

April 2023



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



**International Treaty
on Plant Genetic Resources
for Food and Agriculture**

**INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**SEVENTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
FUNDING STRATEGY AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

3 – 5 MAY 2023

BENEFIT-SHARING FUND OPERATIONS: FIFTH PROJECT CYCLE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its Eighth Session (2019), the Governing Body delegated the authority for the operations of the Benefit-sharing Fund during the biennium to the Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilization (the Committee).

2. According to the *Operational Procedures for the use of resources under the Benefit-sharing Fund*, the pre-proposals received for the Benefit-sharing Fund are screened in steps involving the Secretariat, the Panel of Experts (the Panel) and the Committee. The Panel is responsible for the screening of individual pre-proposals and the Committee determines which pre-proposals are invited to develop full project proposals.¹

3. At its Fifth meeting, the Funding Committee agreed to launch the Fifth Cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF-5).² BSF-5 reflects the inputs and guidance provided by the Committee throughout 2021-2022 and incorporates some of the main novelties outlined in the BSF Operations Manual adopted by the Governing Body:³

- BSF-5 is the first cycle to operationalize the novelties of the BSF Operations Manual, including the new option of funding phase-2 proposals from the BSF-3 cycle;
- BSF-5 is the first cycle to implement a programmatic approach with an overall Results Framework that is set at the programme level and beyond an individual project cycle;
- A new Monitoring, Reporting and Learning Framework will be applied to the BSF-5 projects to enable, inter alia, knowledge management and learning within and among projects.

4. At its sixth meeting, the Committee took note of the outcome of the screening process undertaken in steps by the Secretariat and the Panel from September to December 2022. The Committee approved a list of 34 pre-proposals that were to be invited to develop a full project proposal, as contained in *Appendix 4* of the Proceedings of its sixth meeting, [IT/GB-10/SFC-6/23/Proceedings](https://www.fao.org/3/cc4271en/cc4271en.pdf).⁴

5. Of the 34 pre-proposals invited to develop a full project proposal, the Secretariat received a total of 32 full project proposals. Two applicant countries that have never previously been involved in the BSF, Madagascar and Armenia, did not submit full project proposals. The Secretariat has contacted the applicant institutions to better understand what difficulties may have arisen in preparing the full proposals. The Panel

¹ Resolution 3/2019, Annex 2, section III paragraph 34(d) available at www.fao.org/3/nb780en/nb780en.pdf

² IT/GB-9/SFC-5/22/Proceedings, Item IV paragraph 18 available at www.fao.org/3/cb9206en/cb9206en.pdf

³ Resolution 3/2019, Annex 2, Operations Manual: Benefit-sharing Fund

⁴ IT/GB-10/SFC-6/23/Proceedings available at www.fao.org/3/cc4271en/cc4271en.pdf

of Experts has made a recommendation regarding this matter in its report.

6. During the February-March 2023 period, the Helpdesk for BSF-5 was operational, providing support and responses in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Between March and April 2023, the Panel finalized its work; its report is provided through IT/GB-10/SFC-7/23/Inf.3, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts: Fifth Call for Proposals of the Benefit-sharing Fund (Final PoE-5 Report)*.

7. Section II of this document contains an overview of the Helpdesk function implemented by the Secretariat since the last meeting of the Committee. Section III provides an overview of the outcome of the appraisal process undertaken by the Panel that is detailed in Section III of the *Final PoE-5 Report*. Section IV contains the Guidance sought from the Committee.

II. HELPDESK FUNCTION

8. The Helpdesk function addressed, *inter alia*, the recommendations of the Committee contained in the Proceedings of its sixth meeting, *IT/GB-10/SFC-6/23/Proceedings*. The Committee requested the Secretariat “to provide support in the preparation of full project proposals through the helpdesk function and, in doing so, to explore and find ways in which to most efficiently and effectively leverage resources while taking into consideration relevant issues, including: regional balance; the involvement of countries that have never participated in, or have received limited funding from the BSF; avoiding duplication of similar pre-proposals submitted by the same institution; appropriate balance between national and international organisations; consideration of different types of organisations, including farmers' organisations; the building of capacities and skills of new partners for Treaty implementation; and, the efficient use of fund. The Committee noted that this may include the consolidation of some projects, particularly to address issues of duplication, balance of international and national organisations, and efficiency of resources.”⁵

9. The Secretariat notified those applicants selected to develop full project proposals through the issuance of a formal letter of invitation, as requested by the Committee.⁶ The Secretariat prepared and shared with all pre-selected applicants a package with the guidelines for the development of the full project proposals, including for the budget preparation. The package was available in English, French and Spanish, as specified in the BSF Operational Manual. Comments made by the Panel of Experts on the pre-proposals were shared with the respective applicants invited to develop a full project proposal.

10. The Secretariat provided additional comments for second phase proposals to ensure that these proposals consolidated, leveraged and further advanced achievements attained in BSF-3 projects.

11. In addition, communications to CGIAR and other international applicant institutions were sent to emphasize that CGIAR-led projects must ensure the capacity building of national partners, ownership of project results and joint ownership of project knowledge products. Proposals led by international organizations were invited to revise, where necessary, some sections of the full proposals to provide as much responsibility as possible to national partners in the design and management of the project, especially in countries that have never received funding in previous BSF project cycles.

12. At the end of February 2023, three helpdesk webinars were organized for the applicant institutions from all regions with pre-proposals that had been invited to develop full project proposals. The main purpose of the webinars was to: meet pre-selected applicants to the BSF-5; describe the BSF Operations Manual and novelties of BSF-5; explain, in detail, the guidelines for developing a full proposal and focus, in particular, on the need to meet high standards in specific sections of the full proposals (methodology, targeted PGRFA, budget, knowledge management); give insights on the next steps and timeline in the approval process of the portfolio to be funded; and, to share initial information on the FAO contractual agreements, disbursement, monitoring and reporting arrangements. More than 100 participants from a wide range of institutions attended the webinars. The webinars were provided in English, French and Spanish.

13. In addition to the webinars, the Secretariat organized individual coaching sessions, especially with new applicant countries and institutions, to provide on-demand support for the elaboration of particular sections of the full proposals and to clarify and provide information where needed.

⁵ Item II, paragraph 16 of IT/GB-10/SFC-6/23/Proceedings available at www.fao.org/3/cc4271en/cc4271en.pdf

⁶ Ibid, paragraph 14

III. APPRAISAL PROCESS OF PROJECT PROPOSALS

14. All full project proposals received were appraised by at least two experts. A meeting of a representative group of experts was organized in Rome from 17 to 20 April to finalize the process. The detailed methodology of the appraisal process is contained in Section III of the *Final PoE-5 Report*. The outcome of the appraisal process is a list of proposals recommended for funding, as contained in Annex 1 to the *Final PoE-5 Report* to be considered by the Committee at this meeting.

15. The Panel of experts made a series of recommendations in Section IV of its Final Report. The recommendations focus on the next steps of BSF-5 operations and on the inclusive and systematic management of future funding cycles, and related screening and appraisal processes.

16. Should the Committee approve the list of recommended proposals for funding, the regional distribution of funds and projects would be as follows:

Table 1: distribution of funds calculated from the list of proposals recommended by the Panel

Region	Maximum funds allocated	% of total funds available	Number of projects	% of total
Africa	5,174,634	46,7	10	36
Asia	947,472	8,5	4	14
GRULAC	3,365,044	30,4	9	32
Near East	844,400	7,6	2	7
ERG	250,000	2,3	1	4
SWP	498,529	4,5	2	7
Total	11,080,079	100	28	100

IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

17. The Committee is invited to:
- i. take note of the Final Report of the Panel of Experts, *IT/GB-10/SFC-7/23/Inf.3*, and in particular of the appraisal process conducted and the list of recommended projects for approval, as described in Section III and in Annex 1 to the Report, respectively;
 - ii. consider the recommendations made in Section IV of the Final Report of the Panel of Experts;
 - iii. approve a list of project proposals that will receive funding from the fifth cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund and provide guidance on next steps to be undertaken; and,
 - iv. recognise the excellent work undertaken by the Panel, which was able to deliver its final report to the Committee under significant time pressure;