

DBT, Gates Foundation push agriculture research projects focused on nutrition

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The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology of India, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched Grand Challenges India (GCI) on March 20, 2013 in New Delhi. Biotechnology Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) as the implementing agency for the Grand Challenges framework has announced the first initiative under Grand Challenges India, program titled "Achieving Healthy Growth through Agriculture and Nutrition" with funding support from DBT, USAID, and the Gates Foundation.

Achieving healthy growth through agriculture and nutrition seeks to target the relationship between agriculture, nutrition, and health to reduce the high incidence of low birth weight and early stunting and wasting among India infants. Following an extensive review process by committees consisting of national and international experts, the awardees have been announced today by Prof K Vijay Raghavan, secretary DBT and chairman, BIRAC.

The five selected proposals focus on achieving development of innovative interventions that integrate agriculture practices with nutrition outcomes aimed at improved health benefits for woman and children for significant socio-economic impact and include two Interventional Development Grants and three Seed Grants.

The details of proposals are mentioned below:

1. Digital Green in collaboration with Voluntary Association for Rural Reconstruction and Appropriate Technology (VARRAT), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), The Strengthening Partnerships, Results and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING), Tata-Cornell Agriculture & Nutrition Initiative (TCI), Development Corner (DCOR): Digital technology enabled and community driven integrated agriculture and nutrition intervention to promote maternal and child nutrition in Odisha. This is an interventional development grant.

2. Annamalai University in collaboration with The International Rice Research Institute, New Delhi: Designing on-farm participatory models of integrated farming system for enhancement of household diet diversity and livelihood of women small holder farmers. This is an interventional development grant.

3. EKutir Rural Management Services Private Limited in collaboration with Wholesome Wave, McGill Center for Convergence of Health and Economics: Veggie Lite - Conjunction of agriculture, nutrition and health for inclusive development of women. This is a seed grant.

4. Science for Society, Mumbai: To ensure year wise nutritional food security for Indian women through community level implementation of Domestic Solar Conduction Dryer. This is a seed grant.

5. Amity University, Noida: Novel approach to reduce zinc malnutrition in rural women and children through agronomic bio-fortification of food crops. This is a seed grant.

"We continue to seek new ways to integrate our programs targeting healthy birth, growth, and development to maximize impact" said Chris Wilson, Director of Discovery & Translational Sciences at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "We are excited to learn from our Grand Challenges India partnership and to explore new ways to link agriculture and nutrition to achieve healthy growth for babies."

Prof. K. Vijay Raghavan, Secretary, DBT & Chairman BIRAC stated that "Biotech science is unusually placed today to have a transformative impact on saving lives and improving health through agri-nutrition. We are determined to do our best and not let slip this opportunity for our people."