

RESEARCH IN ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS FUND (RALF)

PROGRESS REPORT

January – July 2004

1. Introduction

The purpose of RALF is to develop and promote innovative alternative livelihood options for rural Afghans currently economically dependent on opium poppy. Having alternative livelihoods in place (goal) will contribute to the supergoal of sustainable elimination of opium poppy in Afghanistan.

RALF expected outputs are:

- A competitive mechanism for funding innovative applied research projects tailored to the programme purpose
- Recommended technologies and support services, tested and available for implementation
- Improved capacity for applied research and extension in government and NGO partners.

2. The Competitive Grant Mechanism

RALF is using a competitive research fund (CRF) to mobilise innovative ideas for the development and promotion of alternative livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan. The CRF is intended to attract a range of innovative proposals for applied research into natural resource-based livelihoods, including post-harvest processing and services, specifically directed at farmers and other rural stakeholders in areas currently affected by poppy production.

RALF is managed by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), which is responsible for managing the selection, supervision, and monitoring and evaluation of projects funded under the CRF. Project selection is made through an autonomous Project Review Panel

The CRF is implemented through Requests for Proposals (RFPs). It is intended to issue two RFPs, the first for projects to commence in mid 2004, and the second for projects to commence in January 2005.

This Progress Report includes the results of the first RFP and the selection of the first round of projects.

3. First Request for Proposals

The first Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in January 2004, and publicized by ICARDA through the Future Harvest Consortium for Rebuilding Agriculture in Afghanistan (FHCRAA) and ICARDA's website.

The announcement provided links to a separate website, which provided (i) the full announcement, (ii) RALF programme description, (iii) background documentation, (iv) guidelines for proposers, and (v) a facility where research agencies may register their interest and details and seek partnerships.¹

Proposals were requested from 'mini-consortia' including a research institution and an Afghan partner. The Afghan partner may either be an NGO (either local or international with

¹ The RALF website: <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/RALFweb/RALF.htm>

registration in Afghanistan), MAAH or other governmental body, or higher educational establishment. This combination is intended to maximise synergy between international research practice and knowledge of the local Afghan context.

Proposed projects were required to include a significant proportion of field research in Afghanistan and involve potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Project total budgets were limited to the range of US\$ 100,000 - US\$ 400,000.

The deadline for submission of proposals was 15 March 2004.

4. The Project Review Panel

An independent Project Review Panel has been appointed, which is responsible for reviewing proposals and selecting projects for funding. The Panel includes:

- The ICARDA designated Programme Manager
- A representative of the Afghanistan MAAH.
- A representative of DFID (Senior Rural Livelihoods Adviser)
- Three independent external reviewers, including an authority on rural development and alternative livelihoods in Afghanistan, an agricultural scientist, and a social development specialist.

5. The Project Review and Selection Process.

A total of 21 proposals were received in response to the first RFP. A full listing of all 21 proposals, including titles, partners and location is attached and is published on the RALF website.²

The 21 proposals were circulated to the Project Review Panel for review, with each proposal reviewed by at least four Panel members.

Panel members were asked to assess the proposals by providing a score for each of the desirable criteria listed in the RFP guidelines, as follows:

Desirable Criteria:

- The proposal demonstrates a clear understanding of the complexity of the problem addressed by RALF and a high likelihood of contributing to the RALF purpose of developing and promoting innovative alternative livelihood options for rural Afghans currently economically dependent on opium poppy.
- Likelihood of achieving sustainable and quantifiable impact and replicability of results, including a clearly defined mechanism for scaling up and promoting successful results of research.
- Is the project realistic in terms of local capacity and resources? Will the overall conception, technical design (logical framework) and research methodology of the project achieve the stated outputs? Particular attention will be given to participatory research approaches.
- The proposal clearly identifies (i) target areas, (ii) participants and immediate users, and (iii) beneficiaries, including an understanding of all stakeholder groups.
- Are particular needs of poor stakeholders/ vulnerable groups (including women) addressed?

² Location had not initially been considered as a criterion in selecting projects. However, the Review Panel looked at location across projects to ensure that RALF was strategically targeting poppy producing areas.

- The proposal considers market aspects and identifies potential markets for products, or includes relevant market research in its scope of activities.
- The proposal encompasses linkages with ongoing projects. Proposals based on promoting the results of relevant on-going or previous research may also be considered.
- The proposal demonstrates potential for rapid uptake of results during the project.
- The proposal includes an element of capacity building for Afghan research and development personnel.
- Comparative advantages of the partners involved in (i) conducting the proposed research and (ii) maximising the synergy between international research practice and knowledge of the local Afghan context.

The entire Project Review Panel met for two days on 8th-9th April 2004 to review collectively the proposals, based on the initial scores provided by each Panel member. Decisions were based on consensus.

Based on this review, two proposals were recommended for acceptance subject to some specific recommendations. Proponents of these two proposals were asked to respond to the Panel's specific recommendations.

A further seven proposals were considered to be potentially fundable, but required further modification. The proponents were provided with full comments and asked to provide modifications to their proposal, together with a letter responding to the Panel's comments, within four weeks of being notified. These revised proposals were then circulated to the Panel for review.

Based on this second round of review, a further five proposals were selected for funding.

6. Selected Projects

The seven projects selected for funding are listed in the table on page 6.

The selected projects represent a balanced geographical spread over poppy producing regions, and a diverse thematic spread, including:

- (a) three participatory livelihoods projects in Laghman, Helmand/Kandahar, and Ghor (Projects 01-03, 01-07 and 01-16, respectively).

All three projects aim, in various ways, to identify, with farming communities, potential alternatives to poppy production, identify market opportunities and constraints to market access, test a variety of agroenterprises and marketing strategies, and strengthen the capacity of MAAH and NGOs to support such participatory action research.

- (b) two projects focused on specific commodities: forage and milk production in Baghlan (01-11) and legumes and vegetables in Nangahar (01-04).

The first aims to promote the production of good quality forages and improved livestock management practices to increase milk production, and to introduce household and community-level processing of milk to add value to milk products. The second focuses on six legume and vegetable crops as viable alternatives to opium poppy, and the value addition of low-cost drip irrigation technology, by working through producer / marketing co-operatives already established.

- (c) one focussed on developing and testing innovative micro-finance mechanisms in Badakhshan (01-08); and

- (d) one a broad scoping study of markets in the livestock sector (01-09): by analyzing the markets for livestock and livestock products, the project will identify will identify the most promising avenues for research to develop market-oriented livestock production systems.

ICARDA is currently concluding project agreements with the lead agencies. Once these are concluded the project documents will be posted on the RALF website.

7. Project Agreements

Project Agreements were drafted based on the requirements of the RALF Programme document and the Grant Agreement between DFID and ICARDA. The draft Project Agreements between ICARDA and each Project Leader were sent to all seven selected projects in early June.

It has taken longer than expected to conclude these contractual arrangements. In some cases Project Leaders have been slow to respond; in others, Project Leaders queried some clauses or requested amendments to the agreement to satisfy their institute's requirements.

By the time of reporting, five projects had concluded all contractual arrangements and provided the necessary requests for payment. ICARDA expects to receive the completed agreements from the remaining two projects during August.

8. Second Request for Proposals

There was general agreement by the Project Review Panel that the time provided for preparation of proposals in the first RFP was too short. The Panel concluded that higher quality proposals would be obtained, and the review process made more efficient, through a two stage process: submission of brief Concept Notes to be short-listed by the Review Panel; short-listed Concept Notes would then be invited to submit full proposals, with selection to be made in the second meeting of the Review Panel.

The second Request for Proposals (RFP02) was issued on 20 June 2004, by email, and posted on the RALF website.

The timetable for RFP02 is as follows:

- The deadline for submission of Concept Notes is: 9 August 2004.
- The Project Review Panel will return their scores by 3 September 2004
- Requests for full proposals for short-listed projects will be issued by 6 September 2004.
- The deadline for submission of Full Proposals will be 18 October 2004.
- The final decision is expected by early December 2004.

9. Planned Activities in next six-month period

- The first annual workshop for the selected projects is planned for late November in Kabul. The workshop will provide a forum for the seven projects to exchange results and experiences, as well as discuss ways in which to integrate their activities within the overall programme.

- The second meeting of the Project Review Panel, to select the second round of projects, is scheduled to coincide with the annual workshop in Kabul.
- The Programme Manager will develop detailed plans for monitoring and evaluation of projects.
- Once immediate activities associated with the RFP02 are completed in September, the Programme Manager will visit Afghanistan to discuss and monitor initiation and progress of the first seven selected projects.
- Based on the experience from the first RFP, it is expected that contractual arrangements for the second round of selected projects can be concluded more quickly and that these projects will commence in early January 2005.

Projects Selected for funding by RALF under the first Request for Proposals.

| Proj No. | Implementing Agencies (lead in bold) | Short Title | Location | Budget (\$) | Duration |
|-----------------|---|--|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 01-03: | Washington State University DACAAR MAAH | Village Decision Driven Research Project | Laghman | 399,943 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |
| 01-04: | Relief International World Vegetable Centre Nangahar University International Development Enterprises | Introduction, Evaluation and Promotion of Appropriate Crop Legumes and Vegetables for Eastern Afghanistan (CLVEA) | Nangarhar | 400,000 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |
| 01-07: | Mercy Corps Afghanistan Centre for Arid Zone Studies MAAH (Helmand and Kandahar Provinces) | Restorative Agriculture and Rural Economy Research Project | Helmand and Kandahar | 400,000 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |
| 01-08: | Natural Resources Institute, UK Aga Khan Foundation | Innovative financial mechanisms for improving the livelihoods of rural Afghans currently economically dependent on opium poppy | Badakhshan | 334,491 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |
| 01-09: | Macaulay Research Consultancy Services Ltd., UK: Mercy Corps MAAH ICARDA | Marketing of livestock and livestock products: Market demand, potential returns to producers and constraints to market access. | Kunduz, Takhar, Daikundi, Kandahar & Helmand Provinces | 109,437 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Jan-05 |
| 01-11: | ICARDA Aga Khan Foundation MAAH Macaulay Research | Improved rural incomes from better forage production and sales of milk products | Baghlan | 399,760 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |
| 01-16: | Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Afghanistan ICRISAT: | Western Afghanistan Agroenterprise Action Research Program | Ghor | 399,814 | 1-Jun-04 to 31-Dec-06 |