Call for Applications

Academic year 2023-2024

Doctoral or post-doctoral research grant on the theme of the effectiveness of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO)

Introduction

The "Coastal Populations and Ecosystems Resilience in the Southwest Indian Ocean" (RECOS) is a 10 million euros project implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and co-financed by the *Agence Française pour le Développement* (AFD) and the *Fond Français pour l'Environnement Mondial* (FFEM). Its overall objective is to strengthen the resilience of coastal populations to the effects of climate change by restoring the services provided by coastal ecosystems. One of the main focuses of the RECOS project is to provide a regional scientific platform for consultation and exchange around 4 key topics. On of the topics focuses on the effectiveness of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Western Indian Indian Ocean (WIO) region. As part of the RECOS project, a doctoral thesis or postdoctoral contract will be funded to contribute to the scientific research on the topic of MPA effectiveness. Collaboration and partnership between regional universities and/or research centres will be strongly encouraged.

Context

Over the last decade, the countries of the WIO have seen a rapid increase in the number of MPAs, a trend partly stimulated by the Aichi International Convention on Biodiversity. This trend is set to continue in the coming years, with a view to achieving the new 30x30 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Convention, which will require countries to make further efforts to expand and strengthen their MPA networks. In this context, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association WIOMSA has been working for years to create a regional dynamic among the stakeholders involved in MPA management. To this end, the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Area Network (WIOMPAN) was created to pool efforts in pursuit of marine conservation objectives.

In this context, a recent study commissioned by WIOMSA[1] aimed to improve understanding of the individual contributions of the countries in the region to the MPA network, for example, making it possible to better qualify and quantify the protected habitats and the management effectiveness of some of the MPAs. However, and in order to avoid the creation of "paper parks", this process needs to be supported to ensure that these MPAs effectively protect the ecosystems.

[1] UNEP-Nairobi Convention and WIOMSA. 2021. Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Outlook: Towards achievement of the Global Biodiversity Framework Targets. UNEP and WIOMSA, Nairobi, Kenya, 298 pp. [https://www.wiomsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WIOMPAO.pdf]

In this context, the WIOMPAN network, which brings together WIOMSA stakeholders who are involved in marine protected areas, is working with initiatives such as the RECOS and VARUNA projects to build capacity, particularly on the topic of management effectiveness. This network of stakeholders met in March 2023 and collectively identified areas of research that could be the subject of a doctoral thesis or post-doctoral fellowship, funded by the RECOS project. The following paragraphs describe the research questions to be addressed and the scope of this research project.

Research topic

In this context, this research project aims to answer the following questions:

- What priorities should the countries of the Western Indian Ocean region, and the IOC countries in particular (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles) focus on to ensure that their MPAs meet the criteria required by the 30x30 targets (e.g. representativeness, connectivity, effectiveness, etc.)? The 30x30 conservation targets specify a set of criteria that a national network of MPAs must meet. The applicant will have to analyse the literature relating to these criteria to identify metrics/indicators that can be used to conduct assessments at a national level. This analytical framework will then be applied to the MPAs of the IOC countries and possibly more widely to the countries that are part of the WIOMSA network. This will contribute to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each national MPA network. This analysis will serve as a basis to guide countries' public policies on the best way to strengthen their networks with a view to achieving the 30x30 targets. This work could be based on the status report produced by the WIOMSA MPA Outlook and recent studies on connectivity in the WIO region, ecosystem mapping, etc.
- What is the status of MPA management effectiveness in the WIO MPA network? What are the identified drivers? This research question will be informed by an ongoing WIOMPAN initiative that consists in mainstreaming the IMET approach regionally to assess the management effectiveness of the national MPAs. Combining existing analyses of management effectiveness with new assessments done by regional MPA managers, the applicant will investigate the general state of management effectiveness of MPAs in the sub-region. Next, he will identify the drivers' factors explaining the effectiveness or lack thereof.
- What strategy can be put in place to guide progress in the management effectiveness of MPAs in the WOI region? Based on the previous situational analysis, the applicant will investigate pathways for improving the management effectiveness of the sub-WIO MPAs specifically by guiding them towards identifying priority areas and actions. This methodological framework, which will enable a gradual progression in management effectiveness, will be based on an analysis of the literature on management effectiveness and interviews with experts.

Eligible graduate schools/host universities

The eligible host universities and graduate schools are those existing in the IOC countries targeted by the RECOS project, i.e. Mauritius, Madagascar and Réunion. Joint supervision is strongly encouraged, in particular involving French universities (Overseas France and mainland France) or other regional/international universities relevant to the proposed research topic.

Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants must be nationals of the countries targeted by the project, i.e. Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. In the absence of a graduate school at the University of Seychelles and Comoros, nationals of these two countries will have to enrol with a graduate school in one of the other targeted countries mentioned above. Candidates must hold a Master degree/thesis in geography, ecology, environmental sciences or in any other field addressing the theme described above. This call for applications will be circulated to all the universities in the IOC area.

Duration

The funding comes from the RECOS project, which is scheduled to run until the end of 2026. Thesis/post-doctoral work must begin by the end of 2023 and be completed by October 2026, at the latest, when the thesis will be defended and published.

Resources made available

The PhD. Student /post-doctoral fellow will receive a monthly stipend, as well as some of the costs required to conduct the research (data collection, fieldwork, participation in conferences, publication/communication costs, etc.)

Expected skills

- ✓ Analytical, writing and synthesis skills.
- ✓ Excellent ability to work in French and English. Fluency in a language of one or more of the IOC countries would be a plus.
- ✓ Knowledge of the regional context and the context and issues of coastal areas.

How to apply

Candidates wishing to apply must have identified at least one graduate school/host university and a PhD./post-doctoral supervisor with the skills needed to supervise a thesis on the specific research question as described above. Applicants must provide the following supporting documents:

- ☑ A cover letter from the applicant explaining the applicant's general interest for the project (800 words maximum)
- ☑ The applicant's CV (3 pages maximum)
- ☑ A copy of the applicant's master's degree or doctoral thesis

- ☑ A brief research proposal for the scheduled PhD. thesis explaining how it fits in the line of research presented in this document (limited to 2000 words)
- ☑ Where possible, a letter from the graduate school agreeing in principle to the registration for the 2023-2024 year (unless applying for a for post-doctorate)
- ☑ A letter from the thesis director/postdoctoral supervisor attesting to his/her agreement to supervise the candidate
- ☑ The names, affiliations, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of two persons who can provide references in the academic or professional context, who can be contacted if necessary
- ☑ The CV of the PhD/Postdoc supervisor
- ☑ Copy of passport/identity card

Selection process

The pre-selection procedure for candidates will be subject to the following criteria:

- Applications received after the closing date will be rejected;
- Incomplete applications will be rejected;
- Applications submitted by candidates who are not nationals of the IOC member countries targeted by project will be rejected.

Each application validating the above criteria will be assessed according to the following evaluation grid:

Critère	*Points*
Master/PhD. results	10
Experience on the research topic	10
Experience/knowledge of the IOC context	10
Writing skills	20
Soundness of the 2000 proposal	20
The research project set-up is collaborative in the region (joint supervision, joint tuition, etc.)	30
Total	**100**