

Seed Funding Call

Seaweed as Sustainable Super Food:
whose knowledge counts and who
benefits from the hype?

*A 2026 initiative of Universiteit Leiden and the Una Europa
Self-Steering Committee in Sustainability. Apply by 30 June.*



Introduction

Across science and policy, awareness is growing about the magnitude of environmental threats in the Anthropocene, and the urgent, global action they require. This realization drives a search for sustainable solutions that can be implemented and scaled across the globe. Much emphasis is placed on the need to develop solutions that balance environmental protection and economic development (Caradonna, 2022).

In this context, the promotion of the **blue economy** – the sustainable use of oceans to curb further land conversion – has emerged as a promising avenue for addressing sustainability challenges (Brent et al. 2020). **Seaweed farming and harvesting** – as sustainable ‘superfood’, and ingredient for medicines, bioplastics and biofertilizer – is an important part of many blue economy strategies (Koksvik and Myskja 2022). Over the past twenty years, seaweed cultivation has increased more than threefold (Chaigneau et al. 2025).

Seaweed cultivation and harvesting is believed to generate economic benefits for coastal communities. However, without attention to underlying structures of inequality and practices of dispossession, optimistic views about the economization of seaweed may reproduce extractive logics and existing inequalities (Besky 2023). Contestations about access to and the governance of coastal areas and marine resources, the distribution of benefits, and whose knowledge counts in designing seaweed economization projects are occurring in Europe (Pendleton and Carr 2023; Albrecht and Lukkarinen 2020) and in the Global South (Perez-Alvaro and Boswell 2025; Satria et al. 2017).

This Seed Funding Call described in this document is part of Universiteit Leiden’s engagement as a partner in the [Una Europa alliance](#). It was initiated by colleagues in the Una Europa Self-Steering Committee in Sustainability and is supported by the Una Europa Self-Steering Committee in Cultural Heritage.

Involved colleagues: Dario Fazzi (Universiteit Leiden), Bernardo Ribeiro de Almeida (Universiteit Leiden), Marja Spierenburg (Universiteit Leiden), Steven van Wolputte (KU Leuven), Silvia Gaiani (Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet), Niki Vermeulen (University of Edinburgh), Steven Robbins (Stellenbosch University).

Seed Funding Call: €3.000 available for projects

Thanks to funding from the Una Europa team at Universiteit Leiden, we are fostering international exchanges on the sustainability of seaweed. We are looking for project proposals that develop fresh insights into the environmental and community impacts of seaweed cultivation and harvesting.

To this end, we invite **doctoral and early-career researchers¹ at Una Europa universities and universities in the global south** to submit proposals for research and/or educational projects addressing the challenges of sustainable seaweed farming and gathering.

Six selected applicants will receive a lump sum of €3.000 as a one-off seed grant for the initial stages of a project.

Proposal requirements

Proposals can be grounded in different disciplines, ranging from anthropology to ecology. Inter- and transdisciplinary ideas are also greatly welcomed. We prefer projects that employ a place-based approach (Balvanera et al. 2017).

Project proposals can focus on research, on education or can combine the two. Examples:

- Research projects could involve, for instance, ethnographic case studies of seaweed harvesting and cultivation projects involving coastal communities and other stakeholders, studies of local entrepreneurs active in the seaweed sector, or ecological studies of environmental impacts and pollution.
- Educational projects may target university students (bachelor's, master's or doctoral), or policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders. Possible examples include the development of educational modules or minors, or the development of training programs and policy or practice-oriented toolkits.

Follow-up workshop

If your project is selected, you will be invited for a two-day workshop at Universiteit Leiden in the Netherlands in mid-November 2026 (dates have yet to be confirmed). This is an opportunity to discuss the implementation of your project with a wider network of scholars working on seaweed-related issues. Transport and accommodation costs for attending the workshop will be covered.

The workshop is made possible thanks to funding from [Una.Futura](#).

How to Apply

Create a pdf file (max. 1000 words, excluding bibliography) which outlines:

- The specific problem or research question to be addressed (brief introduction);
- How the project relates to existing literature on seaweed harvesting and cultivation;
- Research methods and/or activities planned to develop the educational materials;
- Project timeline (see schedule below) and budget for the proposed activities.

¹For the purposes of this Seed Funding Call, early-career researchers are defined as doctoral degree holders who are actively pursuing research but who are not yet fully independent, with no more than seven years of experience since completion of their doctoral degree. Applicants whose doctoral degrees were awarded earlier may be considered on a case-by-case basis subject to justification e.g. career breaks for family-related reasons or to seek asylum due to political instability

Please also prepare a brief CV (maximum 1 page) for all project participants, including PhD graduation dates.

Send both documents to: seaweed.funding@bb.leidenuniv.nl

Schedule

- Deadline for applications: 30 June 2026
- Selection of candidates: mid-July 2026
- Workshop: mid-November 2026 (dates TBC)
- Implementation of the selected projects: December 2026 – June 2027
- Reporting (written or multi-modal): July–October 2027

References

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