

## **ICRISAT-NCAP-IRRI Collaborative Project on Tracking Changes in Rural Poverty in Household and Village Economies in South Asia (VDSA)**

### **Inviting Proposals for Research Field Fellowships 2011**

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) invites research and development institutes to respond to this Request for Proposals (RFP), either from individual researchers or in collaboration with PhD students from Asia who wish to undertake field research in the ICRISAT-IRRI-NCAP collaborative project on “Tracking Changes in Rural Poverty in Household and Village Economies in South Asia”, also known as Village Dynamics Studies in South Asia (VDSA).

#### **About the VDSA Project**

Literature cites that no single dataset has yielded as many important microeconomic papers in the history of modern development economics as ICRISAT’s Village Level Studies, now known as VDSA. The VDSA/VLS-type household panel provide a distinctive social science laboratory to address contemporary issues relating to institutional, policy and technological changes over three decades and their potential scope to benefit the poor. These studies represent a true international public good as already demonstrated by the plethora of quality studies based on the original datasets and their contributions to R&D strategies, policies and priorities.

Insights from VLS-type household panel data help us in understanding the drivers of agricultural and economic transformation, throwing light on the dynamics of poverty. Why do some households escape and yet some others dive headlong into poverty? The Village Dynamics Studies help us understand gender-based differences and strategies for moving out of poverty. Thinking beyond Asia, in the sub-Saharan Africa context, why is agricultural transformation slow to occur? What are the technological, institutional and policy issues preventing agricultural (economic, social, and environmental) transformation from occurring? As we find answers to these questions, we can develop solutions in consultation with crop scientists, development practitioners and policy makers to help improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and families in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, one of ICRISAT’s most important mission goals.

These studies assist in answering several pressing issues pertaining to agriculture as an engine for growth, the positive association between economic growth and poverty alleviation; the impact of technology on poverty reduction; the impact of climate change; nutritional status and income; social network architecture through village registries; the economic, social, and cultural impacts of women’s Self-Help Groups; the determinants of effectiveness in local governance; and changes in natural vegetation and soil quality. The VDSA includes both micro-level and-meso level (district) time series data that complement each other in addressing these questions.

Scores of doctoral dissertations and scholarly articles have taken advantage of the data, collectively shaping policy debate and research direction across the field. The dataset has the advantage of an unusually long duration: 30 years, a period paralleled by only a handful of existing datasets. In efforts to examine the factors that influence poverty and welfare, such a long-term panel duration provides critical information on income dynamics. Over 150 research papers and three dozen doctoral dissertations were based on empirical analysis of VLS data in the semi-arid tropics of India and West Africa. A recent search in Google Scholar shows that this body of work has generated over 10,000 citations.

Research fellowships funded through this RFP will contribute to policies, practices and institutional innovations that alleviate rural poverty by analyzing and disseminating knowledge on rural livelihoods, poverty dynamics and development pathways of the poor in the semi-arid tropics (SAT) as well as on issues related to efficiency, equity and sustainability of agriculture.

### **Objectives of this RFP**

The twin objectives of the competitive grant program to sponsor field research through this project are to:

1. Develop capacity in Asia for the analysis of complex longitudinal household VDSA-type panel data and meso datasets
2. Produce policy-relevant research outputs using existing and/or potential VDSA household and meso data.

Research sponsored under this RFP is expected to build on existing research at ICRISAT, such as either (a) VDSA project activities that already address the above issues, or (b) other ongoing research that has identified the relevance of tracking change in rural poverty but research work is yet to start.

The VDSA project gives priority to the following research themes, based on their importance in policy focus, relevance to the VDSA mandate, and their widespread applicability across resources and regions:

- Development pathways and poverty dynamics
- Public investment and supply response
- Diversification: Farm and non-farm including migration
- Gender, Nutrition and Health
- Technology adoption and impacts
- Governance
- Management of natural resources and common property
- Labor market
- Impact of risk

- Impact of credit and credit constraints
- Other relevant topics on current emerging issues

Support for this research and the overall VDSA project is provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation (BMGF). Six field research fellowships are expected to be awarded funding.

### **Who may apply**

A full-time researcher or a PhD student in the social sciences or humanities and a national of any Asian country (Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam, among others) is eligible to apply for the fellowship. In case of a PhD student, the applicant must have completed all his PhD requirements except fieldwork and dissertation by the time the fellowship begins.

VDSA can only fund research carried out in collaboration with ICRISAT, NCAP or IRRI. Collaboration with an institution (research organization or NGO) in the country or countries of research and collaborative proposals are encouraged, but not compulsory. National institutes in developing countries may initiate the research project but the substantial involvement of ICRISAT, NCAP or IRRI is required.

Funds will be remitted to the lead center identified in the RFP, which will be responsible for accounting and deliverables.

### **Criteria for Grant Selection**

1. The importance and relevance of the proposed research to agriculture and rural development, poverty reduction, inclusive growth, gender equity, socio-economic and environmental sustainability in South Asia
2. Quality of the proposal, particularly in theory and analytical methods
3. Likelihood of sustained impact on research and policy
4. Past academic record of the candidate
5. Cost effectiveness of the research
6. Other things being equal, grants with smaller budgets will have a higher probability of success

Proposals will be reviewed and decisions made by an independent Proposal Review Panel consisting of researchers from programs other than those directly involved in VDSA. VDSA project teams will submit an opinion to the review panel on the feasibility of the research given the existing or potential VDSA data.

### **Funding**

Fellowships will provide support for a maximum of 15 months and must be held for a single continuous period between November 2011 and June 2013. Exclusive of the cost

of collecting supplemental data, the expected grant size will range between US\$ 5000 and US\$ 8000.

- The proposal may request funding for the following expenses, as needed:
  - Maintenance for the period of field work, based on living costs in the host country (using standards of comparable programs, such as the Fulbright stipend levels);
  - Research allowance for supplemental expenses, e.g. local travel, research support (max. US\$ 2500);
  - Costs of field work and data collection (e.g. lab fees)
  - Costs of tuition for courses which cannot be offered at the home institution (such as a course on time series analysis) to enable the student/researcher to effectively carry out the research
  - Round-trip transportation to the host country (including visa fees, if applicable); and
  - Supplemental health and accident insurance.
- Costs will not include the time for writing the results which should be covered by the home institution.

The grant will cover only the above expenses and NOT tuition or any other costs incurring at the university during the field research period, and is not meant to finance the “writing up” of field research already undertaken.

In addition to reporting requirements, several deliverables have to be submitted. Upon completion of the field work, the researcher/student will present his/her preliminary findings at the collaborating center – ICRISAT/NCAP/IRRI. Within 6 months of completing field work, the student will submit a VDSA Working Paper, co-authored with a researcher from the collaborating center and/or local counterpart organization. In case of PhD students, a copy of the dissertation will be provided to the collaborating center and ICRISAT on completion.

This call targets only PhD students and researchers from Asian countries and enrolled/working in an Asian University, and includes three categories of research scholars:

1. PhD students
2. Young researchers – less than 5 years following PhD
3. Field investigators of participating institutions who have completed at least 2 years of field work and have the potential for research as demonstrated by a research proposal.

**Process and Timetable**

- 15 November 2011 Completed proposals must be sent by email no later than this date. All submissions will receive notification upon receipt.
- 30 November 2011 Shortlisted awardees will be notified, and comments on their proposals will be communicated, to strengthen them for re-submission.
- 10 December 2011 Revised proposals to be submitted to the Committee for final selection
- 20 December 2011 Final recipients will be notified and funds transferred

**How to Apply**

The completed application form, including any supporting material should be emailed to [c.bantilan@cgiar.org](mailto:c.bantilan@cgiar.org) with a copy to [u.deb@cgiar.org](mailto:u.deb@cgiar.org)

**Late proposals or proposal components will not be accepted.**

**Questions**

Any questions regarding this RFP should be directed to:  
Cynthia Bantilan ([c.bantilan@cgiar.org](mailto:c.bantilan@cgiar.org)) with a copy to Uttam Deb ([u.deb@cgiar.org](mailto:u.deb@cgiar.org))

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Dr Cynthia Bantilan (with a copy to Uttam Deb) to indicate their interest, and to seek clarifications to make sure the proposals submitted are as strong as possible.