SUSTAINABLE FOREST TRANSITIONS

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MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

UKRI UK Research and Innovation

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PhD studentship on the social and environmental outcomes of reforestation processes

Deadline: 12 February 2024 Midnight (GMT)

Interviews: 22 February 2024

Studentship Funding

The Sustainable Forest Transitions (SFT) Project is recruiting one full-time PhD student at the Global Development Institute (University of Manchester) from September 2024 to work on one of two themes:

Theme 1: Evaluating social and environmental outcomes of reforestation drivers using large-scale publicly available social and environmental datasets.

Theme 2: Development of rapid evidence synthesis methods and products using emerging artificial intelligence tools and other existing systematic review instruments.

SFT seeks to advance a better understanding of the social and environmental outcomes of reforestation drivers globally. This position is fully-funded for 3.5 years, covering academic fees, an annual maintenance stipend of £18,622 (TBC for 2024-25) and research travel. You will be part of a multidisciplinary research team led by Dr Johan Oldekop, including post-doctoral researchers, PhD students, case-country partners (initially in Mexico, Brazil, India, Nepal and Indonesia), and other affiliated researchers.

Lead Supervisor
Dr Johan Oldekop

Project Description

Scholars have devoted much attention to deforestation, yet processes driving the reverse phenomenon – reforestation – and their socioeconomic implications are poorly understood. SFT is conducting ground-breaking research to better understand how reforestation drivers (e.g., changes in migration, livelihoods or forest governance policies) affect forests and the communities that depend on them. SFT is a five-year, £1.7 million project selected by the European Research Council and funded through a UKRI Research Frontier grant hosted by the Global Development Institute. The project is studying the changing nature of forest cover and human development at unprecedented scale and detail at global scales and in specific case-study countries, including Mexico, Brazil, India, Nepal and Indonesia.

PhD applicants can propose to focus on one of two themes linked to the SFT research agenda:

If proposing to work on **Theme 1**, you will analyse social and environmental outcomes of deforestation drivers. More specifically, you will help overcome existing conceptual, methodological and data limitations by combining secondary public socioeconomic (e.g., national census) and environmental data (satellite-derived forest data) with statistical approaches that increase the causal inference of analyses by emulating randomized experiments (quasi-experimental methods). The project has started to work in several countries (see above). Applicants may propose to work in any of these countries or propose to work in a different country or region.

If proposing to work on **Theme 2**, you will develop and test a rapid evidence synthesis methodology

that leverages emerging state-of-the-art artificial intelligence tools already in the public domain (e.g., natural language processing tools such as ChatGPT and Elicit) as well as other existing systematic review instruments. You will develop new methodologies and data evidence products that specifically address one (or more) evidence gaps linked to forest restoration. You will lead the development of these approaches and establish new partnerships with evidence synthesis experts (e.g., the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence, Conservation Evidence, 3ie) evidence users (e.g., international donors and practitioners working in the space of reforestation/restoration and development) and key research networks working in the field of forests and livelihoods (e.g., the FLARE network).

Person specification
Excellence will be the primary selection criterion. Candidates must have strong quantitative skills and experience of handling and analysing datasets from diverse sources (e.g., remote sensing data, representative household surveys and/or systematic reviews and meta-analyses), acquired through relevant postgraduate training (e.g., in political or conservation science, economics, or geography). Additional research training will be available to support further development and expertise in key analytical elements (e.g., econometrics, spatial statistics and/or remote sensing and meta-analyses). If proposing to work on Theme 1, experience of working in one or more of the case countries and relevant language skills (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Nepali, Bahasa) would be very beneficial but not essential.

Eligibility criteria
Academic:
In the majority of cases, eligible candidates will hold a Bachelor's (Honours) degree at 2:1 or above (or overseas equivalent) plus a Masters degree in a relevant subject with an overall average of 60% or above and a minimum mark of 60% in your dissertation (or overseas equivalent).

English language:
International applicants will need to provide one of the following:
• IELTS test minimum score - 7.0 overall, 7.0 in writing, 6.0 in other sections.
• TOEFL (internet based) test, minimum score - 100 overall, 25 in all sections.
• Pearson Test of English (PTE) UKVI/SELT or PTE Academic minimum score - 76 overall, 76 in writing, 70 in other sections.

• To demonstrate that you have taken an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in a majority English speaking nation within the last 5 years.
• Other tests may be considered.

Application procedure
The application deadline will be Midnight (BST) 12/02/24. All supporting documents must be received by the deadline and sent as a zip file to HUMS.doctoralacademy.admissions@manchester.ac.uk using 'Sustainable Forest Transitions (PhD)' as the email subject.

The application must include:
• Full CV, including a breakdown of your grades to date.
• Two-page proposal, clearly highlighting the research gap that you would like to address and the approach that you would take and/or the methodology and data that you would use.
• Personal statement of maximum 700 words indicating why you would like to undertake this studentship and explaining how your focus, experience, and skills link to the research outlined above.
• Example of a piece of academic writing produced by the applicant of up to 5,000 words. (Applicants may consider submitting two shorter pieces if these deal separately with conceptual and empirical analyses). This may be an academic essay or chapter(s) from a dissertation, in which case, an abstract or introduction outlining the context/aims/research questions of the study must also be included.
• Names and contact details of two academic referees who can comment on the applicant's suitability for PhD study and to undertake the advertised project(s).

Further information
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact Dr. Johan Oldekop (*johan.oldekop@manchester.ac.uk*)

Residential eligibility:
This scholarship is open to international students.

www.sites.manchester.ac.uk/sftresearch/

About the Global Development Institute
(www.gdi.manchester.ac.uk/)
The Global Development Institute plays a major role in supporting the University's commitment to addressing global inequality. It aims to create and share knowledge to inform and influence policy makers, organisations and corporations so that they can make positive and sustainable changes for people living in poverty. Promoting social justice is at the heart of GDI's ambition and is connected to our core values of inclusivity, responsibility, equity and sustainability. The Institute builds on the University of Manchester's world-leading reputation for Development Studies research that saw us ranked 1st for research environment in the UK Research Excellence Framework 2021.

GDI has approximately 70 academic staff, up to 100 PhD students and over 600 Master's students who form part of the largest provider of Development Studies research and postgraduate education within Europe. Within the Institute, the Rory and Elizabeth Brooks Doctoral College is the first doctoral college for the study of global development in the world.

GDI has a reputation for cutting edge research in numerous areas. Recent major funded research programmes have included the DFID-funded 'Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre'; the ESRC funded 'Rising Powers and Integrated Futures Programme'; and the DFID-funded 'Capturing the Gains' programme. GDI also hosts the Centre for Digital Development. Current major funding programmes at GDI include the UKRI-funded 'Just Earth Observation for Conservation' research project and the 'African Cities Research Consortium', which is funded by FCDO.

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