

Seminar under the Strategy AV21 research programme “Identities in the World of Wars and Crises”

20 November 2025, 10:30 – 12:00

Café Na Boršově (lounge), Náprstková 272/10, Praha 1

Biodiversity debts and burdens across countries: Unequal costs of conserving the global commons

Odirilwe Selomane, Michelle Fourie, Gemma Nel, et al.

Global efforts to conserve 30% of the planet’s land and oceans by 2030, the “30×30” target of the Global Biodiversity Framework, face a profound equity challenge. While biodiversity is a shared global asset underpinning climate stability, food security, and human well-being, the economic and spatial burdens of conservation fall unevenly across nations. This study quantifies the financial and opportunity costs of expanding terrestrial protected areas in biodiversity-rich countries. Using global data on natural capital, land values, and management costs, we reveal that the nations most critical to achieving 30×30, many in the Global South, also bear the highest opportunity costs from foregone agricultural and development potential, coupled with high external debt. For the top 25 priority countries, the mean opportunity cost of converting land to protection exceeds US\$235 billion, while annual management costs could rise by US\$1 billion per country. These findings expose a “biodiversity debt” in which developing nations carry a disproportionate share of the cost of maintaining global ecological stability. Achieving the 30×30 vision therefore requires new global financing mechanisms, including debt-for-nature swaps, biodiversity credits, and direct investment in low-land-intensive development pathways. Without addressing this imbalance, biodiversity protection will remain both inequitable and aspirational, rather than the shared global enterprise it must become.

Odirilwe Selomane is a senior lecturer at the University of Pretoria, in the department of Agricultural Economics, Extension, and Rural Development. He currently works on three key projects focusing on various aspects of sustainability. The first, [CHOICE](#) projects, aims to integrate consumer behaviour into integrated assessment models - the South African pilot of this project focuses on youth dietary preferences. The second project, Future Ecosystems for Africa ([FEFA](#)) uses ecological modeling, futures thinking, and understanding nature finance flows to support decision making on the African continent. Here Dr. Selomane’s main focus is on understanding nature finance and innovative tools for financing biodiversity conservation. The [BridgingVALUES](#) project aims to inform conservation policies and practices towards more equitable and effective governance. Dr. Selomane was also recently a coordinating lead author on the Nexus Assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services ([IPBES](#)). He has academic backgrounds in Agricultural Economics, Environmental Economics, and Conservation Ecology.