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The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

FOURTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE FUNDING STRATEGY AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

20 – 22 September 2021

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIFTH CYCLE OF THE BENEFIT- SHARING FUND

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its Eighth Session, 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 Funding Committee).¹
2. At its second meeting, the Funding Committee finalized the *Operational Plan for the Funding Strategy 2020-2025*.² One of the milestones of the Operational Plan is that the BSF-5 will be initiated in 2021.
3. At its third meeting, the Funding Committee discussed the *Options Paper for BSF-5*³ based on the options set out in the new *Operations Manual: Benefit-sharing Fund* (the BSF Operations Manual).⁴
4. During the third meeting of the Funding Committee, a representative of the European Union informed the Committee of the European Union's decision to support, in principle, the Treaty's Benefit-sharing Fund with a further grant of four million Euros, which will be applied to the BSF-5 programme.⁵ The Secretariat is in the process of finalising the contribution agreement with the European Union. This contribution would bring the total expected funds available for BSF-5 to almost 9 million USD, which would make BSF-5 the second largest cycle so far implemented. A detailed update on the funds available for BSF-5, by funding source, will be provided at the meeting.
5. The Ninth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty (GB-9) will be held in May 2022, which provides a unique opportunity for the Funding Committee to inform the Governing Body of the significant progress that has been made in the preparations for and implementation of BSF-5. Launching BSF-5 prior to GB-9 will create a good momentum in terms of visibility and awareness raising.
6. At its third meeting, the Funding Committee agreed to further discuss the BSF-5 programme at this meeting. The following section of this document explores how to advance the

¹ Res3/2019 paragraph 31, Annex 2: Operations Manual: Benefit-sharing Fund available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nb780en/nb780en.pdf>

² Meeting proceedings – Second meeting of the Committee, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb2451en/cb2451en.pdf>

³ IT/GB-9/SFC-3/21/5: Options Paper for BSF-5 available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3452en/cb3452en.pdf>

⁴ Annex 2 of the Funding Strategy of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture 2020-2025, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nb780en/nb780en.pdf>

⁵ IT/GB-9/SFC-3/21/Proceedings, paragraphs 5 and 6 available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb4090en/cb4090en.pdf>

implementation of new modalities for fund allocation discussed during SFC-3. Section III provides an overview of the main elements of the BSF-5 programme. Section IV contains the next steps to be taken for preparing the launch of BSF-5 along with a tentative timeline.

7. The Funding Committee is invited to provide further guidance on the next steps to launch BSF-5 for consideration at its next meeting.

II. ADVANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW MODALITIES FOR FUND ALLOCATION FOR BSF-5

8. The BSF Operations Manual, provides the following options to the Funding Committee in the design and launch of next phases of the Benefit-sharing Fund operations:

- A. establish and launch a new round of the project cycle, as needed;
- B. decide whether to provide funding to projects that previously received a Certificate of Excellence from the Panel of Experts (B.1) or to a second phase of projects previously funded by the Benefit-sharing Fund (B.2);
- C. decide whether to contribute to larger development programmes to support the implementation of interventions that are aligned with the programmatic approach of the Benefit-sharing Fund;
- D. decide whether to provide project preparation funding for larger project proposal development contributing to the programmatic approach of the Fund.

9. Related to the options for designing the fund allocation, the Funding Committee “expressed preference for advancing options B1 and B2, and possibly option A. It noted that some questions remained on options C and D about how these would work in practice, and that they may require further discussion. The Committee further agreed that the options to be explored further should consider how projects funded could leverage further resources available at national or regional levels. The Committee noted the importance of taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of the independent evaluation of BSF-3, as well as considerations related to recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, in preparation for BSF-5”.⁶

10. While Option A has been used throughout the previous four BSF project cycles, options B to D are new ways available for the use of resources under the BSF and bring important new approaches in terms of the decision-making process for the BSF operations. The following paragraphs detail possible next steps to advance the implementation of the modalities for fund allocation.

Advancing Option B.1: provide funding to projects that previously received a Certificate of Excellence from the Panel of Experts

11. BSF-4 was the first cycle where the Bureau of the Governing Body decided to issue a certificate of excellence to a number of pre-proposals that were not funded, following the recommendation of the Panel of Experts. The Panel considered that providing a certificate of excellence could help applicants to find funding from other donors. This practice was then incorporated into the BSF Operations Manual.

12. The list of projects that received a certificate of excellence included countries and subregions that have never received funding from the BSF. In the case of the Africa region, the consideration of countries from francophone Africa may ultimately enable improving the intra-regional representation within the Benefit-sharing Fund, as recommended by the Independent Evaluation of BSF-3.⁷

⁶ IT/GB-9/SFC-3/21/Proceedings, paragraph 31 and 32 available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb4090en/cb4090en.pdf>

⁷ IT/GB-9/SFC-3/21/Inf.3: Draft Report of the First Phase of the Independent Evaluation of the Third Project Cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3418en/cb3418en.pdf>

13. The applicants to BSF-4 submitted their pre-proposals by March 2018, and the Secretariat has not been in regular contact with the applicants that received a Certificate of Excellence since then. The Committee may wish to request the Secretariat to contact these applicants to enquire whether they would envision participating in BSF-5 and whether the work proposed in BSF-4 is still current and relevant or has already been conducted. The communication will inform that such an invitation does not entail any commitment or guarantee to provision of funding at this stage.

Advancing Option B.2: provide funding to a second phase of projects previously funded by the Benefit-sharing Fund

14. This option can be advanced to support a second phase of projects funded by BSF-3, the independent evaluation of which is being finalized. BSF-2 projects were concluded in 2015 and the implementation of BSF-4 projects is still in its first-phase. A benefit of this option is to enable BSF-3 projects with a record of high-performance to undertake a second phase or scaling up the outputs of the projects.

15. The BSF-3 project portfolio included 20 projects which had finalized by the end of 2020, and featured two thematic Windows.⁸

16. There are various sources of information available to determine BSF-3 projects with a record of high-performance. The BSF-3 independent evaluation assessed the third project cycle as a whole. Given the large geographical spread of the BSF-3 projects, the evaluation focused on a selected number of projects for the in-depth assessments. 11 projects covering 22 targeted countries received in-depth assessments. Another source available are the partner performance reports that FAO requests the Secretariat to fill out when the project agreements are closed. Such internal records are kept by FAO to inform decision-making for future projects with these partners. In addition, the Secretariat maintains the technical and financial reports used to monitor each individual project.

17. The Committee may wish to advance implementation of this option as follows:

- Step 1: request the Secretariat to use the records available to prepare a short analysis clustering the BSF-3 projects with a view to identify those with high-performance. The short analysis would include a list of projects suggested to be invited to BSF-5 and the methodology and criteria used for arriving at such a list. In preparing the analysis, the Secretariat may consult the team of independent experts that conducted the BSF-3 evaluation.
- Step 2: the Secretariat would contact the BSF-3 partners with a high-performance record to enquire whether they would envision participating in BSF-5 and whether the results achieved in BSF-3 have been expanded. The communication will inform that such invitation does not entail any commitment or guarantee to provision of funding at this stage.

Advancing other options available for fund allocation

18. The Committee has indicated that the options above could possibly be combined with the establishment and launch of a new round of the project cycle, with other options needing more discussion.

19. The Committee may wish to request the Secretariat to prepare a document for the next meeting of the Committee detailing progress made to advance the preferred options for BSF-5 fund allocation described above and how, if needed, they could be combined with other options.

⁸ Window 2 projects supported activities that ensure that local crop varieties of importance for food security are preserved, reintroduced, developed and maintained in farmers' fields through on-farm conservation, while Window 3 projects focused on the co-development of technology packages (technology, PGRFA data and materials) to add value to PGRFA through scientific research and studies.

III. FEATURES OF THE BSF-5 PROGRAMME

20. The BSF-5 will be the first funding cycle where the new approaches set out in the BSF Operations Manual will be used. It will also be the first funding cycle where a newly developed MEL framework will inform the programme design, implementation, monitoring and learning. All BSF-5 projects will contribute to the realization of the new Results Framework of BSF⁹ and will identify a number of monitoring indicators from Annex 1 of the MEL framework that they would use throughout the project life.
21. As stated in the BSF Operations Manual, the primary beneficiaries of the BSF-5 are farmers, especially in developing countries, and countries with economies in transition, who conserve and sustainably utilize plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The BSF-5 will target, in particular, small-scale farmers in developing countries, with a special focus on those most vulnerable to climate change and food insecurity and that greatly depend on PGRFA to ensure their livelihoods.
22. The BSF-5 will implement responsive and inclusive PGRFA strategies that cater to diverse needs of farmers, including women and youth. Throughout the years, the BSF has emphasized the role of women as major custodians and users of agrobiodiversity and required their involvement in project implementation. Gender mainstreaming will thus be an essential component of the design and implementation of all BSF-5 funded projects. Annex 1 of the MEL framework of the BSF includes gender differentiated indicators to enable a gender differentiated monitoring at the output levels.
23. BSF-5 funded projects are expected to establish consortia of Treaty enabling partners collaborating to enhance the implementation and visibility of the Treaty. These partnerships are expected to be inclusive, dynamic and multiple level between a wide range of PGRFA institutions and stakeholders. Through the partnerships established, the BSF-5 is expected to also benefit a wide range of PGRFA stakeholders (e.g., researchers, breeders, genebank curators, governmental officials, students, both MSc and PhD and lectures).
24. BSF-5 funded projects will demonstrate the positive changes that PGRFA bring to small-scale farmers in developing countries for climate-resilient food and agriculture. This will include the development of locally adapted PGRFA with traits that benefit farmers, enhanced capacities within the local seed value chain to disseminate locally adapted PGRFA and secure their conservation as well as policy changes and institutional transformation.
25. Through the Multilateral System of the Treaty, BSF-5 partners will continue to enable the access and facilitate the use of PGRFA, which in turn will generate new materials for farmers and the MLS. By supporting in situ and on-farm management, BSF-5 will strengthen the linkages with broader ex-situ conservation efforts, facilitate farmer to farmer exchanges of seeds and enable the flow of PGRFA material from farmers to ex-situ collections and back. More than just conserving diversity, the BSF-5 will strengthen the systems that maintain and create diversity for climate resilient food and agriculture. BSF-5 will integrate research for development with vulnerable communities through participatory selection, development, dissemination, conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.
26. At project level, a diversity of PGRFA materials is expected to be accessed, characterized, tested, developed and adapted on multiple locations within diverse agro-ecologies and cropping systems. BSF-5 will support farmers to analyse and work together with plant breeders and extension agents, for gender disaggregated identification of trait preferences and plant breeding objectives.

⁹ IT/GB-9/SFC-4/21/5-Third draft of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework of the BSF, section 1.2. Results framework.

27. As described in the BSF Operations Manual, learning in BSF-5 will be enabled within and between projects and programmes and the external environment. Lessons learned and continuous learning will be regularly provided to all Regions so to increase commitment to the Fund. Learning should occur on a continuous basis so that knowledge and lessons can be applied and facilitated through a community of practice of enabling partners.¹⁰

28. BSF-5 will contribute to the collection and sharing of PGRFA data and information, knowledge products and successful adaptation models, processes, lessons learned and best practices and share these amongst the past and present BSF partners and more widely with the Treaty Contracting Parties through the community of practice.

29. In addition, BSF-5 is expected to develop a strong knowledge-sharing mechanisms to improve farmers access to plant genetic material, related-data and Treaty implementation tools developed by the International Treaty and key partners.

30. In order to leverage further support, the BSF-5 partners will be encouraged to build synergies with other FAO projects and programmes, and other programmes of partners such as the CGIAR or the Global Crop Diversity Trust. BSF-5 partners will be encouraged to build linkages between different funding sources and explore collaborative planning and co-spending opportunities with others.

31. The BSF-5 will have a stronger focus on communication and visibility.

IV. NEXT STEPS FOR THE LAUNCH OF BSF-5

32. In order to advance preparations for BSF-5, the Committee may wish to take note and agree on the next steps needed for the launch of BSF-5:

Steps to be undertaken prior to SFC-5:

- The Secretariat organizes, upon request, a virtual briefing with Regional Groups to update them about preparations for the launch of BSF-5 and its novelties: new BSF Operations Manual adopted by the GB; MEL framework finalized by Committee and the new modalities for BSF-5 fund allocation being advanced by the Committee;
- The Secretariat contacts BSF-4 partners that received a certificate of excellence to enquire whether they would envision participating in BSF-5 and whether the work proposed in BSF-4 is still current and relevant or has already been conducted or expanded;
- The Secretariat analyses the records available to prepare a short analysis clustering the BSF-3 projects with a view to identify those with high-performance. It contacts the shortlisted BSF-3 partners to enquire whether they would envision participating in BSF-5 and whether the results achieved in BSF-3 have already been expanded through other funding sources;
- The Secretariat shares the methodology for screening of project pre-proposals to be used by the Panel of Experts;
- Bureau reconvenes the Independent Panel of Experts;
- The Secretariat continues resource mobilization and donor engagement in support of BSF-5.

¹⁰ Res3/2019, Annex 2 paragraph 42 (j): Operations Manual: Benefit-sharing Fund available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nb780en/nb780en.pdf>

SFC-5

- The Committee considers a BSF-5 programme document prepared by the Secretariat that includes:
 - Main features and novelties of BSF-5;
 - Funds available, budget and funding ceilings for single-country and multi-country projects;
 - Progress made to advance the preferred options for BSF-5 fund allocation and how, if needed, they could be combined with other options;
 - List of partners from BSF-3 and BSF-4 to be potentially invited to submit a pre-proposal;
 - Overview of the key dates for BSF-5 implementation;
- The Funding Committee takes note of the methodology for the screening of project pre-proposals to be used by the Panel of Experts;
- The Funding Committee decides to officially launch BSF-5 and requests the Secretariat to publish a notification and other communication products to inform about BSF-5.

V. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

32. The Funding Committee is invited to consider this document and provide guidance on the elements stipulated in paragraph 31 above, and on any other relevant aspects of the preparations for the BSF-5 programme.