

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the current worldwide wave of achieving goals relating to agricultural research and development programs by increasing the participation of the governmental, private and non-governmental sectors and the civil society through the Competitive Grant System (CGS), it has become imperative in our country also to give momentum to the overall development of the agricultural sector by launching agricultural research and development programs through the private sector, the non-governmental community, the academic institutions and the civil society, in addition to the governmental sector.

In exercise of the power conferred by Section 3 of the 1986 Working Fund Act, the then His Majesty's Government (now called as 'Government of Nepal') has established a National Agricultural Research and Development Fund (NARDF) on 10 December, 2001, with the objective of carrying out functions aimed at contributing to the development of the agricultural sector by distributing its financial resources on the basis of the competitive grant system open to all development stakeholders and partners. Presently, NARDF is a government entity under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives supporting and promulgating the CGS initiative which was started by HARP seven years back. The main thrust of NARDF is to familiarize the CGS concept to a wider level of heterogeneous clients/development partners scattered all over the length and breadth of Nepal. The CGS philosophy is to ensure the participation of the private sector, the non-governmental community, the community-based organizations and the civil society in planning and investment activities, increase their involvement in the tasks of diversifying and promoting the agricultural research and development sector and bringing about coordination in agricultural research, extension and training activities.

NARDF aims to promote a demand-driven and pluralistic approach, providing grants that are designed to uplift the standard of living of Nepalese farmers while at the same time it believes in capacity building of the participating institutions and those of the end- users. Thus, a call for proposals is advertised in daily newspapers each year and the award is based on a transparent process of selection through independent review by the professionals. The major steps of project selection are as follows:

- NARDF calls for project concept notes (PCN) within the NARDF thematic and priorities areas
- PCNs are pre-screened by NARDF Secretariat to check whether the minimum set of criteria are fulfilled.
- PCNs are forwarded to Peer Reviewers for reviewing and evaluation.
- Comments and recommendations on PCNs received from Peer Reviewers are compiled systematically and presented to the Technical sub-committee (TSC) by the Secretariat.

- TSC go through the individual PCNs received from Peer Reviewers and submit to the Fund Management Committee (FMC) for approval along with recommendations.
- FMC makes the final decision regarding PCN acceptance.
- Successful applicants whose PCNs are accepted are notified by NARDF Secretariat and they are asked to submit the Full Project Proposals within a set deadline.
- The FPP received by NARDF from the applicants follows the same cyclic process as that of PCN before the final decision is made for awarding of the Grant.
- Following the award of Grant, the successful Project Proponents (in NARDF's case, Project Coordinator) signs the Official Project Agreement Paper on behalf of his/her institution with the NARDF Secretariat and Project work is set in motion.

The advertisement for the NARDF first call was made on 2059/6/25 in National Daily newspapers Gorakhapatra and Kantipur as well as in the NARDF official website (www.nardf.org.np). The total number of Project Concept Notes [PCNs] registered in this first call were 174 out of which 116 were rejected during the prescreening phase by the NARDF secretariat. The remaining 58 PCN were forwarded for review to the independent peer reviewers in order to pass by the process of selection as mentioned above. Out of these 58 PCNs, only 19 PCNs were accepted for submitting full proposal. Finally, fifteen (15) projects were approved for implementation. These projects are already completed.

The second call was made on 2060/6/10 in National Daily Papers Gorakhapatra and Kantipur as well as in the website of NARDF. There were altogether 277 PCNs registered in second call, out of which 65 PCNs were rejected during the prescreening phase by NARDF secretariat. The remaining 212 PCNs were forwarded to the peer reviewers for review process and only 71 PCNs were selected for submitting the Full Project Proposal (FPP). Out of these 71 full proposals, 23 projects were approved for implementation. Out of these 23 projects, two projects were merged into one, and one project was terminated without completion. So, only 21 projects of the second call are being implemented. All these 21 Projects are already completed.

The third call for the PCN was made on 2061/7/12 in the National Daily Gorakhapatra and NARDF website. A total of 380 PCNs were registered in NARDF secretariat for project bidding. Out of 380 PCNs, 293 were forwarded to the peer reviewers for review after 87 PCNs were rejected during the pre-screening phase. A total of 72 PCNs were accepted for submitting the FPP out of which 68 FPPs were finally received and send to the peer reviewers for further reviewing. Among the 68 FPPs only 21 FPPs were finally approved for funding. Some of the 3rd call projects are completed and the rest are in the process of completion soon.

Likewise, the fourth call for the PCN was made on 2062/11/17 in the National Daily Gorakhapatra and NARDF website. A total number of 300 PCNs were registered by different proponents in NARDF Secretariat before the deadline, out of which, 39 PCNs have to be rejected after pre-screening process and the remaining 261 PCNs were forwarded to the peer reviewers for review. Out of the 261 PCNs, 80 PCNs were accepted for submitting the FPP. But only 77 FPPs were submitted. With the same token of reviewing process as in the case of PCNs, only 26 FPPs were finally selected for funding. Now, these projects are ongoing.

The advertisement for the NARDF's fifth call was publicly announced on 2064/03/22 in National Daily Gorakhpatra as well as in the official website of NARDF. A total number of 266 PCNs were registered in NARDF Secretariat. After going through the prescreening phase and reviewing process a total of 47 PCNs were selected for developing the FPPs and were sent to respective proponents. A total of 45 FPPs were received in the NARDF Secretariat before the deadline, and were further sent to independent peer reviewers for reviewing. Finally, only 18 FPPs were prioritized for funding by the Fund Management Committee (FMC) of NARDF. These projects are currently ongoing in various districts of Nepal.

NARDF 6th Call for Project proposals was publicly announced on 2065/03/28 and 29 in the National Daily Gorakhpatra. A total of 347 Project Concept Notes were received in NARDF Secretariat. Finally only 28 Projects got approved for funding by the FMC. Some organizations/ institutions have already signed the project agreement with NARDF Secretariat and their approved project has already come under implementation. The rest will follow suit soon and are awaiting the process by the time this publication is sent to the press.

In the Fiscal year 2064/65 NARDF has taken some new initiatives in the implementation of Small Grants and Thesis Grants Programme. The Operating Manual and guidelines of both the Small and Thesis Grants Schemes are already developed by the NARDF Secretariat. The Small Grants funding scheme is mainly targeted for supporting local/grassroots NGOs and CBOs with a maximum budget ceiling of Five lakhs and the Thesis Grants to Masters' level students who are currently undertaking Post-Graduate studies in the field of agriculture and development, matching with the priority areas of NARDF. In the Small Grants call for proposals a total of 161 FPPs were registered in NARDF Secretariat out of which only 24 projects were finally approved for funding. All the 24 projects are completed. Regarding the Thesis Grants programme, altogether 12 Research grants have been awarded to 12 Post-Graduate level students during this fiscal year. After completion of their research work, all these students have presented their findings to NARDF.

In the current Fiscal year 2065/66 regarding the Small Grants, a relatively small number (35 FPPs) were received by NARDF – which was precisely targeted for 15 remote districts according to NARDF priority focus for that particular call. Due to the poor quality of proposals received only seven (7) Projects finally got approved for funding out of which six (6) are currently ongoing in some of those districts. Regarding Thesis Grants, a total of 18 Post Graduate (M.Sc. Students) has been awarded with the Research Grant to conduct their Thesis work.

NARDF is optimistic that the research and development grants of the FUND are being frugally utilized by its development stakeholders and implementing partners in order to leave a lasting and desired impact in the targeted communities where support is most needed to uplift the living conditions/livelihoods of the people.