



SA-TIED

Southern Africa – Towards Inclusive Economic Development

Request for Research Proposals (RfRP)

Long-Term Financing of Sustainable Infrastructures: A Water-Energy-Food

Nexus Approach with an Emphasis on Just Transition

Introduction

SA-TIED's Workstream 5 addresses the critical challenges posed by the reliance on fossil fuels and inefficient water usage, which impact food production and accessibility in South Africa. The urgent need for sustainable solutions has led to the adoption of the Water-Energy-Food Nexus (WEF Nexus) approach, recognizing the synergies and potential conflicts between these sectors. The integration of Just Transition principles aims to ensure that these sustainability efforts are inclusive and equitable, providing benefits across all strata of society and ensuring no one is left behind.

This call for research proposals seeks to explore financial mechanisms that can foster a transition towards sustainability in the water, energy, and food sectors, ensuring long-term economic development and social equity. It calls for innovative thinking. Given the interconnectedness of these sectors and the exacerbating impacts of climate change, this call emphasizes a Just Transition.

Research expectations

Proposals are expected to address the long-term financing of water, energy, and food systems that are not only climate-resilient but also reinforce Just Transition principles. We encourage submissions to explore:

1. What system changes (policy, regulatory, institutional, financial) are required to ensure that South Africa has long-term sustainable supplies of energy, water, and food in the face of climate change?
2. What are the related investments needed to achieve this?
3. What are the long-term economic consequences of sustainable energy, water, and food supplies relative to a business-as-usual scenario?
4. Achieving a Just Transition.

Building on the National Planning Commission (NPC) report entitled *2050 Vision and Pathways for a Just Transition to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society* (NPC, 2019) which emphasized the need for thinking in terms of the water-energy-land-use nexus, Workstream 5 has operationalised its research agenda by way of a unique research collaboration between four major public sector institutions that share an interest in addressing the WEF Nexus challenge. Formed in 2023, this research collaboration involves the National Planning Commission (NPC), Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), National Treasury (NT) via the SA-TIED programme, and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). This research collaboration addresses the water-energy-food nexus using a two-stage research process: the first stage is in-depth sectoral analyses of the investment requirements to achieve the goals of the NDP within these three sectors, and the second stage is integrative work to develop a WEF-Nexus perspective that addresses the

governance and policy reforms that will be required in future (Swilling et al., 2023). Researchers should also take into account the Just Transition Framework (2021), the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (2022) and the Just Energy Transition Implementation Plan (2023).

This RFP invites research that addresses the financing of climate-resilient and socially equitable water, energy, and food systems. Recognizing the complexity of the water-energy-food nexus, proposals may focus on one or multiple sectors, elucidating how these sectors interconnect and impact each other.

We seek rigorous academic analysis coupled with creative solutions that consider the future implications of the research findings. Proposals should go beyond theoretical discussions to suggest actionable strategies for leveraging public, private, and blended finance. The aim is to foster systems that not only withstand climate challenges but also advance a Just Transition.

Research goals:

- **Exploration of Innovative Financial Models:** Identify and develop financial mechanisms that enhance investment in sustainable systems, emphasizing the role of key financial institutions and innovative financial structures.
- **Case Studies on Investment Impact:** Provide examples from South Africa and globally where creative financing has successfully supported sustainable initiatives in the nexus sectors.
- **Policy and Institutional Frameworks:** Propose policy, regulatory, and institutional changes that can significantly increase financial flows into sustainable and equitable water, energy, and food systems.

We encourage proposals that creatively rethink financial interactions to avoid undue burdens on taxpayers while unlocking significant new investment channels. Examples include leveraging guarantees for renewable energy projects, using household and business assets for securing loans, and innovative public-private partnerships.

Submission guidelines & procedure

Evaluation criteria and submission process

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the RfRP announcement page, where applicants can choose from individual, group, or non-profit organization submission forms. Each proposal, limited to three pages excluding cover page and references, should clearly articulate the research objectives, methods, data sources, and relevance to policy. Proposals are required to include a cover page with full contact details and a concise 120-150 word abstract summarizing the main question, method, and expected contributions.

The evaluation of proposals will be based on:

Relevance: Alignment with the research objectives focusing on innovative financial solutions for sustainable development.

Scientific Merit and Feasibility: Strength and feasibility of the proposed research methodology and the potential to contribute to empirical and policy advancements.

Quality and Clarity: Clarity of writing, and the coherence and comprehensiveness of the proposed analysis.

The overall timeline for the call is as follows:

Date	Milestone
03 May 2024	Request for proposals issued
22 May 2024	Deadline for questions of proposal content and process
31 May 2024	Deadline for proposal submission
14 June 2024	Selection of preferred proposals communicated
30 June 2024	Finalization of MoUs and contracts
18 October 2024	Submission of first drafts
Early November	Workshop & feedback
Early December	Submission of final papers

Knowledge-sharing events will be planned subsequently.

Of note:

- SA-TIED Workstream 5 reserves the right to propose collaborations between respondents where synergies are identified (we will facilitate the MoU process to establish these consortiums).
- No justifications will be provided for rejected proposals.

Offer to RfP respondents

The call invites both qualified individuals and teams/institutions/organizations to submit proposals. There is no need Submission of a budget is not required for the proposal.

The selected works will be considered for publication under UNU-WIDER copyright as an SA-TIED research paper and possibly also in the WIDER Working Paper Series. The working papers need to be written in English and limited to 8000 - 10,000 words (inclusive of text, tables, figures, footnotes, references, etc. — further information is found here)

The deliverable must be deemed acceptable by UNU-WIDER before payment will be made. The honorarium is expected to cover all expenses associated with the conduct of the proposed research (including data collection, research assistance, etc.). It is therefore not required to submit a budget.

Payment be made when the final paper is accepted after peer review. Proposals for an interim payment will be considered. After payment has been made, researchers may be asked to:

- Participate in at least one knowledge-sharing event.

- Engage with the SA-TIED communications team to develop the one-pager further into a knowledge mobilization output (e.g. video, social media products, infographics, brief, blog, op-ed).

Expectations after proposal acceptance

All successful research grant applicants will be expected to:

1. Produce a relevant research paper of sufficient quality to merit publication in the SA-TIED Working Paper series.
2. To present the draft submission (or work in progress) at the WS5 internal workshop at an appropriate venue (TBD) and to listen to and to comment upon work in progress of other researchers. UNU-WIDER will cover the flights (if required) of 2-3 members per team.
3. Prepare a research brief that brings together the key findings from the research paper and the key policy lessons. A key focus will be on specific, policy-relevant recommendations that can be taken forward through a further phase of work.
4. Participate in a workshop/policy dialogue after completion of the final paper to communicate the policy implications and lessons from the research.

Researchers or their institutions (non-profit) will sign a consultant contract or an institutional contractual agreement with UNU-WIDER that follows the UNU conditions of service for Consultant Contracts (CTC), or Institutional Contractual Agreements (ICA). Researchers/institutions will transfer copyright of research produced under the contract to UNU-WIDER. The purpose of this copyright transfer is to allow UNU-WIDER to effectively negotiate with top academic publishers in order to seek the most desirable possible publication outlet for a related set of papers/studies, and to allow UNU-WIDER to license the planned book on full open access. If no (further) publication is expected by UNU-WIDER, the copyright can be transferred to the author(s). Any material published externally thereafter resulting from this body of work should carry due acknowledgement of UNU-WIDER as the original commissioning institute.

For queries, please email sa-tied@wider.unu.edu

References

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