

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Establishment of the Future Earth Africa Hub Regional Nodes

Closing Date: **12 January 2024**

This call for expressions of interest is to solicit applications to host regional nodes for Future Earth Africa Hub in four AU Regions– namely East Africa, North Africa, Central Africa, and West Africa.



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National
Research
Foundation

futureearth
research for global sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background

The Future Earth selected the National Research Foundation (NRF) to serve as the host of the Future Earth Global Secretariat Hub for Africa beginning in March 2022. The Africa Hub joins eight other global secretariat hubs, namely: Canada, China, France, Japan, South Asia, Sweden, Taipei, and the United States. The NRF strategy is to use a phased implementation process culminating into a fully functional Africa Hub with all its governance structure finalised in early 2024. The Africa Hub operates as a global initiative with a strong African presence and voice, integrating Africa's thriving and expanding sustainability science, policy, and funding communities into the global sustainability science arena. The approach articulates a clear framework for Future Earth Africa Global Secretariat Hub, which includes the Future Earth Africa Hub Leadership Centre (AHLC) co-hosted in South Africa by Rhodes University and the University of Pretoria. The AHLC is expected to coordinate regional participation through the five African regionally distributed Nodes: Southern Africa, East Africa; North Africa; Central Africa; and West Africa. These nodes will be strategically located throughout the continent and supported by other academic partner institutions and/or funders e.g., science granting councils.

This is, therefore, a call to solicit expressions of interest from all qualifying African institutions (see Section 4 of this document) to host the Future Earth Africa Hub Regional Nodes.

1.2 About Future Earth

Future Earth is a global initiative that aims to advance sustainability science. Announced in June 2012 at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), Future Earth builds on more than three decades of international global change research. Operational since 2015, Future Earth has structures in over 20 countries, managed through an internationally distributed Secretariat with nine Global Secretariat Hubs (inclusive of the Africa Hub). Future Earth's network of global research projects collectively mobilizes over 50 000 experts around the world.

The primary work of Future Earth is to initiate and facilitate, convene and coordinate, and synthesise and communicate global sustainability science. Future Earth mobilises the world's leading sustainability scientists and leverages the resources available in its core community to deliver a portfolio of essential activities that include:

- establishing, connecting, and promoting international research initiatives, such as Global Research Networks and new integrative activities
- initiating and organising scientific syntheses assessments and activities that cut across and integrate research in a systems approach, such as the Earth Commission
- facilitating the representation and engagement of global sustainability science in global science-policy-practice interfaces, global integrated and thematic assessment and response frameworks, and discourse around globally agreed goals and multilateral environmental and social agreements
- curating global sustainability science communications, such as the Anthropocene Magazine
- convening international, open science conferences, such as the regular series of Sustainability Research and Innovation Congresses and stimulating and supporting global sustainability science

capacity development initiatives, such as the Earth Leadership Programme.

Moreover, Future Earth promotes the use of big data, linked data, data sharing, and other tools of the digital revolution that fuel scientific discovery and strengthen our understanding of system complexity.

The strategic objectives of Future Earth are to:

- Champion and promote rigorous and relevant knowledge on global sustainability challenges by identify critical knowledge needs, offering an international science programme for transdisciplinary research and collaboration on global sustainability science, and developing pathways, scenarios and additional innovative methods for the production and synthesis of ongoing international research.
- Champion and promote rigorous and relevant knowledge on global sustainability challenges by identifying critical knowledge needs, developing pathways, scenarios, and additional innovative methods for the production and synthesis of ongoing international research, and developing an international science programme for transdisciplinary research and collaboration on global sustainability science.
- Ensure the development and growth of transdisciplinary research approaches that systematically integrate natural, social, and technical sciences, as well as scholarship from the humanities and connect this work with needs, insights, and innovation within other sectors of society to develop systems-oriented perspectives, products, platforms, methods and tools that support sustainability pathways.
- Support evidence-informed decision-making on transformations to global sustainability through effective communication and engagement with relevant decision-makers and societal actors at the science-policy-practice interface, throughout the whole cycle of knowledge generation from problem definition to responsible practitioners/actors at scale, i.e., along the whole value chain of knowledge and knowledge products.
- Strengthen global sustainability science by expanding the community, increasing its connectivity, building its essential capacities, improving the conditions for conducting transdisciplinary and impact-oriented research, and developing clear methodologies of transdisciplinary sciences.
- Provide a platform for communicating and facilitating access to integrated scientific knowledge to the broader community.

1.3 About Future Earth Africa Hub

The Future Earth Africa Hub is one of the nine Future Earth Global Secretariat worldwide. The Africa Hub is designed to contribute capacity and expertise towards the effective delivery of the Future Earth global secretariat's key functions, which are intended to serve the global sustainability science community and its stakeholders. In doing so, the Africa Hub ensures that the needs and interests, as well as insights and perspectives of the African continent, are consistently and fully integrated into Future Earth's strategies, activities, and operations at a global level. The Africa Hub works to advance sustainability science in and for Africa and develop networks and activities that address specific regional priorities, which will include, for example, excellence models in research uptake and

advancement, early-career scientists' capacity development, institutional strengthening, and centers of competence/excellence, as well as strategic knowledge networking. In doing so, the Hub will leverage on Future Earth resources, broadly defined, to strengthen and showcase African sustainability science and its impact on Africa.

The intent is to build on, expand, and complement the significant Global Change Research Programme in South Africa and regionally, supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), in advancing a concise and clear value-addition to sustainability research in Africa.

1.4 About Future Earth Africa Hub Leadership Centre (FE AHLC)

The FE AHLC serves as both the coordinative and operational component of the Africa Hub and is responsible for driving and advancing strategic activities in support of the mandate of the Africa Hub. The AHLC liaises and works proactively with African partners involved in the different entities of Future Earth Global communities such as the representatives at the Future Earth Assembly, the representatives at the Future Earth Governing Council, the contributors to the Future Earth Global Research Networks, the Future Earth Low and Middle Income Countries entity and the Early Career Scientists and Researchers Network of Network (ECRs NoN).

The functions of the AHLC include:

- Work with the NRF and regional nodes to provide leadership in terms of the implementation of the Africa Hub's mandate in support of Future Earth global activities.
- Coordinate and facilitate the Africa Hub's scientific activities at the regional level.
- Coordinate and support Knowledge production, knowledge sharing, and communication on the African continent.
- Act as an intermediary for all communications between the Africa Hub and its partners in the different regions of Africa as well as other global secretariat hubs.

2. ROLE OF THE FUTURE EARTH AFRICA HUB REGIONAL NODES

The purpose of the Future Earth Africa Hub (FEAH) regional nodes is to support and promote efforts aligned with implementation of Future Earth Africa Global Secretariat programmes at a regional level, strengthen knowledge networks and infrastructure access, and enhance cooperation between regions in Africa and globally in support of the FEAH's vision. Among others, regional nodes are expected to lead:

a. Programme delivery and implementation

- Support the streamlining of regional, or national Future Earth Africa Hub activities, action plans and programmes.
- Promote the development and implementation of Future Earth Africa Hub regional

programmes aligned with Future Earth.

- Support research and initiatives aimed at finding innovative solutions to regional sustainability challenges, sustainable technologies, and practices and link to the existing Future Earth Global Research Networks and Future Earth Africa Science Clusters.

b. Coordination

- Convene regional and continental African sustainability research conferences and debates.
- Coordinate activities compatible with the FE research agenda in their respective regions.
- Facilitate a systems approach and transdisciplinary to conducting and reporting on sustainability research in their respective regions.
- Monitor and assess the state of the environment and sustainability in their regions, providing valuable data for decision-makers and researchers.

c. Capacity building programmes

- Facilitate the rollout of capacity-building regional initiatives on African sustainability research working closely with local or global actors.
- Engage in capacity-building activities to enhance the skills and knowledge of researchers and professionals in the region - help build a stronger research community focused on sustainability.

d. Societal engagement, dialogue, and policy

- Promote and support effective multi-stakeholder regional networks of relevant actors in response to emerging regional needs.
- Promote outreach activities on sustainability research in Africa at regional level.
- Facilitate the representation and engagement of African sustainability science in science policy practice interfaces, integrated and thematic assessment and response frameworks, and discourse around continentally agreed goals and multilateral environmental and social agreements.
- Maintain communication with the FEAHLC and provide updates on the work of the regional node.
- Represent the FEAH at regional/global meetings and platforms.
- Involved in public outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about sustainability issues and engage with local communities.

3. HOSTING AND RESOURCING ARRANGEMENTS

An indicative budget for the next two years should be developed, taking into account the deliverables expected from the regional node. It is possible to co-host a regional node. Support for the Node's staffing and operating expenses is expected to come from the host, regional sponsors, such as Science Granting Councils, national government, and/or national research/university or agencies within the

hosting country. The support may include financial or in-kind from hosting institutions.

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following conditions should be fulfilled by all applicants:

The applicant hosting entity shall include the facilities to host and operate the regional node, including adequate physical hosting facilities, an efficiently functioning research support ecosystem and IT infrastructure.

- a. Consortium hosts are encouraged but are not a prerequisite.
- b. Universities, research centers/institutes, research councils or national funding agencies are eligible to apply.
- c. Applications should include the provision of appropriate supporting documentation proving the commitment of the leadership where the hosting entity is established and where necessary, support letters from co-hosts or partners.
- d. Be based in the respective country within the African Union regions.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Hosting a Future Earth regional node is a significant responsibility, and candidates are selected based on specific criteria and should:

- Demonstrate track record of conducting or supporting research in areas related to sustainability, environmental, and social sciences with a diverse portfolio of research projects and publications that address global and regional sustainability challenges.
- Have a history of (or plans) fostering collaboration across different disciplines, sectors, domains, and preferably inter-institutional activities with African focus.
- Have or demonstrate the ability to build and maintain a strong network of partners (research and academic institutions, government agencies, CSOs/NGOs, and industry stakeholders)
- Have a commitment to training and mentoring the next generation of researchers, scientists, and practitioners in sustainability science.
- Demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability in its own operations and practices, including efforts to reduce environmental impact, promote social equity, and uphold ethical principles.
- Have the financial resources or the ability to secure funding to support the node's activities.
- Have strong leadership and effective governance structures to manage the regional node's activities and ensure that it aligns with the goals and principles of Future Earth Global and the strategic direction of the Future Earth Africa Global Secretariat Hub.
- Articulate a clear and compelling vision for how it will contribute to the goals of Future Earth and advance sustainability science in its region over the long term.

Furthermore, the NRF will evaluate all expressions of interest, based on the following criteria:

a. Excellence of the proposal:

- Strong potential and capability to host the regional node and value addition to the Future Earth AfricaHub strategy and implementation plan.
- Adequacy and sufficiency of the provided expertise for supporting and facilitating the regional node in terms of governance, consortium and Africa Knowledge production and facilitation.
- Disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary value addition.

b. Expected Impact on Future Earth visions, mission and main purpose

- Quality and feasibility of the expression of interest.
- Adequate potential for uptake of results including quality of the knowledge sharing approach with appropriate stakeholder engagement, network mobilizations, capacity development, and communication strategy.
- Contribution to shaping the African focus narratives and facilitation of research and innovation in Africa

c. Quality and efficiency of the implementation:

- Objectives as well as the related work plan.
- Adequacy, feasibility and coherence of the various proposed activities for the Future Earth Africa Global Secretariat (FEAH).
- Evidence of resource mobilization activities.

d. Partnerships:

- Partners’ roles and contributions to the node operation and work plan

All applications will be treated confidentially, as well as any related information, data and documents submitted.

6. TIMETABLE

The steps and indicative dates for the call are shown in the table below:

Call Milestones	Date
Call Launch for the Expression of Interest Publication	
Opening date	03 November 2023
Closing date	12 January 2024
Evaluation	
NRF review	19 January 2024
Final Process	

Engagement with shortlisted applicants and Q&A session for additional information	22– 26 January 2024
Communication of Final Outcomes	23 February 2024

8. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION CRITERIA

Proposals should be submitted electronically by email to Anastasia Moloto email: an.moloto@risa.nrf.ac.za and CC mg.nxumalo@risa.nrf.ac.za . Once submitted, changes to the proposal will no longer be possible. Delayed proposals and/or proposals submitted outside this deadline will not be considered. Following submission, proposals will first be screened by the NRF for the following general eligibility criteria. Each proposal must:

- Be submitted in the correct format.
- Submitted in electronic format, digitally signed by the person authorised to enter legally binding commitments on behalf of the applicant organisation.
- Be submitted in English or French.
- Meet the submission deadline.
- Attach all proofs and support letters to the submission

9. NRF CONTACT DETAILS FOR QUERIES

For specific content-related questions (or meeting requests to clarify requirements) please contact:

Anastasia Moloto +27 12 481 4027 an.moloto@risa.nrf.ac.za	Michael Nxumalo +27 12 481 4011 mg.nxumalo@risa.nrf.ac.za
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