

*f o n d a t i o n*  
**BOTNAR**



## **u'Good**

**A funding call for research, intervention, and theory-testing on  
young people and relational wellbeing**

**January 2024**

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CoP	Community of Practice
Eoi	Expression of Interest
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
MESL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Strategic Learning
NRF	National Research Foundation
PI	Principal Investigator
RWB	Relational Wellbeing
ToC	Theory of Change
YPRWB	Young People and Relational Wellbeing

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The National Research Foundation (NRF) (South Africa), Fondation Botnar (Switzerland), and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) (South Africa) have partnered to implement a research programme named u'Good<sup>1</sup> which is focused on young people and relational wellbeing (YPRWB) in urban and peri-urban environments. The purpose of this research is to test and further develop relational approaches to wellbeing; and generate empirical insights into key contemporary challenges to young people's wellbeing, and how they are addressing these.

The approach to relational wellbeing (RWB) upon which this call is based builds on 20 years' research on wellbeing in the Global South. As a conceptual framework, it is people-centred, recognising that wellbeing is based on the subjective (people feeling good) and the material (having enough). However, it also emphasises the importance of a third dimension, the relational – how the nature and extent of the connections between people shape, for instance, the opportunities available to them and the choices they make. Relational thinking is also applied to understanding how personal, societal, and environmental drivers impact on people's wellbeing – not as separate sets of conditions, but as interconnected factors which flow and intersect in ways that either promote or obstruct sustainable wellbeing.

From a methodological and intervention design perspective, relationality is also at the centre of the RWB approach. The emphasis is on cooperative engagement, collaboration, coalition-building, and strengthening capacity. Furthermore, the people whose wellbeing is being assessed or advanced are positioned and treated as the subjects of their own lives, as active participants, and not the objects of research or interventions.

Young people are the most important group to consider in the world today. They are faced with unprecedented challenges for their future, uncertainty and precariousness regarding livelihoods, security (e.g., access to food, water, and healthcare), the effects of the climate crisis, and global economic turbulence, among others. This is particularly exacerbated among young people in the Global South. Placing young people in urban and peri-urban environments in the Global South at the centre of this research programme provides a significant opportunity to contribute to the existing knowledge base and theoretical insights about these regions. It contributes to insights on how to harness the youth dividend and provide a more supportive basis for young people to further develop resilience, agility, resourcefulness, and innovativeness for both the present and the future.

A key principle of the u'Good research programme is its commitment to research approaches informed by the realities, contexts and methods emerging from the Global South and/or specifically adapted for young people's leadership in research. This relates to considerations of for example, the choice of methods, the understandings of collective versus individual agency and the formulation of research ethics that need to consider cultural norms that depart from the 'Western' approach to research.

The programme seeks to harness the power of multilateral research platforms to undertake research and develop a community of practice (CoP) that could be impactful across geographical locations and disciplines and inform policy and practice more broadly. In addition to the lead partners (the NRF,

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<sup>1</sup> u'Good shortens the phrase "Are You Good?", colloquially used to inquire whether someone is feeling or doing well. The naming of the programme reflects the essence of what is intended - understanding and ensuring the wellbeing of young people. Intentionally it is aimed to embrace and communicate a less technical and much more accessible notion of the key principle guiding the work to signal that the young people and their views will be taken seriously in this programme. It is also a phrase that translates well across different age categories but also transferable across cultures and allow for adaptation to make it contextually relevant.

Fondation Botnar and the HSRC), partnership with NRF sister agencies (science granting councils in the target countries) will contribute to implementing the research programme.

The core activities of the u'Good research programme will be implemented through the research programme following: (1) the funding of research projects; (2) capacity strengthening of young people and researchers; (3) building a CoP on young people and RWB; (4) monitoring, evaluation and strategic learning at both programme and research project levels; and (5) innovative and meaningful research communication and dissemination.

Four thematic areas in which researchers will be invited to generate theoretical and empirical insights will be: (1) young people and livelihoods, (2) young people and mental health, (3) young people and digitalisation, and (4) young people and climate change. In this project Young People are defined as falling into the 10–24-year-old age range<sup>2</sup>: i.e. including early adolescence (10-14), adolescence (15-19) and youth (15-24). Proposals engaging and seeking to test and critique the RWB approach purely from a theoretical vantage point (i.e., not directly related to the thematic areas) will also be considered, as will those that integrate investigations across themes.

Researchers whose research interests focus on young people and wellbeing in one or several of the following 12 countries are eligible to apply: Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Romania, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Vietnam. In addition, funded development projects of Fondation Botnar who focus their work at the interface of young people in the 12 eligible countries can apply to this funding opportunity.

This research call is administered by the NRF.

## 2 RESEARCH PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This opportunity provides funding for researchers working on topics pertaining to YPRWB in the Global South through the u'Good programme. Successful applicants will commit to the following objectives:

1. To test and further develop relational approaches to wellbeing in conceptual, methodological and operational terms; and
2. To generate empirical insights into key contemporary challenges to young people's wellbeing in urban and peri-urban environments, and how young people are addressing these.

By the end of the funding period, researchers will deliver on the following outcomes, as relevant to their intended study:

- Rigorously tested RWB concepts and theoretical propositions;
- Rigorously tested RWB application approaches to assess and promote young people's wellbeing in the Global South through research, intervention and/or policy;
- Developed, utilised and/or refined applied methodologies that align to RWB principles and allow for in-depth investigation into the complexities of the RWB of young people in the Global South;
- Developed and thorough understanding of wellbeing of young people in several contexts;

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<sup>2</sup> While we acknowledge that these upper limits for the definition of Youth tend to be higher (29 or even 35) in some Southern countries, this delimitation acknowledges Fondation Botnar intervention focus being on particularly Young People between the ages of 10-24.

- Produced new evidence demonstrating the feasibility of RWB concepts, theoretical propositions, methodologies and/or interventions; and
- Developed, utilised and/or refined means for capturing RWB. In this context, ‘capturing RWB’ is a deliberately broad term that encompasses novel forms of making RWB visible (and assessing it) as well as more traditional attempts to quantify it.

### 3 DURATION AND FUNDING LEVELS

The u’Good programme will run from 2023 to 2027. Funding is available for three-year projects. Therefore, projects should be designed to be completed within three years (2025–2027). One-year no-cost extensions may be available in some circumstances, on request, and requiring appropriate justification.

The total amount of funding available for research grants is USD7 million. Funded projects will fall within the following two funding tracks:

- 15 x single-country research teams, three-year grants at USD200,000 each, and
- 8 x multi-country research teams, three-year grants at USD500,000 each.

Project budgets must convincingly allow the achievement of the project goals and must not exceed the funding limits indicated above. Sustainability of the overall area of research is also an important objective, and successful projects will be required to reflect on whether and how they intend to leverage additional collaboration and funding.

### 4 U’GOOD CALL SECRETARIAT

The NRF will serve as the Call Secretariat for the programme. The u’Good Call Secretariat will provide administrative and technical support to applicants regarding this Call for proposals, Call documents, and procedures. It is the primary point of contact between the research project teams and the u’Good coordinators for all general matters in relation to this Call for proposals. The contact details for the u’Good Call Secretariat are as follows:

National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa

Email: [ugoodCall@nrf.ac.za](mailto:ugoodCall@nrf.ac.za)

Telephone: +27 12 481 4285

Office hours: Mon-Fri 9AM-4PM (SAST)

There is also a dedicated helpdesk for enquiries related to submission of applications. The helpdesk can be reached at: [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za).

The u’Good Call Secretariat will be working closely with the science granting councils/national funding agencies within the 12 focus countries of this Call. Although these science granting councils are not providing funding for the Call, they will be supporting the implementation of the u’Good programme and will be involved in the different stages of adjudicating this Call for proposals.

## 6 THE RELATIONAL WELLBEING APPROACH UNDERPINNING THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The notion of wellbeing emerged in the literature as a push back against negative or deficit characterisations of people's lives in intervention and theory. The overarching terminology used when speaking of the needs and circumstances of people's lived experience became limited to terms such as 'development', 'poverty', 'exclusion', and 'dysfunction'. In contrast, 'wellness' emerged as a theoretical approach to understanding and intervening in people's lives that was positive, aspirational, and inclusive (Bess & Doykos, 2014; Dolan & White, 2007; Gough & McGregor, 2007; Keyes, 1998, 2003; Mahali et al., 2018; White, 2010; Rojas, 2019).

A wide scholarship exists on wellbeing, focusing mostly on **material** and **subjective wellbeing**. Material wellbeing is understood as the assets you have, the state of physical welfare, standard of living, consumption, livelihoods, and wealth (what you have). On the other hand, subjective wellbeing is understood as people's perceptions and beliefs about what they have, as well as their cultural values and the ideologies that influence their perceived ability to change circumstances. Building on these two dimensions of wellbeing, the notion of **multi-dimensional wellbeing** emerged (Johnson, 2009), with **relational wellbeing** (White, 2010) becoming a critical and central component, that offered a counterpoint to individual agency and highlighted the social, collective, and structural dimensions of wellbeing ("what you have through or because of others").

Experiences from the Global South in particular, have driven the realisation of inadequacies in the literature, and have highlighted the limits of such approaches to understanding and intervening on the wellbeing of societies. Approaches to wellbeing tend to have been predicated on a well-functioning, orderly, and regulated society (Dolan & White, 2007) with strong social capital and broad participation and a notion of individual embeddedness of happiness; often derived from contexts and countries in the North. Southern societies are profoundly shaped by colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial histories that contribute to gross inequalities and distinct differences in experience from the Global North. However, the South has collective and cultural resources that could impact on wellbeing – frequently ignored in wellbeing research.

Furthermore, when one considers scholarship, particularly in relation to the term 'relational wellbeing', it is often in reference to the quality of relationships (Bess & Doykos, 2014; Geerts-Perry, et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2021; Leavitt et al., 2019; Lévesque et al., 2020; Waid, 2021), rather than as an encompassing framework that positions relationality at the centre of how wellbeing should be understood, engaged with, studied, promoted and prioritised by, and in collaboration with, various stakeholders and beneficiaries. This leads to the vibrant version of RWB described by UK academic, Sarah White, which has been taken up in the work of Fondation Botnar, and which is central to this envisaged programme of research.

Conceptualisation of RWB asserts that our wellbeing is more than subjective happiness, material assets, or the quality of relationships (White's, 2010, 2017; White & Jha, 2020). Rather, wellbeing is relational in a collective and multidimensional way as it emerges through "the inter-relations of personal, societal and environmental structures and processes" (White & Jha, 2020). McCubbin et al. (2013) explained RWB as an approach to combine the various dimensions of wellbeing into a unified theory to understand and research wellbeing (from a theoretical and methodological perspective) and to address the interrelated factors that compromise or diminish wellbeing (through intervention).

From an ontological position (theory of being), this means that wellbeing is accepted as inherently relational, co-constructed in the relationships between people, their environment, institutional contexts and the like. It recognises that individuals are relational beings existing within a multi-

dimensional ecology (White & Jha, 2020). Since ontology, epistemology (theory of knowledge) and methodology are linked, an RWB orientation emphasises the importance of relational thinking and relational methodologies that prioritise full, active engagement and involvement of community members (beneficiaries of research) to facilitate the co-production of knowledge, empowerment, capacity building and co-ownership of research or interventions (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2010; Viljoen & Eskill-Blokland, 2007).

In summary, this conceptualisation of RWB aligns with four key assertions: (1) RWB must be engaged with as an ontology (White, 2019 p129); (2) epistemologically, it should embrace a relational theory, relational thinking, and relational working; (3) methodologically, it should embrace tools that facilitate co-creation, co-investment and collaboration towards participatory and perhaps emancipatory outcomes (in research or intervention); with (4) this systemic recognition and emphasis on societal structures and context is likely to make policy (aiming to positively impact on young people) more effective (White, 2017 p131).

While the importance of positive social relationships for happiness and meaning in life has long been acknowledged, Wissing (2014 p117), it is in the connection of this ontological position with the epistemological orientation and methodological sense that combines RWB into a unified theory that carries a more inclusive, rounded sense of what it means to experience wellbeing. This is the lens this impending programme of work attempts to bring to the challenges facing young people and is therefore a useful and important exercise given the extent of social, political and intersectional vulnerabilities faced. And so, while the construct of RWB is not entirely new to the literature (especially within positive psychology and the broader health sciences domains), its application as an all-encompassing theory and/or conceptual model to drive practice is novel. To ensure wider uptake, it is therefore critical that it be subject to critical scrutiny and deep engagement within the context of youth research to understand how this approach can be applied to better promote youth wellbeing in the Global South. This is of especial importance and interest for young people living in fast-urbanising contexts, where previously relied upon supports are eroding, and where a comparative and systemic analysis of RWB could contribute to accelerating the likelihood of wellbeing outcomes.

## **7 THEMATIC AREAS OF THE CALL CENTRED ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN URBAN AND PERI-URBAN ENVIRONMENTS**

Youth in the Global South face material differences in social, economic, and political contexts that distinctly shape the nature, obstacles, and opportunities for their wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> Compared to their Northern counterparts, children, adolescents and young adults in the Global South face significant hardship, such as joblessness and poverty (Cooper et al., 2021; Ferguson, 2015), digital inequality through restricted access to digital infrastructure and services (Helsper & Smirnova, 2019; Kulkarni, 2019; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), and higher levels of exposure and poorer infrastructures to mitigate the effects of climate change (Bezu et al., 2020; Crandon et al., 2022; de Pinto et al., 2020; Dey & Balachandran, 2021; Ma et al., 2022; Nkrumah, 2021). Not only does this have implications for physical wellbeing, but also results in diminished mental health and more extreme social vulnerabilities<sup>4</sup> that impact on suicide and death rates (Chukwuere et al., 2021; Orri et al., 2022; WHO, 2022a; 2022b; Toyama et al., 2022; Sarriera & Bedin, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> Youth of the Global South face serious health challenges given the precariousness of public healthcare structures in the many contexts of, and the social ills related to poverty – for instance, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse (see, for example, Reddy et al., 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Associated with social positionality and intersectionality – for example, gender, disability, LGBTQI, different cultures in wellbeing, religion, race and caste (see, for example, Francis, 2020; Klaasen, 2017; Neil & Shapiro,



Drawing from these insights, four thematic areas were selected to frame the research programme, as entry points for strengthening RWB theory through building empirical insights from young people's experiences and how they address the challenges they face. These are considered global transformations or megatrends and/or key contemporary challenges that have implications for society at large, but particularly the relational wellbeing of young people. Thus the four thematic focus areas for the u'Good programme are:

1. **Young people and livelihoods**, the intention is to understand the global context where regular employment is increasingly unavailable, how young people are assembling their livelihoods, and what new markers of purpose, meaning, and identity are emerging.
2. **Young people and mental health**, where ruptures in traditional forms of socialisation are apparent, and community and face-to-face interaction have diminished, how young people are navigating and constructing the role of connectedness to positive identities and wellbeing.
3. **Young people and digitalisation**, through which the increasing role of digitalisation in society is acknowledged, where access to and inequality in the digital realm will significantly shape opportunities for wellbeing, and where it is important to understand how young people construct themselves as relational subjects in a digital age.
4. **Young people and climate change**, the goal is to explore how young people's wellbeing can be sustained and advanced in response to the climate emergency, and where for vulnerable groups, including young people compounding factors endanger their wellbeing with serious implications for their physical and mental health, education pathways, and livelihood prospects.

Prospective projects should propose research engaging and interrogating the RWB approach in relation to one or more of these four thematic areas identified. *(As highlighted in the introduction, proposals may also choose to test and critique the RWB approach purely from a theoretical vantage point; i.e. not directly related to the thematic areas.)*

Literature pertaining to the four thematic areas is summarised in brief below, with a particular focus on why each of these is important as thematic areas for young people; how they relate to RWB in the academic literature; the gaps in the literature; and what opportunities applying an RWB approach in these areas would offer.

## 7.1 Young People and Livelihoods

'Work' is increasingly occurring at the margins of our traditional understanding of the formal labour market, and youth in particular are challenged to navigate their livelihoods, most of them outside of this structure. Livelihoods research (especially from the South) points to the fact that the majority of the population (especially young people) are involved in survivalist strategies at the margins of society in conditions of extreme insecurity and precariousness (Tokman, 2007; Sanchez, 2006).<sup>5</sup>

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2011). Given the significance of gender in shaping the lives of young people, and how it can have very serious consequences for their wellbeing and exposure to gender-based violence, this must form part of exploration. The same applies to young LGBTQI people. Not only is suicide one of the leading causes of death amongst queer youth in South Africa but there are contexts in the Global South where being gay, lesbian or gender non-conforming can legally be punished by death. The same argument can be made for disabled youth (in all contexts), youth of different religions and caste (e.g. India), and different ethnic groups (e.g. Rwanda).

<sup>5</sup> Here Ferguson (2015: 94) refers to the fact that the 'work' of surviving, often in Southern African contexts, revolves around "accessing or making claims on the resources of others", thus through social claims distributing incomes secured elsewhere.

The review of the literature at the intersection of young people, wellbeing, and livelihoods revealed a range of weaknesses and gaps. Livelihoods research incorporates wellbeing and a contextual understanding of impact and outcomes, but u'Good research programme offers the opportunity to: (1) improve conceptualisation of the components of livelihoods, and the linkages between livelihoods and wellbeing (particularly the contribution of RWB to livelihoods) (Porter et al., 2010; Renzaho et al., 2020); (2) address poor conceptualisation of access (a central construct in livelihoods research), which is critical to understanding how young people navigate livelihoods; (3) address gaps in meta-analytic and comparative research on livelihoods that could illustrate the extent to which relationality impact on livelihoods; and (4) expand 'limited' work in the Global South.

A set of studies hoping to further research at the intersection of young people, livelihoods and RWB would thus need to be cognisant and address the limitations of extant literature, but also emphasise RWB. Applying an RWB approach to research on the livelihoods of young people should thus: (1) employ an approach to research that acknowledges relationality; (2) foreground analysis and understanding of RWB (3) generate knowledge on the relationship between livelihoods and different dimensions of wellbeing; (4) engage explicitly with how 'young people' are defined and applied in the research project; and (5) expand 'limited' work at the intersection of the constructs of young people, livelihoods and RWB in many of the focus countries.

## **7.2 Young People and Mental Health**

Mental health has become a growing public health priority worldwide. Defined as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community”, it is an integral component of everyday life (WHO, 2022a). Mental health is multifaceted. It refers to more than the absence of psychological disease, encompassing our abilities to subjectively and collectively engage with everyday life to make decisions and enact behaviours or practices that can move us towards realising our capabilities, confronting obstacles, and fostering positive outcomes (Dhami et al., 2021; WHO, 2022a).

Particularly in relation to mental health, the review of the literature indicated: (1) a focus on prevalence and perspectives on mental health conditions, rather than situating mental health within the relational ecology of experience or development; (2) a strong focus on anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, but fewer studies on suicides in low- to middle-income countries where most young people live; and (3) that studies on determinants of mental health conditions primarily highlight the roles of disconnected social relationships, adverse conditions, and individual factors as drivers of mental health conditions, rather than better understanding protective factors and how mental health is understood, prioritised, and promoted.

While the literature sheds light on the prevalence and determinants of mental health conditions, there is thus a paucity of studies that explore mental health and mental health conditions within the relational ecology of experience and development. The U'Good research programme thus contributes to this gap in the literature by applying the RWB framework to the study of mental health and mental health conditions. Applying an RWB lens means exploring the interplay between various factors that promote or hinder mental health. In this way, it is not only which factors predict mental health outcomes that are considered, but also how these factors co-exist (or not) to influence mental health or illness. Conceptually, youth mental health is thus nested within an ecology of bidirectional systems, pushing researchers, interventionists, and policymakers to think beyond the individual domain, mainly towards promoting healthy environments and happy lives. For example, a study conducted in Vietnam showed that school-going youth who experienced bullying were almost twice more likely to experience depressive symptoms than those who had not been bullied (Le et al., 2019). While this

knowledge is important to understand the factors that predispose depression amongst adolescents, an RWB approach may also consider the role of the context (e.g., school environment) within which the bullying occurs, and the factors within the context that may facilitate or prevent bullying behaviours. These may be individual factors, socio-cultural factors, or gendered norms that perpetuate violent behaviours. The adolescent's relationship to the context, such as the availability of mental health-directed support networks to protect the adolescent, could also be unpacked.

### **7.3 Young People and Digitalisation**

Research into digitalisation covers a broad range of independent subjects which separately influence the lives of young people. These include, but are not limited to, digital inclusion, online learning, the future of work, and online behaviour. In the Global South, issues about digital access dominate the discourse as countries continue to grapple with digital inequality, where pervasive social inequalities are represented digitally (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). The digital opportunities for young people are also largely dependent on their state of relational wellbeing, where their wellbeing is affected by various systems and relationships, including policy frameworks, budgetary support, communication systems, and the efforts of public and private sectors to invest in accessible infrastructure.

Despite the complex set of factors affecting young people in the digital age, particularly in the Global South, digitalisation research is focused mainly on the developed world, with limited attention given to issues of digital inequality. Consequently, policies are constructed with a developed world focus, ignoring the unique local conditions and inequalities of the Global South (Kuehn, 2021) and, by extension, the youth in such countries. Access to and participation in the digital economy is unequal, and digital economic participation is not automatic (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Thus, while much of the Global North literature focuses on the very important social implications of digitalisation, the review shows that for the Global South, much of the concern of young people and their wellbeing is structured around inequality of access to even basic information technology infrastructures.

Since research into how young people engage with technology is primarily focused on developed countries, resulting in policies that ignore the unique local conditions and inequalities of the Global South, u'Good research programme offers important opportunities to strengthen our understanding of the impact of digitalisation on youth wellbeing as it will allow for: (1) fuller examination of digital inequalities, and identification of how digital transformation policies can recognise and address such disparities; (2) understanding the nuances of knowledge transfer and strategies crucial for the Global South to take advantage of existing knowledge advances through South-South and North-South partnerships; (3) exploration of inclusive, high quality online learning that could address some social disparities in contexts where institutions contend with minimal resources; (4) showing how digital work will continue to evolve, but equally how jobs should ensure decency and dignity, and how young people conceptualise and experience these; and (5) clearer understanding of how sustained technology usage impact how young people engage their peers and situate their identities, and how this interfaces with their relational wellbeing from Global South contexts (Singh et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Kamal & Kamal, 2018).

### **7.4 Young People and Climate Change**

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These can be the result of natural processes; however, since the 1800s, human economic and related activities have been the main drivers of climate change. According to the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal

historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals" (IPCC, 2023, p.4). The IPCC further notes that the hardest hit by climate impact are regions in the Global South, as well as vulnerable groups, including youth. The review of the literature reveals that there is limited research combining RWB and climate change, and that young people are usually side-lined. Furthermore, much of the literature on climate change and the wellbeing of young people is centred on health, with a particularly narrow focus on mental rather than physical health (Charlson et al., 2021). As such, analysis of what is happening in research on climate change and wellbeing specific to urban youth in the Global South needs to be mindful of the existing focus on mental health risks, and the dearth of research beyond this.

The RWB approach has the potential to generate much needed empirical insights into the impending challenges of climate change for young people in the Global South. In the context of increasing awareness of climate risk and vulnerability across the world, the concept of wellbeing as "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" takes on new meaning (Dodge et al., 2012). Climate change as a thematic area for understanding youth wellbeing is particularly relevant given that young people are most vulnerable to climate impact, most actively engaged in activism on this issue, and most invested in future effects of climate justice.

The broader understanding offered by a relational approach to wellbeing is thus an opportunity to respond to key research gaps in both youth studies and climate change studies, including but not limited to: (1) moving beyond activism in research on youth and climate change; (2) expanding the focus from mental health to a more encompassing understanding of young people's wellbeing, inclusive of both physical and mental health, as well as intersecting social vulnerabilities such as gender and livelihood precarity; and (3) identifying the interventions, policies, and decision-making mechanisms that can be put in place to mitigate the impact of climate change on young people.

Possible avenues for organising future research responses include first distinguishing between the impact of direct and indirect exposure to climate change, and the different ways in which these impact young people's wellbeing; and second, adopting a social-ecological theoretical framework for more targeted research interventions into the individual characteristics of young people, and how these interact relationally with a structure of systems. Together, this approach can bring closer attention to some of the more specific experiences of urban youth in the Global South, as well as begin working towards a systemic, comparative approach to understanding the risk and protective factors affecting young people's likelihood of experiencing wellbeing impact.

## **8 BROAD RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE CALL**

It is important to recognise that RWB as applied in this programme of research is reflective of a wider body of scholarship that has evolved out of a deepening understanding of personhood, in contrast to those espoused by individualistic and historical Western theories. This is important in framing the types of explorations and research that can build, test, stretch, and strengthen RWB as ways of being, knowing and doing (ontology, epistemology, and methodology). These more ecological, collective, cultural, and systemic ways of thinking about what it means to be human, what it means to be happy, and what it means to have purpose, have found expression in many disciplines. Furthermore, Global South theorists have highlighted the structures and components of societies and wellbeing as being distinctly different to the Global North contexts. This is also from whence the methodological and epistemological imperatives of studying RWB originate. If wellbeing is located in an understanding of personhood as inherently relational and co-constructed, this requires methodologies that reflect and 'access' that relationality and co-constructed-ness. They also need to respond to emancipatory

objectives which emerge from and align with a tradition of scholarship that understands the purpose of research and intervention as a tool towards achieving social justice (Swartz & Nyamnjoh, 2018).

However, such approaches are relatively new within considerations of wellbeing, and thus are ripe for further testing and development. The following list provides potential areas that can be explored. However, these should be considered as guidelines and issues that the programme hopes to engage with, and not requirements for what applications should address. Importantly, they provide examples of theoretical and methodological questions that would contribute to a deep, nuanced, and useful understanding of RWB.

1. **Resilience:** If the RWB approach proves to be theoretically convincing, empirically insightful and practically useful, it will inevitably require rethinking other concepts that are commonly referred to when efforts are made to improve the lives of young people or understand how they are achieving wellbeing. One such concept is resilience. While it has been noted that RWB and resilience can be linked) to the mainstream understanding of it follows from an individualistic rather than a relational approach(Sinha et al., 2022). What are the RWB implications for discussions on resilience?
2. **Scale:**
  - a. Space: How can wellbeing be thought of differently in different spaces? Can different aspects of wellbeing change in their relative importance at different times in different geographical, political, and cultural spaces? How can analysis connect different spaces of consideration together?
  - b. Time: As for space, and interacting with it, what are the different ways to account for time in research on RWB? Is it possible to chart intergenerational and perhaps collective, even national histories and the transmission of trauma or potential for wellbeing that are time-dependent?
2. **Systems and complexity approaches:** Recognising the close association between RWB, and systems and complexity thinking, how can scholarship be utilised in these areas to further develop relational approaches to wellbeing? How should systems and complexity thinking affect research methodology – for example, in the understanding of boundaries as spaces of connection rather than limits, and in exploring emergence and systemic change over time? How should systems and complexity thinking affect the understanding of wellbeing, and how could it be tracked or measured to reflect interconnection and complexity?
3. **Collective wellbeing:** How can a relational conception of collective wellbeing be developed, in a manner that it is not the sum of individual wellbeing, but that can account for the distinct properties and dynamics of wellbeing at a community or institutional level, while recognising internal difference and diversity?
4. **Intersectionality:** How can relational understanding of intersectionality be developed, which can grasp the co-constitution of different aspects of identity, rather than aggregating them through a structural metaphor?
5. **Hypothesis:** The RWB approach as described by White (2010) rests on an underlying hypothesis that personal and interpersonal wellbeing depends on social justice and ecological balance. How can this be tested? How can it be explored in real time? Is it possible to track empirically the interrelations between personal, societal, and environmental drivers of wellbeing?

6. **Power:** How can power be embedded/considered into RWB analyses, while not losing the sense of fluidity? Gergen (2009) argues that political mobilisation tends to produce oppositional constructions of identity, which deny inter-relationship. How can power be theorised and operationalised in action to advance wellbeing, including political action?
7. **Fluidity:** How can the study of relationality be done in a way that does not fix relationships, and does not, for example, make ‘the network’ the new unit of analysis? How can this be done while using quantitative measures or markers (e.g., social network analysis)?
8. **Measures:**
  - a. What are the most effective ways to measure and track young people’s wellbeing using a relational approach?
  - b. How can interaction effects be traced – for example, between material, relational, and subjective dimensions of wellbeing; or between personal, societal, and environmental drivers of wellbeing?
  - c. To what degree can or should there be an attempt to ascribe causal influence to these interaction effects?
9. **Process:**
  - a. How can RWB as a process support research and desired results?
  - b. Can research on RWB integrate RWB processes at all levels?
  - c. Can or does RWB produce relational wellbeing in the context of research for systems change?
  - d. Can RWB result in building sustainable structural change over time and within and across countries in relation to fostering the wellbeing of young people?

## 9 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles and values have guided and shaped how the programme has been conceptualised. Applications should clearly demonstrate how these are integrated in the proposals, as appropriate.

### 9.1 Partnership and Collaboration

Proposals should be characterised by equal partnership and sustainable collaboration among the research team members and non-academic stakeholders (i.e. youth organisations, non-governmental organisations, community groups, government agencies, etc.). This includes inter-institutional and trans-sectoral cooperation; a balanced contribution to the proposed research; gender equality; a focus on capacity building; and a frequent exchange between the research team members and stakeholders.

Particularly, applications must adhere to the Commission for research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE)<sup>6</sup> or equivalent principles that seek to promote research partnerships that result in long-term and successful contribution to sustainable development<sup>7</sup>. The mission is towards solving global and local challenges through efficient, effective, and equitable partnerships with institutions in developing and transition countries.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://kfpe.scnat.ch/en>

<sup>7</sup> It is possible to highlight the alignment most distinctly to the following sustainable development goals: SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities, SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong institutions and explorations of ways to support SDG 17: Partnerships for achieving the SD Goals.

## 9.2 A focus on impact

The research conducted in this Call should have relevance and potential for impact beyond the academic world, such as in societal, technical, economical, or cultural realms. Societal impact is never solely an outcome of knowledge and insight from research. Furthermore, societal impact is often only realised in the years after a research project has been concluded. Research teams should consider how relevant stakeholders can be involved in, or benefit from, the design and realisation of the proposed research project.

To further enhance the potential for impact of the proposed research, the application should state how approaches for achieving impact are integrated into the research design and conducted by the research team in engagement with stakeholders. To this end, applicants are asked to include an Impact Plan that sets out the potential for impact of the proposed research. The Impact Plan approach to knowledge utilisation should be integrated into the research design and serve as an aid to increase the impact potential of the proposed research.

The Impact Plan consists of the following elements:

- **Productive interactions:** Exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant. Examples of productive interactions include the formulation of research questions and approaches jointly with potential end-users (co-design); and joint execution of research projects and interactive dialogue on research results (co-creation). To foster greater potential for policy impact, research projects should include key policy stakeholders at proposal stage that can build relationships with key individuals throughout the project, to optimise uptake and impact.
- A **theory of change (ToC)** describes how the research process can contribute to societal/economic impact, taking into account the context, actors involved, and describing the sequence of logically-linked consequential relations. Developing a ToC in a joint effort with research partners and stakeholders allows for making explicit which (and whose) problem is being tackled, and how the desired change is perceived to happen through research efforts. Projections on expected change will be based on a myriad of assumptions; documenting these assumptions allows for reflection on whether and how expected pathways to impact remain adequate or need adjustment. A ToC is not fixed, but rather reflected on continuously throughout the research process. For this reason, it is also used as part of the monitoring, evaluation, and learning trajectory.
- The **impact pathway**, which is part of the ToC, is the visualisation of the change process following from research execution as described in the ToC. It makes explicit how the research activities will lead to results (output), and how exchange of knowledge and the uptake of research output will contribute to desired changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities of partners and stakeholders (outcome) that are considered essential to achieving the desired impact. Grant-holders will need to describe their approaches to relational thinking and working in their impact pathway and strategic activity plan.
- **Risk mitigation plan**, all applicants will be required to describe the intended and unintended risks and outcomes associated with their work along with the strategies to mitigate the challenges and promote positive outcomes. These risks, outcomes and mitigating strategies will be documented, reviewed and discussed through ongoing engagements in the CoP and with thematic leads as far possible. This will facilitate active and ongoing learnings across the



duration of the programme. Through building long-term networking and collaborations, the CoP will also enable meaningful and long-term impact on the lives of young people in the Global South, beyond the life of the programme.

- A **strategic activity plan** spells out how the proposed productive interactions contribute to achieving outcomes. Outputs do not automatically lead to outcomes; thus, strategies are needed for the research teams to plan and monitor how their efforts will enhance the potential for outcomes. This planning should include specific activities for:
  - *Stakeholder engagement*: Who are the relevant stakeholders to engage with according to context analysis, how are the productive interactions organised and when?
  - *Communication strategy*: How are engagement dialogues organised and results exchanged and translated, and whose responsibility is this?
  - *Monitoring, evaluation and learning*: How are results of activities monitored and evaluated, such that assumptions can be tested, and activities adjusted accordingly, and whose responsibility is this?
  - *Capacity strengthening*: How are required capacities (of research team and stakeholders) strengthened in order to achieve the outcomes, how is this organised, and whose responsibility is this?

An important part of the ToC and impact pathway is to identify assumptions and make these explicit. This concerns assumptions of the members of the research team as well as stakeholders. Making these assumptions explicit can help you identify where change may happen in a different way than you envision, and where you may find that you need adjustment.

### 9.3 Partnering and collaborating with Young People

Applicants are required to indicate how young people will be meaningfully and realistically included in the project implementation and should strive to address aspects such as:

- 1) How will the applicant collaborate with young people throughout the process?
- 2) How will the applicant decide which young people will be involved?
- 3) Who do you anticipate them being?
- 4) What types of decisions will the young people have the authority to make? What decisions will be made collaboratively? And without them?
- 5) How will they benefit?
- 6) What will you project in the budget for this collaborative work?
- 7) What challenge and risks are anticipated?

Applicants are expected to include a strategy or approach to partner and collaborate meaningfully with young people as part of the application. The strategies outlined below serve as guidance; applicants are free to devise any strategy suitable to their research project:

- Providing training and support with and for young people to help them understand the research process and their role in it. This can include providing information on the research topic, the data collection methods, and the potential outcomes of the research.
- Taking time to build relationships of trust and respect with young people before the research begins, and being responsive to their needs and concerns throughout the research process. This will include involving young people in the design and planning of the research; for example, in setting the research agenda and research questions, developing data collection tools, and determining the methods of analysis.



- Using age-appropriate and culturally-sensitive methods of data collection and analysis, such as visual or creative methods (e.g. storytelling or drawing) to engage young people and to make the research process more accessible.
- Using participatory methods of data analysis to involve young people in the interpretation and dissemination of the research findings by, for example, involving them in the analysis of the data, and providing opportunities for them to present the research findings to other stakeholders.
- Recognising and valuing the contributions of young people. This can include providing them with credit for their participation in the research and ensuring that the research findings are used to create positive change for young people.
- Creating opportunities for young people to provide feedback on their experience of the research projects in which they are involved and reflect on the impact of their participation. This will include assessing how well the research projects are working in involving young people and what could be improved.
- Ensuring that young people involved in the programme have the resources they need in order to make a meaningful contribution, including access to data for virtual meetings, transport for in person meetings, and compensation for their time when necessary.

#### **9.4 Ecological Mitigation**

The design and implementation of research projects will be required to take cognisance of the ecological impact of their activities and develop strategies/plans for how to mitigate these. This would include taking into account the nature and extent of resource consumption (e.g. water, energy, land, trees, single-use plastics, and packaging), and the generation of waste and pollution through project activities, and making choices that reduce the negative impact on natural ecosystems and exacerbate the climate crisis. Examples of strategies to reduce consumption and minimise and manage the generation and waste and pollution include the following:

- Conducting research in an efficient and streamlined manner, to minimise the use of resources and generation of waste;
- Utilising digital technologies, such as online meeting platforms and collaboration tools, to reduce the need for travel and physical meetings;
- Refusing or minimising the use of disposable or single-use materials and equipment, and instead opting for reusable or durable alternatives;
- Re-using or repurposing containers and other equipment where possible;
- Repairing rather than replacing faulty equipment; and
- Implementing recycling and composting programmes to reduce the amount of waste generated.

Applicants are required to include an ecological impact mitigation plan as part of the application. This should also consider who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the plan; what resources (financial, other) might be required; education and training for project teams and beneficiaries; and what trade-offs might be involved as a result of the implementation of the plan.

#### **9.5 Engage implications of Gender and Diversity**

Research that focuses on young people and RWB should clearly consider its implications at the intersection of gender and diversity, if it is to find meaningful use among its target audiences. Research proposals must demonstrate considerations of gender and diversity, including sex as a biological variable and gender as a socio-cultural factor in research projects. These considerations will find effect in how the research teams are composed; how the research is conducted to consider sex and gender

as units of analysis; and how these will be given effect in how the projects are executed. How these considerations are integrated should be clearly articulated across the proposal.

The following resources may be consulted to guide applicants:

- How to integrate sex and gender into research:
  - <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50836.html>
- Methods of sex, gender, and intersectional analysis:
  - <http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/methods-sex-and-gender-analysis.html>
- Integration of the sex/gender dimension into research and teaching content:
  - <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/integration-gender-dimension-research-and-teaching-content>

## 10 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Each project team must nominate a principal investigator (PI) who will serve as a project team leader and bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as timely delivery of technical and financial reports to the u'Good Call Secretariat. PI's are responsible for informing the rest of the research team members of any feedback received on the eligibility of the application, review outcomes, and any further information concerning the project. The (knowledge) institution of the PI will be the main beneficiary.

- This Call is open to applications from single or multi-country research teams where the PIs (1) must be residents, or (2) form part of the diaspora, of the 12 focus countries of this Call, and (3) have any of the 12 focus countries as a geographic focus of the research project. Note that applications that do not meet this criterion will not be considered.
- This Call is also open to applicants who currently hold a grant from Fondation Botnar and whose work aligns with the aims and objectives of this Call and meet the eligibility criteria outlined above. Fondation Botnar grant-holders who wish to expand their research teams are encouraged to forge partnerships with interested external applicants. The u'Good Call Secretariat will assist to facilitate the match-making process. See Section 12 for details.

Below is the comprehensive list of eligibility criteria for this Call. The criteria apply to all applicants irrespective of the selected funding track. The eligibility criteria are grouped into three categories; that is, eligibility as it relates to: (1) PIs and their research teams, (2) submitted research proposals, and (3) technical aspects.

### 10.1 General Eligibility Criteria for Applicants

- Principal investigators must be in possession of a PhD and may either be emerging researchers (up to seven years post-PhD) or established researchers (eight-plus years post-PhD), and must be based at a research institution (i.e. university or public sector research institute).
- Project teams must be based in one of the 12 focus countries, be part of the diaspora of one of the 12 focus countries, or must show that they work in one of the countries even if they are affiliated to or based at an institution outside of the focus countries.
- Project teams are expected to include non-academic research partners (e.g. from non-governmental organisations, community groups, industry, government agencies, etc.) and to foster wellbeing, co-creation and co-learning. These partnerships must extend beyond the life and scope of the project. Evidence of such active engagement will be important in the assessment of project proposals and may be demonstrated through consultative,

participatory, inclusive, collaborative, and emancipatory actions by the project team (see Section 9 which covers the guiding principles underpinning this Call). Research partners from these non-academic institutions cannot lead the project or serve as PIs.

- Project teams are expected to incorporate capacity development (i.e. the development of young scholars such as Masters or Doctoral students and/or Postdoctoral fellows), and to work towards a multi-pronged approach to capacity strengthening of young people, early career researchers, and networks within and beyond the u'Good programme.

## 10.2 General Eligibility Criteria for Submitted Proposals

- Submitted proposals should centre young people and relational wellbeing.
- Submitted proposals may:
  - Focus on one or more of the four thematic areas of the Call; namely: young people and livelihoods, mental health, digitalisation, and/or climate change (see Section 7 for details on these four themes); and/or
  - Address the more conceptual basis of RWB.
- Submitted proposals should be interdisciplinary (integrating information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialised knowledge), transdisciplinary (integrating the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context), and trans-sectoral (involving the academic, research, economic, societal, and community sectors, as appropriate). Proposals should therefore be rooted in transdisciplinarity, multi-dimensional, systems thinking, context and reflexivity (see Section 9.2).
- Submitted proposals must be young people-centred, meaning that they must include young people as part of the research team. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as incorporating young people's voices, ideas, and lived experiences throughout the project cycle (i.e. from design through implementation and evaluation) via participatory, action and emancipatory research methodologies (see Section 9.3 on approaches to partnering with young people).
- Submitted proposals should take cognisance of the ecological impact of the project activities and should include strategies/plans for how to mitigate these (see Section 9.4).
- Submitted proposals must demonstrate consideration for gender and diversity including sex as a biological variable and gender as a socio-cultural factor in research projects (see Section 9.5 for further details).

## 10.3 Technical Eligibility Criteria

- Each PI (and research team) is allowed to submit only one proposal and apply to only one funding track. The PI cannot participate as a research team member in other proposals.
- All submissions (research initiatives, expressions of interest, and full proposals) must be written in English.
- All submissions (research initiatives, expressions of interest, and full proposals) must be made before the indicated deadlines as highlighted in Section 5 of this document via the link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>.
- The project duration must not exceed three (3) years (36 months).

Further to the general eligibility criteria above, there are additional eligibility criteria relevant specifically to applicants applying under the multi-country funding track as outlined below.

## 10.4 Eligibility for Multi-Country Research Teams

- Multi-country research teams must include a minimum of three countries from the 12 focus countries of this Call. There is no maximum limit to the number of countries that can participate in a multi-country funding track.
- Funding requested by a PI leading a multi-country research team cannot represent more than 50% of the funding requested by the research team as a whole.

## 11 PREPARING AN APPLICATION

This Call for proposals consists of three main phases:

1. Online registration for partner search (not mandatory)
2. An expression of interest submission (mandatory)
3. A full proposal submission (mandatory)

The full application procedure consists of the following steps:

- *Online registration for partner search*
- *Submission of the expressions of interest*
- Eligibility check and consideration of the expressions of interest
- Assessment of the expressions of interest and feedback to applicants
- *Submission of the full proposals*
- Eligibility check and consideration of the full proposals
- Peer review by External Expert Reviewers (EER)
- Assessment and ranking of full proposals
- Funding decision-making.

Each step is summarised below.

### Online registration for partner search

Applicants interested in finding research partners are invited to register on OurSpace [<https://www.ourspacefondationbotnar.org>] and connect with other researchers from the 12 focal countries who share similar interests and who are also seeking collaborations. Registering on OurSpace is not compulsory. This process aims to assist researchers with finding suitable partners and form effective research teams. See section 12 for further details.

### Submission of an expression of interest

The submission of an expression of interest is compulsory for this Call for proposals. An expression of interest is a concise proposal, submitted online through the NRF Online Submission System, and must be received by the u'Good Call Secretariat before the indicated deadline. After submitting an expression of interest, the PI will receive a confirmation of receipt. See Section 13 for further details.

### Eligibility check and consideration of the expressions of interest

The applicant will receive confirmation of receipt from the u'Good Call Secretariat as soon as the application is submitted. The u'Good Call Secretariat will then determine if the expression of interest meets the outlined conditions. Please bear in mind that within two weeks after the submission deadline, you may be requested to make amendments to your submitted expression of interest should it not meet all conditions for submission. Applicants will be given five (5) working days to make amendments, and no second opportunity will be granted in this regard. See Section 13 for further details.

#### Assessment of the expressions of interest

The u'Good Advisory Group will assess the eligible expressions of interest, without making use of external reviewers, according to the criteria in Section 13.2. The u'Good Advisory Group will then present a substantiated advice to the u'Good Call Secretariat regarding which research teams to invite to submit a full proposal. The decision of the u'Good Advisory Group is definitive. Research teams whose expressions of interest are judged not likely to be awarded grants will be notified that they are not invited to submit a full proposal.

#### Submission of the full proposals

For the submission of the full proposal, a standard online form is available through the NRF Online Submission System called the NRF Connect. The applicant must adhere to the questions stated on this form, the procedure given in the explanatory notes, and to the required maximum number of words and pages. The complete application form must be received by the u'Good Call Secretariat before the indicated deadline. No applications will be accepted after the submission deadline. An email confirming the receipt of the application will be sent to the PI after the closing date for submitting applications, the PI will receive a confirmation see Section 14 for further details.

#### Eligibility check and consideration of the full proposals

As soon as possible after you have submitted your proposal, you will hear from the u'Good Call Secretariat whether your full proposal will be taken into consideration. The u'Good Call Secretariat will determine this based on several administrative-technical criteria and will only take your full proposal into consideration if it meets all outlined conditions. You are requested to be available during the two weeks after submitting your full proposal to enter any possible administrative corrections so that your full proposal can (still) meet the conditions for submission. You will be given the opportunity to make the corrections, and you will be given five (5) working days to do this. If needed, a second opportunity may be granted with a maximum of two working days. See Section 14 for further details.

#### Peer review by external reviewers (remote)

The u'Good Call Secretariat will request input from at least three external reviewers. These are independent experts in the subject of the Call. They will assess the full proposal based on the assessment criteria stated in the Call for proposals (see Section 14.3). Each external reviewer will submit a reviewer's report of full proposals that were allocated to them. The u'Good Call Secretariat will therefore receive three reviewers' reports per proposal. Applicants will be requested to suggest external reviewers. A maximum of three external reviewers may be proposed by each applicant by registering their details on the NRF Online Submission System when submitting the full proposal. The u'Good Call Secretariat reserves the right to not approach any of the suggested reviewers.

#### Assessment and ranking by an International Panel of Experts

An International Panel of Experts will be appointed for the final assessment of your full proposal. Your full proposal, and the external reviewers' reports will be submitted for assessment by this Panel. The Panel members will provide substantiated written comments on the full proposal, based on the assessment criteria (see Section 14.3), and will give the full proposal a numerical score per assessment criterion. Following the discussion, the Panel will draw up a written recommendation addressed to the u'Good Advisory Group about the quality and ranking of the full proposals.

#### Funding decision-making by u'Good Advisory Group

The u'Good Advisory Group will assess the procedure followed and the advice from the International Panel of Experts. It will subsequently determine the final qualifications and take a decision about awarding or rejecting the full proposals. The decision becomes definitive when the u'Good Advisory Group members have come to the same provisional decision.

## 12 ONLINE REGISTRATION FOR PARTNER SEARCH

Before submitting the expression of interest proposal, applicants are invited to announce their areas of research interest and research ideas through OurSpace online platform [<https://www.ourspacefoundationbotnar.org>]. This may enable potential partners to contact an applicant and possibly join a research team or expand a research team (in the case of existing Foundation Botnar funded projects), or it may even give reason to merge certain research ideas. This registration is not compulsory. The platform is meant for those researchers interested in the call but struggling to find partners. Applicants have until 28 February 2024 to utilise this space for partner search.

## 13 SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The steps involved in writing your expression of interest application are:

- Log onto the NRF Connect (<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>) and create an account. Most of the applicants based at South African institutions of higher learning will already have an account.
- Complete the online form. You can save the application and return to it at a later stage.
- Once you are satisfied with all aspects of your application you can submit it.
- Your submitted application will be received by the u'Good Call Secretariat.
- It is important to start with your application on the online system on time as additional information may be requested.
- You must write your application in English.

An application can only be submitted through the NRF Connect. Applications that are not submitted through this system will not be taken into consideration.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration. Please contact [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za) for enquiries.

PIs must inform their institutions about the submission of the application as the institution will be expected to accept the granting conditions of this Call and to fully engage in the pre-awarding due diligence process which is described in section 17 below. Funds will not be made to individual researchers. Institutions where the PI is based will serve as a beneficiary. Therefore, PIs will be requested to provide Letters of Support from their institutions during the full proposal phase.

The u'Good Call Secretariat will assess your application against the conditions listed below. Your application will only be admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets these conditions. After submitting your application, we request you to be available to implement any possible administrative/technical corrections so that you can (still) meet the conditions for submission.

### 13.1 Conditions for the Expressions of Interest

- The PI and the collaboration partners meet the conditions stated in Section 10.
- The online application form is correct, complete and filled out according to the instructions.
- The application is submitted via the NRF Connect.
- The application is received on or before the deadline set.
- The application is written in English.

- The proposed project has a duration of at most three (3) years.
- The requested budget falls within the funding limits set for this Call.

All eligible expressions of interest will be substantively assessed by the u’Good Advisory Group based on the criteria listed below.

### 13.2 Assessment Criteria for Expressions of Interest

Please note that selection of successful Eol and projects will be made based on merit and quality with no predetermined criteria or targets for geographic representivity to cover all Call focus countries.

- Fit within the thematic focus of this Call (60 percent weighting)
- Scientific importance of the proposed project (20 percent weighting)
- Societal relevance of the proposed project (20 percent weighting)

The assessment criteria are further operationalised below:

#### Fit within the thematic focus of this Call (60 percent weighting)

- The research team addresses a problem relevant to one or more of the thematic foci of the Call.
- Adequacy of transdisciplinary research approach.
- Young people-focus using the RWB approach.
- Takes gender and diversity into consideration.
- Inclusion of human capacity development.

#### Scientific importance of the proposed project (20 percent weighting)

- The problem definition is scientifically important.
- There is a plausible likelihood of a scientific breakthrough.

#### Societal relevance of the proposed project (20 percent weighting)

- The proposal is societally relevant for the Global South context.
- Adequacy of trans-sectoral research approach.
- There is a plausible likelihood of a societal breakthrough.

## 14 SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT OF FULL PROPOSALS

The steps involved in writing your application are:

- Log onto the NRF Connect (<https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>), and complete the online form. You can save the application and return to it at a later stage.
- Once you are satisfied with all aspects of your application you can submit it.
- Your submitted application will be received by the u’Good Call Secretariat.
- It is important to start with your application on the online system on time as additional information may be requested.
- You must write your application in English.

### 14.1 Compulsory Attachments

- Curriculum vitae of PI, research team members, non-academic stakeholders, and additional partners (if part of the research team). CVs should be a maximum of 3 pages in length. There

is no template for compiling the CV. Applicants should decide on what to highlight in relation to skills required.

- Detailed budget breakdown.
- A Letter of Support from the head of the PI's institution (i.e. president/executive officer/executive secretary/director general). The letter should specify the nature and level of support that can be provided by the institution in terms of technical, financial, and administrative contribution towards the project resources. It should also indicate the commitment of the institution to actively and timeously engage in pre-awarding and post-awarding administrative requirements, such as due diligence processes.
- An impact plan outlining the project's ToC and impact pathway.
- Intended and unintended risks and outcomes identification and mitigation strategy.
- Strategy/plan for meaningful youth participation.
- An ecological impact mitigation plan.
- Draft consortium agreement outlining internal organisation and management of the research team, intellectual property arrangements, data management, ethical considerations, settlement of internal disputes, etc.

Attachments must be uploaded to the NRF Connect separately from the application form. The system will provide instructions on how to upload attachments. All attachments, except for the budget, must be submitted as open document format (ODF) or PDF files (without encryption). The requested detailed budget can be submitted in an Excel file. Any attachments other than those above-mentioned are not permitted.

An application can only be submitted through the NRF Connect. Applications that are not submitted through this system will not be considered.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Please contact [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za) for enquiries.

## **14.2 Conditions for the Full Proposal Phase**

Your application will only be admitted to the assessment procedure if it meets the following conditions:

- The PI and the collaboration partners meet the conditions stated in Section 10.
- The expression of interest proposal was approved.
- The budget is drawn up in accordance with the conditions for this Call.
- The online application form is correct, complete and filled out according to the instructions.
- The application is submitted via the NRF Online Submission System.
- The application is received on or before the set deadline.
- The application is written in English.
- The proposed project has a duration of at most three (3) years.
- All of the required attachments have been submitted.

Full proposals that are eligible according to the above stated criteria, submitted correctly, and within the deadline will undergo peer review evaluation by external reviewers and an International Panel of Experts with relevant expertise in the field(s) concerned. Each external reviewer and panel member is independent, and no conflict of Interest will exist in relation to the full proposal evaluated. Each full proposal will be reviewed by at least two external reviewers from different institutions.



Your full proposal and reviewers' reports will be submitted for final assessment by the International Panel of Experts. The composition of this Panel is decided by the representivity Advisory Group. Full proposals are subjected to a thorough quality assessment by the Panel in accordance with the assessment criteria outlined in the next sub-section.

Furthermore, all applicants who are invited to submit full proposals will be required to participate in workshops on participatory action research and understanding of the concept and methodology of RWB.

### **14.3 Assessment Criteria for the Full Proposal Phase**

- Excellence of the research proposal.
- Potential for societal impact.
- Quality and efficiency of the implementation.

The criteria weight is reflected in the attached scorecard. The assessment criteria are further operationalised below:

#### Excellence of the research proposal

- Scientific importance and innovativeness in responding to the research questions.
- Degree to which the proposal fits one or more of the thematic foci of the Call.
- Degree of novelty and innovation in its approach to RWB.
- Rigour of the research design: adequacy, feasibility, and coherence of the research approach and methodology in view of the problem addressed.
- Interdisciplinarity: the proposal incorporates the scientific disciplines required to address the problem, as well as knowledge from outside the scientific community.
- Gender and diversity considerations.
- Ecological mitigation plan.
- Inclusion of capacity strengthening.
- Adequacy of the budget.

#### Potential for societal impact

- Relevance for society and potential for societal breakthroughs.
- Suitable participation of target groups, convincingly responding to their demand.
- Youth-focused using the RWB approach.
- Quality of the impact plan:
  - A clear problem statement, analysis and vision on the desired societal impact;
  - A logical impact pathway presenting plausible pathways to societal impact;
  - Appropriate and feasible strategic activity planning; and
  - Relevant stakeholder involvement in the development and execution of the impact plan.
- Quality of the meaningful collaboration and partnership with young people outlined in strategies/plans (refer to section 9.3).

#### Quality and efficiency of the implementation

- Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including the extent to which the resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables.
- Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management.
- Complementarity of the participants and extent to which the research team brings together the necessary expertise.
- Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.

- The project budget is appropriate to the planned work and allows the achievement of the project goals.

Evaluation scores will be awarded for each of the three main criteria. Sub-criteria are aspects that the experts will consider in the assessment of each criterion. Each criterion will be scored out of 5 and equally weighted. The 1-5 scoring system for each criterion indicates the following assessment:

**1 - Poor.** *The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.*

**2 - Fair.** *The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.*

**3 - Good.** *The proposal addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.*

**4 - Very Good.** *The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.*

**5 - Excellent.** *The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.*

At the end of the review process, the International Panel of Experts will decide on one final ranking list of proposals based on the scores and review reports. The Panel will also deliver a consensus review report to be sent to applicants for each proposal.

## 15 FUNDING REGULATIONS AND ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

All successful projects will receive funding for a maximum period of three years (2025–2027). The total amount of funding (USD7 million) available for this Call will be awarded as follows:

- 15 x single-country research teams, three-year grants at USD200,000 each
- 8 x multi-country research teams, three-year grants at USD500,000 each

The grant disbursement, for each of the funding tracks above, will be made as follows:

### Year 1 (2025)

- The first tranche of 50% of Year 1 grant will be released for payment immediately after the satisfactory completion of pre-award due diligence process for the grant recipient and receipt of the signed *Conditions of Grant* contract by the institution and the grant-holder.
- The second tranche (50%) of Year 1 grant will be released for payment on satisfactory project performance as highlighted in the mid-term report of the first six months of project implementation.

### Year 2 (2026)

- 100% of the grant allocated for Year 2 will be released for payment upon receiving Year 1 performance report (technical and financial) and on condition that more than 75% of Year 1 budget was expensed. Both of these conditions must be met prior to the release of the Year 2 funds.

### Year 3 (2027)

- 80% of Year 3 grant will be released for payment upon receiving Year 2 performance report (technical and financial) and on condition that more than 75% of Year 2 budget was expensed. Both of these conditions must be met prior to the release of the 80%.

- The final tranche of 20% will be paid upon completion of the project and receipt of final performance report (technical and financial).

Funds can be utilised to support the following eligible costs:

- *Project management costs:* May also include salaries for administrative support and/or research assistants. Up to 10% of total budget per annum may be used.
- *Fellowships and bursaries:* Meaning postdoctoral fellows (per person awarded pro rata for up to 2 years), doctoral students (per person, full time for up to 3+1 years) and Masters Students (per person, full time for up to 2+1 years). Up to 15% of total budget per annum may be used.
- *Running costs (incl. overheads, research related costs and mobility):* This line item may include activities such as fieldwork, publication costs, research exchange programmes, attendance of conferences (including those organised by u’Good coordinators), etc. Up to 50% of total budget may be used for this line item.
- *Research equipment or infrastructure:* Up to 15% of total budget may be used.
- *External project audit fees:* A maximum of 10% of the total budget may be used.

## 16 SUBMISSION DEADLINES AND TIMELINES

This Call for proposals consists of three phases:

1. Online registration for partner search;
2. An expression of interest submission phase; and
3. A full proposal submission phase.

The deadline for the online registration for partner search (not mandatory):  
**Wed, 28 February 2024, at 23:59:59 hours SAST.**

The deadline for the submission of expressions of interest (mandatory):  
**Wed, 28 February 2024, at 23:59:59 hours SAST.**

The deadline for the submission of full proposals (mandatory)  
**Mon, 29 July 2024, at 23:59:59 hours SAST.**

All applications are to be submitted to the u’Good Call Secretariat through the NRF Connect (link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za>). As applicants will be required to create an online account, some additional informational may be requested such as an Orchid account). Therefore, applicants should start submitting applications at least one week before the deadline of this Call. Applications that are submitted after the deadline will not be taken into consideration.

Research Initiative	
Mon, 30 October 2023	Virtual matchmaking platform becomes active
Wed, 28 February 2024	<b>Submission deadline for research initiatives (not mandatory)</b>
Expression of Interest	
Mon, 22 January 2024	Online System opens for submission of expressions of interest
Wed, 28 February 2024	<b>Submission deadline for expressions of interest</b>
February – March 2024	Assessment of eligible expressions of interest by u’Good Advisory Group

<b>Full Proposal Phase</b>	
Mon, 1 April 2024	Online System opens for submission of full proposals
Wed, 10 April 2024	Webinar for applicants who are invited to submit full proposal
Mon 29 July 2024	<b>Submission deadline for full proposals</b>
July – September 2024	External expert reviewers consulted
December 2024	International Panel of Experts meeting (final assessment)
January 2025	Funding Decision by u’Good Advisory Group
January – March 2025	Due diligence
April 2025	Contracting of successful projects

## 17 OBLIGATIONS FOR AWARDED PROJECTS

### 17.1 Due Diligence Process

The NRF has adopted a standard approach to conducting due diligence, which will take place prior to, and after awards are made. There will be a virtual due diligence process coordinated by a team comprised by the NRF Internal Audit Team in conjunction with external service providers via virtual platforms (i.e. desktop reviews of all documents, email communication and virtual meetings). For this reason, we will rely on your institution’s effective communication. The review will primarily focus on: (1) procurement, (2) financial management and grants management; and (3) risk management including anti-fraud and corruption mechanisms. As such, a list of documentation will be required by the NRF from the recipient institutions prior to the release of funds. This documentation covers: the organisational structure; risk management and anti-corruption; audit, procurement and financial management; and sub-granting/forwarding of funds. Applicants are required to inform their institutions of this requirement prior to submission of applications, and to obtain assurance of support to proceed with the due diligence process, should the applications be successful. The relevant research, finance and internal audit functions of successful applicant institutions will be required to interface with the due diligence team. Due diligence post-award is linked to the performance reports submitted by grant recipients, and which will determine continued transfer of funds.

### 17.2 Ethical Aspects

Ethics is an integral part of research and ethical compliance is considered pivotal to achieve research excellence. The applicant is responsible for determining whether an ethical statement or license is needed for the realisation of the proposed project. The applicant should ensure that this is obtained from the relevant institution or ethics committee on time. As a standard practice, all studies that will directly engage with young people or participants (particularly between the ages of 10-18) will need to have ethical approval from a reputable Research Ethics Committee. We will offer guidance for ethical approval processes where requested.

If the project is awarded funding, then the grant is issued under the condition that the necessary ethical statement or license is obtained before the latest start date for the project. The project cannot start until the u’Good Call Secretariat have received a copy of the ethical statement or license. The awarded amount will not be released for payment if a copy of the required ethical clearance certificate, as indicated in the application, is not attached to the *Conditions of Grant* contract.

### 17.3 Terms of Participation

Awarded project teams will be expected to form part of the u'Good CoP and participate in different engagements as organised through the CoP. The CoP is a group of individuals who come together to share knowledge and expertise, and to learn from one another. It will serve as a platform for engagement and support among the research teams that are funded by the programme and provide the link between this core research component and external stakeholders. The following events are foreseen for research teams under the CoP:

- The CoP will hold three face-to-face meetings over the five years – an inception conference, mid-programme conference and a closing out conference that will include the following activities:
  - PIs will present progress reports; researchers and students will present their emerging research findings; engagement with relevant stakeholders regarding uptake of research findings will take place; and challenges and constraints regarding performance and progress will be discussed.
  - Presentations of work-in-progress and plans for use of findings across multiple spheres.
  - Guided discussions between researchers, the programme team, young people, and external stakeholders to further embed relationships and networks.
- Several virtual engagements will be planned around the CoP each year, including:
  - At least two formal meetings of PIs of funded projects.
  - At least four webinars per year reporting on findings and insights emerging from research projects, developing new skills to deepen research projects.
  - Meetings between researchers and external stakeholders.

#### **17.4 Data Management**

Responsible data management is part of good research. The data management section is part of the proposal. Researchers are asked before the start of the research to consider how the data collected will be ordered and categorised so that this can be made publicly available. Measures will often already need to be taken, during the creation of data and analysis of the data, to make its later storage and dissemination possible. If it is not possible to make all data publicly available, for example due to reasons of privacy, ethics or valorisation, then the applicant is obliged to list the reasons for this in the data management section. The data management section in the proposal is not evaluated and will therefore not be weighed in the decision whether to award funding. However, both the reviewers and the International Panel of Experts can issue advice with respect to the data management section.

#### **17.5 Open Access**

The u'Good team is committed to making the results of the research funded through this Call openly available and accessible in Open Access form. Scientific publications arising from projects awarded based on this Call must therefore be made available in Open Access form in accordance with the Open Access Policy (Berlin Declaration, 2003<sup>8</sup>).

#### **17.6 Consortium Agreement and Intellectual Property Rights**

Research partnerships are strongly encouraged. For research partnerships to be effective, they must be fair and equitable. A consortium agreement should be signed by all research team members prior to the start of the awarded project, detailing agreements regarding rights (such as copyright, publications, intellectual property etc. of products or other developments in the project), knowledge

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.berlin9.org/about/declaration/>

utilisation, as well as affairs such as payments, progress- and final reports, and confidentiality. The agreement furthermore details agreements on governance of the research team (to the extent that it gives sufficient guarantee for effective collaboration), finances, and if applicable, basic knowledge to be contributed, of equity. The initiative for the concluding of this agreement lies with the PI. The u'Good Call Secretariat will subsequently check whether the consortium agreement meets the conditions and will not itself sign the agreement. There is no template for this agreement. Researchers are free to develop their own.

## 17.7 Start and Duration of the Projects

The project should start within six months of the grant being awarded. If the project has not started within six months, the u'Good Call Secretariat and Advisory Group can decide to revoke the granting decision. Projects are expected to run for a maximum of 36 months.

## 17.8 Contracts and Contractual Relationships

PIs are responsible for ensuring the necessary documents for the start of the project are submitted to the u'Good Call Secretariat, so that the project in its entirety can start on time. These documents include:

- A consortium agreement, signed by all participating research institutions
- A data management plan
- (If applicable) approval of relevant ethics committees

Some of the contractual obligations will be detailed in the *Conditions of Grant* Contract to be signed between the researchers and the u'Good Call Secretariat during the award process.

## 17.9 Project Monitoring and Reporting

Annual progress reports shall be submitted by the recipients detailing progress in terms of the agreed deliverables (financial, students' performance and other information) no later than 60 days after the end of the calendar year.

- An interim technical and financial report after 6 months (i.e. no later than 30 days after the end of July) will be expected for the first year of the project to allow the disbursement of the second tranches of funds requested. Thereafter, annual technical and financial reports will be provided.
- All recipients will provide an annual audit report in respect of the Project Funds prepared by an independent auditor arranged and paid for by the Recipient by not later than two (2) months from the end of the Recipient's financial year.
- Annual technical and financial reports will be submitted no later than 60 days after the end of the calendar year (i.e. 28/29 February), in the format provided by the u'Good Call Secretariat.
- Final technical and financial reports will be submitted no later than 60 days after the end of the three-year contractual period (i.e. 28/29 February), in the format provided by the u'Good Call Secretariat.
- Allocations made to contracted institutions that may not be spent will be automatically carried over to the next cycle and the u'Good Call Secretariat will review this to ascertain whether the balance must be deducted for the following tranche.
- Funds from the u'Good Call Secretariat will be disbursed to the institutions by no later than 30 days following receipt of the technical and financial reports.



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