

Recruitment for one PhD position:

We are recruiting one PhD student in collaboration with the [Chr. Michelsen Institute](#) in Bergen, Norway and our collaborating partner in India- [Department of Sociology and Anthropology](#), Ashoka University.

The PhDs will work under the joint supervision(s) of Anwasha Dutta (Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway), Mitul Baruah (Ashoka University) and Vijay Kolinjivadi (Concordia University, Canada) on the following project:

Financing Transformative Nature-based Solutions for Equitable and just Sustainability Solutions (FITNESS).

The project is funded by the Norwegian Research Council through the BIODIVERSA+ scheme of the European Biodiversity Partnership and co-funded by the European Union. This is a collaborative project with institutional partnership across Chr. Michelsen Institute (Norway), Aarhus University (Denmark), University of Antwerp (Belgium) and Universidade Federal do Pará (Brazil)

Summary of project:

FITNESS aims to enhance the understanding of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) as a means of advancing sustainability, socio-ecological integrity, and global ecological value while prioritizing social and environmental justice. A flagship NbS mechanism known as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) will be analyzed as it incentivizes exchanges in land-use practices to deliver ecosystem services for mutual ecological, livelihood, and human well-being benefits. Four research questions guide the project: 1) To what extent do justice criteria influence the success of NbS interventions to more effectively deliver ecosystem services? 2) How consistently do financial flows prioritize social and environmental justice, and are there conflicting incentives for ecologically damaging activities through the same funding sources? 3) Who gets included or excluded from decision-making in NbS programs, and how does this impact implementation? 4) What examples exist in Brazil, South Africa, and India of communities taking ownership and autonomy over NbS projects, and how can these lessons benefit implementation of NbS in Europe? The research hypothesis posits that aligning NbS projects with diverse value frameworks, acknowledging power imbalances, and respecting historical and cultural ties to the territory will enhance resilience and ecological effectiveness while fostering community ownership and legitimacy. Through a transformative paradigm, the project will employ mixed methods, participatory mapping, and social network analysis to gather data from specific NbS projects.

India case study:

In India, the government recently launched the Green Credits Programme (GCP) Draft Rules, which aim to generate market-based mechanisms for NbS across the country in meeting India's Nationally Determined Contributions to achieving the Paris Agreement on climate change. Users can buy and sell ecosystem service offsets on a digital trading platform across activities ranging from waste management, air pollution abatement, sustainable building, and reforestation. On a regional level, the state of Assam has initiated a NbS project called the Amrit Briksh Andolan (ABA) in June of 2023 with the aim of achieving a tree-based economy through direct payments to local communities, specifically women, to exceed previous level of tree coverage by 200 million trees by the end of 2025. As the extent to which fair and inclusive NbS design is prioritized remains understudied, the project will analyse the financial flows and origins of PES in Assam, and elsewhere through the ABA, as well as the social legitimacy and environmental justice implications of GCP trades and associated tree plantations established on land traditionally managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs).

PhD studies & employment terms

The PhD position will last for 5-6 years, with 5 years of guaranteed funding. The candidate will be recruited through an arrangement wherein they will receive their doctoral training and their PhD degree from Ashoka University while having an affiliation with the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway. The candidate will have to comply with Ashoka University's regulations in terms of coursework and other requisites for the successful completion of a PhD degree (see: https://www.ashoka.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ashoka_PhD_Guidelines_Updated.pdf). However, the PhD candidate will work on the FITNESS project, specifically on the Indian case study (see above) and meet project deliverables including fieldwork, data analysis, coordination with project partners and writing of research articles. These will be decided in consultation with Dutta and Kolinjivadi.

The PhD will undertake social science mixed methods research on the GCP (broadly), with a particular focus on qualitative or ethnographic research. The student will develop a set of research questions that reflect ecological, economic, socio-cultural and/or historical and political aspects of forest governance in areas where plantations for Green Credits are

being established as well as the downstream public relations strategies for purchasers of Green Credits. The PhD candidate will explore the GCP from an interdisciplinary perspective and will have considerable flexibility in terms of research angle, given that it is centered on the design, implementation, and analysis of the GCP.

Qualifications

We are looking for a highly motivated candidate with research interests that align with this project and preferably with prior experience in working on issues of forestry, conservation and payments for ecosystem services. Applicants must possess a **master's degree** in environmental studies, environmental anthropology/sociology, rural development, wildlife conservation, forestry/forest policy and related fields. The applicant must also have experience conducting fieldwork or working in rural areas of India and proficiency in written and spoken Indian languages, especially languages spoken in the state where they choose to conduct fieldwork in. The student must possess strong writing skills to be able to write and publish in English.

Prior work experience in related fields, previous publications, and experience in mixed methods and creative approaches are desirable.

Starting date:

We would like to hire someone to start in August 2025, as per the admission cycle of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ashoka University.

Selection Process:

Interested candidates must apply through Ashoka University's online application portal by February 24, 2025. For more details, please follow this link: <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/programme/phd-programme-in-sociology-and-anthropology/>

The application materials should contain a cover letter, an updated CV, a research proposal and a writing sample. Shortlisted candidates will have to take a written test and an oral interview.

Contact:

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