

# **Competitive Grant Scheme For Agricultural Research for Development In Sub-Saharan Africa:**

## **Scheme for SROs and their Organs**

### **Manual of Procedures <sup>1</sup>**

#### **1. Background**

Most of the African countries are still classified as poor by the United Nations. Generally 70% of the population is said to be living in poverty, although this differs from country to country. Given a population growth rate for all Africa of more than 3% the current average economic growth rates are not sufficient to make a dent in poverty alleviation and provide food security.

Many African Governments have declared that agriculture forms the basic engine of economic growth. Unfortunately those pronouncements are often not backed by clear policy or economic support or guidance. A review of the agricultural sector in the last decades shows that regions have been facing perpetual staple cereal deficit and that most African States are net food importers of staple cereal<sup>2</sup>. A similar picture is emerging on livestock and fish production. This adversely affects the trade balance and the overall balance of payments of most States. It also deprives most of them from using the scarce foreign exchange on essentials services such as health and education.

However, the agricultural sector in Africa is evolving very quickly, because of changes in international trade patterns and the more and more important role of SPS measures, the increasing role of the private sector and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the decrease in public funding for research and services and the decentralisation of decision making. In addition, the emergence of new sciences and technologies, such as biotechnology, offer further opportunities and challenges for regional co-operation. The needs for the development of the agricultural sector are also becoming more complex. The increase in food production and food security through the improvement of productivity in both large and small-scale sectors is no longer the only issue agricultural research and training should look at. The competitiveness and quality of agricultural products, labour employment and income generation, equity and gender awareness, environmental concerns and management of natural resources, as well as an appropriate and stable policy environment, also need to be taken into consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Consultative meeting on competitive funding for agriculture research was organized at the European Commission in Brussels 24-26 of June 2002. This meeting has regrouped major donors with the three Sub-Regional Organizations (ASARECA, CORAF and SADC-SRCU<sup>1</sup>, FARA and GFAR representatives. <sup>2</sup> Taking action to reduce poverty in Africa: The World Bank report by Janvry. A. (1997) P.40.

Increase in agricultural productivity in Africa **could not be fully achieved without:**

- ⇒ the benefits of safe and responsible use of cutting-edge science,
- ⇒ advances in technology development,
- ⇒ capacity building,
- ⇒ technology dissemination,
- ⇒ policy research and implementation to promote the development, adaptation and dissemination of new technologies, and
- ⇒ a genuine and deliberate involvement of all stakeholders concerned at all stages of the “research to extension” process.

Noting this deplorable agricultural development over the last few decades it is noted that: i) the fragmentary research programmes and the history of difficulty in funding sustainable research programmes in Africa has adversely effected agricultural development; ii) the need for sustained agricultural research to promote technology generation and dissemination through the establishment of a competitive grant scheme.

The three sub-Regional Organizations ASARECA<sup>2</sup>, CORAF<sup>3</sup> and SADC-SRCU<sup>4</sup> have defined the regional research priorities based on the aspirations of the NARSs and coordinate their implementation by NARSs and scientific partners along the Research to Development continuum at their respective countries and coverage areas. The common primary areas identified by SROs as well as NEPAD<sup>5</sup> and FARA for agricultural research intervention in Africa include the following:

- Natural resource management (NRM) – including soil and water, agro-forestry and integrated pest management;
- Genetic Resource Management (GRM) and biotechnology;
- Post harvest technologies;
- Policy research;
- Knowledge systems generation and
- Capacity building in all the areas identified by the SROs.

Each sub-regional Organisation has set its own ARD priorities that will serve as the basis for the successive calls for proposals.

To achieve this objective increased investment in agricultural research is necessary. To improve the effectiveness of financial resource use a grant Competitive Grant Scheme (CGS) is required as an additional support to agricultural research and development in Africa and this document highlights procedures for implementation of this scheme.

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<sup>2</sup> ASARECA: Association for Strengthening Agricultural research in Eastern and Central Africa

<sup>3</sup> CORAZF: Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles.

<sup>4</sup> SADC-SRCU: Southern African development Community – Sub-Regional Coordinating Unit for Agricultural Research and Training.

<sup>5</sup> NEPAD: New Partnership for African Development

## **2. Competitive Grant Scheme (CGS) for the SROs**

Determinants of SROs interest in the establishment of such a competitive grant scheme are to:

- i) Strengthen the national agricultural research systems (NARSs) and their SROs through a better involvement of all kind of stakeholders;
- ii) Increase the ARD co-operation among national and international, private and public institutions;
- iii) Increase the linkages between stronger and weaker ARD stakeholders to facilitate for capacity building;
- iv) Experiment with a new flexible, participative, transparent and targeted ARD project selection, financing and evaluation scheme;
- v) Complement core programmes with competitive grant scheme;
- vi) Promote cost-effectiveness and efficiency of partnership research systems and
- vii) Improve the quality of research as well as its relevance for the development of the sub-region.

### **2.1 Definition of Competitive Grant Scheme (CGS)**

A Competitive Grant Scheme (CGS) is a new funding scheme to produce knowledge. It is a financing mechanism to implement research projects based on the SROs strategy and regional priorities to:

- ⇒ promote integration between the NARSs and stimulate regional collaborative research activities in the African regions;
- ⇒ generate and disseminate knowledge, technologies or materials for rural development oriented programs, which match effectively the needs of regional stakeholders and
- ⇒ strengthen the SROs as regional institutions responsible for co-ordinating agricultural research.

As a financing mechanism the Competitive Grand Scheme must be performance based, demand driven, transparent, open and competitive.

The SROs competitive grant program is being established to improve the performance of production systems and to stimulate all dimensions of agricultural development in Africa. They expect to reach this goal by:

- Providing grants on a competitive basis to stakeholders to work together with partner institutions and beneficiaries to generate knowledge and technology, and to facilitate its dissemination and adoption;
- Using the experience of funded projects to develop lessons and guidelines applicable to help solve the problems of knowledge and technology generation, dissemination and adoption in the region; and
- Supporting projects that will make a positive contribution toward the

region's economic and social development through investment in agriculture.

## **2.2 Strategic Plans of the SROs as the basis for the CGS**

The three African Sub Regional Organisations have developed 5-years strategic plans<sup>6</sup> that establish their respective priorities and program thrusts over that time period. Through annual meetings the SROs refine that strategy and develop their programme focus. These strategies and program thrusts form the basis for the competitive grant scheme programming, with the view of developing and supporting opportunities for collaborative activities that would reduce cost and increase the effectiveness of the SROs portfolio.

The SROs strategic plans set agenda that work towards ensuring food security, increasing household income, alleviating poverty and protecting the natural resource base. The SROs expect to address these agenda through a demand driven Agricultural Research for Development.

This requires the development sub-regional and regional Research Networks (RN) and research Programmes (RP) partnerships able to conduct a range of research from basic to strategic, applied and adaptive research. The process must also take into account the dissemination and adoption of results. In this process there would be room for the participation of specialised and advanced research institutes; international agricultural research institutes (both CGIAR and non-CGIAR); sub-regional organisations; national agricultural research systems; non-governmental organisations; community-based organisations, farmers' organisations and the private sector etc.

## **3. Project Proposals Preparation**

All research projects submitted to the SROs for a particular call for proposals should address the research priorities identified in their respective strategic plan and chosen for this call. They should also demonstrate a collaborative approach.

Proposals will be submitted based on a call for proposals issued by the SROs and must be prepared in accordance with the Proposal Presentation Guide.

Proposals will be considered for funding at only one time per year. The following offers a tentative schedule for the program:

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<sup>6</sup> ASARECA : Strategic plan developed in 1997  
CORAF: Strategic plan developed in 1999  
SADC-SACCAR: Strategic plan developed in 2000

Date (months)	Action
T°	Call for Proposals
T° + 4	End of proposals submission period
T° + 4-5	Proposal Review Process
T° + 6	CD makes final approval at the annual meeting
T° + 6	Contract preparation
T° + 7	Disbursement to Successful Grantees

#### **4. Duration of Projects.**

The Competitive Grant Scheme (CGS) should be established as a long-term approach to sustainable funding for agricultural research for Development in Africa. However projects may receive funding for up to three years. In rare cases and where projects have proved particularly successful or innovative, the Board can approve funding up to an additional two years. However, initial funding periods will not exceed three years. No project will receive funding for more than five years without prior evaluation and new successful submission of proposal to the CGS.

#### **5. Funding**

##### **5.1 Amount**

SROs have established minimum and maximum funding amounts for its competitive grant program. Projects responding to a call for proposals must have a minimum value of \$50,000 (fifty thousand dollars). Maximum funding amounts will be established in each call for proposals. In most cases grants under the SROs competitive grant scheme will not exceed \$300,000 (three hundred thousand dollars) over a three-year period.

##### **5.2 Eligibility**

Funds from the grants are intended to cover additional costs in the following line items:

- The costs of short-term personnel dedicated to work on the project;
- Travel costs and per diem;
- Project inputs including specialized equipment;
- Required computer and/or telecommunications equipment;
- Data collection costs;
- Statistical analysis;
- Local transportation;
- Training, meeting and seminar costs;
- Dissemination of research results generated by the project through workshop proceeding, scientific publications, technical notes.
- All other costs not related to core costs and directly related to the

- implementation of the project.
- To purchase/solicit services from ARIs and/or IARCs

The grant scheme will not provide funding for core or permanent salary costs, overheads or for large capital items, such as vehicles. The program also will not finance investment in construction of buildings or research facilities.

## **6. Proposal Evaluation Criteria**

The Sub-Regional Organizations will apply two levels of criteria to the review of projects submitted for funding under its competitive grants program. All projects must meet basic **submission** criteria to be considered for funding. The SROs Secretariats will maintain levels of responsibility to review submissions and judge their compliance with the general submission criteria. Once SROs determine that the project meets the general submission criteria, it will be reviewed against established **technical** criteria.

### **6.1. General Submission Criteria.**

SROs' competitive grant program has established the following general criteria for project submitted under their competitive grant program. These criteria represent the minimum criteria that all projects must meet to receive funding consideration under the program.

#### **a) Consistency with the SROs Strategic Plans and the priorities chosen for the present call for proposal.**

As a minimum requirement all projects must be consistent with the SROs strategic plan and with the priorities established by the Committee of Directors as part of the implementation of this plan, relevant to the present call. In this context all projects must focus on all dimensions of agricultural development, contribute to economic growth and development and enhance the natural resource base. In addition the project must be relevant to regional issues and concerns and should address a major constraint or issue.

#### **b) Involvement of inter-institutional partners.**

The projects presented to SROs must demonstrate a partnership among stakeholders in planning and implementation. Each project must demonstrate involvement of at least three "different kinds of entities" from at least three SROs countries. The research team may include international research centres, NGOs or other relevant stakeholder organisations working in the SROs region.

**c) Identification of the executing organisation and project team.** The project document must clearly identify the entity that will serve as the principal institution and those that will serve as partners in the organisations. The proposal needs to list the names and institutions of all participating researchers and/or project implementers. The project should indicate the knowledge and experience that the principal investigator has in the research subject.

#### **d) Duration of project and grant limit.**

The project proposal must adhere to the project period and funding limits

established in proposal solicitation and by SROs project guidelines.

**e) Commitment of contributions to the project.**

Projects will indicate clearly the inputs of human, material and financial resources to be provided by the principal executing agency and the various partners involved in the project. The project must include signed documentation from the parties confirming those commitments.

**f) Conformity with general project guidelines.** Proposals must follow the guidelines established in the proposal guidelines. All projects must include information requested, including a detailed budget, work plan, and monitoring and evaluation plan. Projects that do not include all relevant information will be considered non-responsive.

**6.2. Technical Submission Criteria**

All projects that meet the general submission criteria will be evaluated according to technical criteria to determine the overall feasibility of the project. SROs will employ four levels of technical criteria to evaluate the projects under the competitive grant system. These levels include: (1) economic, financial, and social impact, (2) technical and scientific excellence, (3) institutional capacity, (4) environmental impact and (5) partnership quality. All projects will be measured against these various criteria and ranked and scored according to importance. Indicative weightings are: economic, social and financial would receive 35 points (economic-15, financial-10, social-10), technical quality 35 points, institutional capacity 20 points and environmental impact 10 points.

**(a) Economic. Financial. and Social Impact**

*Economic Considerations:* The economic assessment attempts to establish the economic impact of the proposed project at the regional level. Projects funded must demonstrate a contribution to the economic development of the region and lead to increased agricultural incomes and stability of production in the medium to long-term. In most cases this will translate into a focus on market oriented programs.

For example, the evaluation of proposals focusing on production aspects will take into account the significance of the expected changes in production value (based on production volume, product quality, efficient use of production factors, and other improvements that may result from introducing a new product) and the impacts of those changes for the sector and the farmer.

For proposals focusing on overall sector activities the evaluation will consider the economic strength of that specific sector, the magnitude of the problems being addressed, and the estimated extent to which the proposed project can address them and overcome any existing constraints.

*Social Considerations:* The social assessment considers the project's likely effects on employment, income and contribution to the economic and social

well-being of the target audience. Projects need to contribute to economic development objectives and help the target audience participate more effectively in the market economy. The project should foster broad participation with particular attention to the participation of women. The social assessment also analyses whether the project is likely to have potential negative impacts on the region or other non-target groups.

*Cross-cutting Considerations:* Projects will also be evaluated on the potential for adoption of the technology or programs developed through the project. The potential for adoption offers an important point for evaluation the research project's success. Adoption may provide economic, social and financial benefits to the beneficiaries. Important factors include the potential for spillovers from one area where the technology is developed to other eco-regions and countries, for sustainability and for achieving impact within a reasonable time frame.

*Summary:* The economic, financial, and social impact assessment requires information and analysis of:

- (i) direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project including benefits to women;
- (ii) likelihood of success of the proposed activity and impact of the project within a reasonable time frame;
- (iii) potential for the adoption of the generated technologies and opportunities for spillover to other regions, eco-regions and countries;
- (iv) expected incremental economic, financial, and social effects on aspects such as regional changes in production value, increased productivity, enhanced product quality, cost fluctuations, effect on income level and distribution, employment and overall contribution to economic development;
- (v) the ability of the technology to stimulate target group participation in market oriented agriculture ;
- (vi) expected indirect effects of technologies, such as those caused by spillovers of research results; and
- (vii) the potential for the project or activity to achieve economic and financial sustainability in the long-run.

**(b) Technical and Scientific quality**

The project proposal must offer a solid response to a priority problem or research opportunity or address a priority constraint in the region, relevant to the present call. As part of this it must offer an innovative, coherent and



inclusive strategy to achieve established objectives. Each project must present a research hypothesis and provide adequate explanation as to how the project will address that hypothesis.

The purpose of assessing technical quality is to determine the scope of the proposal and whether it has been properly formulated. The review will determine whether the project makes sense scientifically and technically, whether there are alternatives or more promising avenues, and whether there are efficient mechanisms proposed to transfer or disseminate the expected results. Moreover, the assessment will determine the project's overall technical feasibility and relevance.

The project's technical and scientific excellence will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- (i) established research hypothesis that addresses an important constraint or issue of relevance to the region;
- (ii) clear background and justification for the project along with a detailed description of the expected outcomes;
- (iii) scope of the proposal in terms of diversity of disciplines involved, size of the affected geographic area, and degree of joint activity and inter-institutional relations;
- (iv) clear knowledge of the state of the art;
- (v) quality of scientific or technical design of the proposal, based on clear objectives, specified activities, internal logic, quality and rigorous nature of the scientific and technical foundation;
- (vi) quality and currency of materials and methods for achieving the objectives and expected outcomes;
- (vii) feasibility of meeting the proposed activity schedule, with a sequential breakdown of phases or stages included, linkages and degree of dependence;
- (viii) well-established indicators for each outcome or objective and methods established to measure progress toward meeting the established objectives (well-developed monitoring and evaluation plan).
- (ix) possible multiplier effects, taking into account the use of the product(s) and technologies in the region and how they might contribute to other projects or programs throughout the SROs

networks.

**(c) Institutional and management Capacity**

The function of the institutional evaluation is to establish that the executing agencies have sufficient managerial capacity to undertake the proposed project: i.e., that they have the technical capacity, the experience and the managerial, administrative and control systems required to implement the project successfully.

The evaluation will focus on overall institutional experience to determine to institution's or team's capacity to research proposed topics. Reviewers will assess the:

- qualifications of the "Consortium Co-ordinator" and each participant groups;
- background and scientific/technical performance of the team members in the past;
- ability of the team to achieve the proposed results; and
- lead institution's capacity to capably manage the team;
- ability of the institutions to administer finances and to permit accountability through internal and external auditing mechanisms.

The level of institutional capacity is particularly important in proposals that favour inter-institutional action and joint research among research entities at the national, sub-regional, regional and international level.

The evaluation will also concern a management plan for the implementation of the project.

**(d) Environmental Impact**

All projects must conform to the environmental laws of the country where they will be implemented. Projects must provide evidence of compliance with all environmental regulations and laws in effect in the country or countries where the project will be implemented. Where national environmental law stipulates the need for an environmental review, SROs will require approved environmental reviews from the appropriate environmental authority in the country (countries) where the projects will be implemented. The environmental review or statement should be attached to the proposal along with any determinations as well as the signed approval.

In some cases SROs may provide provisional project approval pending the outcome of the required impact assessment. SROs would not release funds to the project until receipt of the requisite approved environmental review or statement from the appropriate authority.

Projects should include means of verifying environmental impacts so as to

facilitate the assessment of environmental effects, both positive and negative, in the short and medium term, and the measures proposed to mitigate possible negative effects.

Particular attention must be paid to the potential impact on natural areas, especially tropical forests that could be impacted by deforestation as a result of the spread of an agricultural technology developed under the competitive grant program.

In those cases where no environmental regulations exist and local laws provide not guidance, each applicant will prepare a detailed review outlining the potential impacts on the environment and likely

SROs will not finance projects that have a net negative environmental effect, where sufficient mitigation measures cannot be developed to off-set the potential negative impacts. On the basis of the aforementioned impact assessment criteria, it favours proposals that focus comprehensively on environmental issues and that foster the development of technologies that are sustainable from an environmental standpoint.

#### **(e) Partnership quality**

The partnership assessment attempts to establish beyond the number of partners the **quality** and the **diversity** of the partnerships of the proposed project at the regional level.

Reviewers will assess:

- The participatory process, which has been followed to achieve the design of the project proposal (eg meetings, workshops, electronic mail conferences, gap evaluation between the first draft and final proposal).
- The diversity and complementarity of the roles played (with specific references to the integration and synergism among different knowledge systems) by the different stakeholders and the added value brought by these different roles.
- The agreement and consensus built by stakeholders themselves on these principles of participation based on comparative advantage.
- The shared mechanism allowing the consensus decision-making process and conflict resolution mechanism.

### **7. Governance of the Competitive Grant Scheme**

#### **7.1 SROs Committee of Directors (CD)**

The competitive Grant Scheme will ultimately be managed under the overall guidance of the Committee of Directors who will finally approve all projects for funding.

#### **7.2 Technical advisory committee (TAC)**

Members of the Technical Advisory Committee will serve a maximum of two terms of three year each. CD will select TAC members, who must have

considerable experience and contributed significantly to agricultural research for development in Africa. It will meet once a year. It will collate information and select projects with recommendations to the CD for approval. The TAC will constitute the Peer Review Panels as and when required for advice. The TAC will score proposals based on the given guidelines. The TAC will comprise ten members from the following categories:

- 6 eminent scientists involving social and/or socio-economic scientists, from whom one person will be elected to, serve as chairperson of the TAC on an annual basis;
- 3 representatives from the sub-region, one each from NGOs, private sector and Farmers' organisations;
- The executive secretary of the SRO who will serve as the secretary of the TAC and will report its deliberation to the CD.

### **7.3 Peer Review Panels (PRP)**

The TAC will constitute the peer review teams of scientists as and when is requested in specific disciplines to review all projects from scientific standpoint and give recommendations for consideration by the TAC. The peer review will operate by mail.

### **7.4 SROs secretariats**

The SROs secretariats will be responsible for the day to day management of the grant. Therefore it will:

- Call for proposals;
- Arrange for review;
- Submit prioritised list and report to the CD;
- Disburse grant and;
- Arrange for M&E of projects.

## **8 Proposal Selection Process**

Projects are selected based on comprehensive review by the TAC and approval for funding by the CD. At least three Peer reviewers selected by the TAC for their technical expertise will initially evaluate all proposals for their technical merit. All projects will pass through an initial screening (administratively) by the SROs secretariats before they are submitted for peer review.

The SROs Committee of Directors maintains the overall responsibility for the proposal selection process with technical support provided by the TAC and administrative support from the SROs' secretariat. After peer review the TAC will receive the projects and will rank them.

The Secretariat will submit the list of proposals to the CD, ranked in the order of the score received from the TAC. The CD will review the projects and amounts requested and will make final decisions on funding based on the scores and funds availability.

## **9. Preparation of Project Implementation Contracts**

Once the Board of Directors has approved project proposals, the SRO Secretariat will prepare project implementation contracts with the executing organisation or team. The agreements, or project implementation contracts, will serve as the legal agreement between SROs and the executing agency and will stipulate the responsibilities of the respective parties. For example, the agreements will stipulate the obligations of the executing agencies, presentation of reports and applicable disbursements, project audits, and a summary of the proposal approved by the Committee of Directors.

The SRO Secretariat and the lead institution of the research consortium managing the project, or a member of the consortium who also has legal status will sign these agreements. A third party, such as an international institution that can expedite resource transfers to the executing agencies, may also sign the agreement(s).

## **10. Disbursements**

Funds will be disbursed according to a funding and implementation schedule agreed to by the parties and based upon the submitted budget and work plan. Funding requests should plan to cover activities for at least six months. Project disbursements will take place every six months upon receipt by SROs of project implementation and expenditure reports. SROs will develop a schedule with each grant recipient to ensure proper funding accounting and reporting and timely disbursement of funds during the implementation phase.

During the implementation phase of the project SROs will disburse 90% of the total amount approved for the project with an initial payment not exceeding 40% of this total amount, holding 10% of the funds in abeyance. The remaining 50% will be disbursed based on progress. The final 10% of the funds will be disbursed once the executing agency submits and SROs approves the final project report.

## **11. Project Reports**

The executing agency must present semi-annual progress reports to the SROs indicating project progress and outcomes. The reports should describe the activities carried out during the period and the results obtained in relation to the specified objectives and indicators developed as part of the monitoring and evaluation plan.

Project participants will be expected to produce a detailed annual report and 6 monthly progress reports not exceeding two pages.

At the end of the project, the executing agency must submit a **final report** to SROs describing the most significant features, including the principal results,

outcomes and expected impacts. The report should also identify any significant constraints or issues that might impede long-term success or adoption. The presentation of the final project report and its approval by the SRO Secretariat is a condition precedent to the final disbursement.

## **12. Program Monitoring and Evaluation**

SROs need to determine the effectiveness of its project financing through project evaluation. Each project will include funds for monitoring and evaluation and project approval will be based on the inclusion of an effective monitoring and evaluation plan. These funds should be used to carry out adoption analysis, undertake case study analyses or employ other approaches to measure achievement against established indicators. In general, monitoring and evaluation budgets should not exceed seven to nine percent (7-9%) of the total project budget.

SROs will evaluate the results of the funded research projects at the end of the project execution period. SROs will accomplish this primarily based on the final report, which will indicate the degree to which the objectives have been met. In addition SROs will undertake external evaluations of selected projects, either through its own Grants Management Unit or through the services of external consultants. These periodic evaluations will provide SROs with a means to check on those results reported by grant recipients and serve as a mechanism to collect independent information and results verification.

### **Permanent financial audit**

The SRO Secretariat will maintain a database with the evaluation results of all projects' financed under the CGS. These data will serve as a reference for evaluating the institutional capacity of the executing agencies, as well as provide a source of lessons learned for adaptive research and technology transfer in the region.

Brussels 25 June 2002

**ANNEXES:**

- ⇒ Application format
- ⇒ Guidelines for the evaluation of proposals