative description of their expected involvement;
- timeline;
- budget;
- outreach plan
- proposed pair.

Multi-disciplinary proposals would include:

- jointly developed description of the issue addressed, and expected enhanced contribution from a multi-disciplinary collaboration (expected outcomes);
- list of activities and outputs planned;
- timeline;
- budget;
- draft outreach strategy and map of key stakeholders to be engaged, along with proposed modality of engagement.



All proposals will receive 1 round of feedback from a high-profile academic acting as a resource person, typically a Scientific Committee member, 1 week before the submission deadline.

- v. FINAL SELECTION: a high-level Jury that will include GDN, AFD, the Award's Scientific Committee and at least one top biodiversity academic and a top biodiversity policy actor (for example, a high-ranking IPBES official), will review the research proposals and identify up to 4 individual award winners and up to 2 multidisciplinary pairing grants. 1 individual award will be reserved for PIs from Francophone African countries. In case individual research projects do not find a match, they may also be awarded an individual award without running for the multidisciplinary pairing grant, if and when they are considered of very high quality.

#### 4.3. Implementation & monitoring

Two agreements (1 individual and 1 joint with the paired PI) will be signed. In the case of individual research project that could not be matched, a single grant agreement will be signed. Agreements will be issued for a maximum period of 2 years, but activities included in the multidisciplinary pairing grant could be shorter, based on the proposal developed by the paired PIs. Similarly, in the case of the multidisciplinary pairing grant, PIs will be able to additionally budget up to USD 15,000, based on the activities planned. Any saving from the Awards program justified by a lower budget, will be returned to AFD or re-allocated to the outreach budget of the Program after discussion with the AFD. The administration of the grant will be taken on by GDN, who will mobilize the Scientific Committee for quality control.

As part of the Awards Program, winners are paired with a member of the Scientific Committee who will act as individual **Scientific Advisors** to the winners, following regularly the progress of the research from an academic standpoint, but also identify additional support needed or highlight outreach opportunities. This does not conflict with the quality control function of the Scientific Committee, as individual research outputs will be externally peer-reviewed. In fact, mentoring is expected to reduce the information asymmetry on single projects and thus support quality control and the tailoring of support to PIs.

The researcher will also have access to additional support services from GDN, including communications training, grant management support, strategic advice for policy outreach.

GDN will organize a **mid-term comprehensive review** of the progress at the end of Y1, in a dedicated workshop that could be held during the GDN Global Development Conference or a main AFD conference. The workshop will offer the opportunity to meet the Scientific Committee in person for a face-to-face thorough review, to receive feedback from policy actors, and for communications and outreach training.

The review workshop will look separately into the independent projects, and into the joint grants. A dedicated session at the review meeting would provide pairs with feedback on the state of implementation of their efforts, in-lieu of an external peer-review, which is unlikely to be possible given the multi-disciplinary nature of the projects. The details of this step will be defined at the outset of the program, in consultation with the Scientific Committee and the AFD.

GDN will structure the engagement with the policy actor over the full duration of the research grant, conditional on the specific design of the research projects awarded. The policy actor, typically the same person who has been identified in consultation with the AFD and the PIs to attend the Research Design Lab, will be engaged at key times to provide his/her own feedback to the team, particularly with

reference to the team's outreach work and findings. This individual may also 'champion' the research by supporting the presentations of the team's work at the local level. S/he will not have any direct control of the research question, and no formal influence over the research process. This person would be part of the mid-term review.

#### 4.4. Quality Control

Scientific quality is at the centre of the initiative GDN proposes to set up with the AFD, and so is the need to inscribe scientific quality, in a second step, into multidisciplinary effort that synthesize academic outputs from different disciplines and tease out the policy-relevant knowledge.

Accordingly, GDN will combine established standard for quality control, i.e. external, double and blind peer review, for independent research projects, with a quality control function over the multi-disciplinary grants and related outputs that will be done exclusively by the Scientific Committee.

These measures will complete measures already set up to monitor quality during the process, specifically mentoring and feedback from demand-side actors throughout the process.

Furthermore, GDN will partner up with the AFD Evaluation team to develop, as part of this program, existing frameworks for the evaluation of multidisciplinary and policy-relevant work, in support of the Scientific Committee's role, drawing on existing scholarly discussions on the definition of quality for inter-disciplinary and transdisciplinary research<sup>7</sup>, as through close involvement in monitoring the Awards Program implementation.

#### 4.5. Dissemination

GDN and AFD will jointly publish final research reports and communicate around it pro-actively, leaving open the possibility that the teams publish part of the study in academic journals. Dissemination support would include support to publish blog posts on platforms such as GlobalDev (a joint initiative by GDN, the Gates Foundation and the IMF) and ID4D, and events – through local AFD offices.

#### 4.6. Evaluation

As mentioned above, the evaluation of the program will be done based on a M&E framework developed at the beginning of the program. This evaluation should feed on-going discussions on research capacity building, especially in the context of multidisciplinary work.

---

<sup>7</sup> Baker, Elizabeth A, Sharon Homan, Sr. Rita Schonhoff, and Matthew Kreuter. 'Principles of Practice for Academic/ Practice/Community Research Partnerships'. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 16, no. 3, Supplement 1 (1 April 1999): 86–93. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00149-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00149-4).

Georgalakis, James, and Pauline Rose. 'Exploring Research–Policy Partnerships in International Development', *IDS Bulletin* vol 50 issue 1, 2019. <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/issue/view/237>

