

Securing water for food: a call for innovations

WASHINGTON D.C., USA - The US Agency for International Development (USAID); Sweden, through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; and the government of South Africa, have announced a fourth call for groundbreaking innovations under 'Securing Water for Food: A Grand Challenge for Development'.



Image by 123RF

Launched in 2013, '[Securing Water for Food: A Grand Challenge for Development](#)' aims to increase access to innovations that help farmers produce more food with less water, enhance water storage, and improve the use of saline water and soils to produce food.

Over the previous three rounds of Securing Water for Food, the program has saved over 700 million litres of water, produced nearly 2,600 tons of food, and served more than 780,000 farmers and other customers in more than 25 low-resource countries.

"By 2050, global water demand is expected to increase by 55%, and 70% of global water use occurs in food production," said Christian Holmes, USAID's global water coordinator. "Through a catalytic use of aid, Securing Water for Food will be able to capture and support the implementation of innovative ideas and new technologies for better water efficiency and sustainable development."

To solve this problem, the Securing Water for Food partners will direct \$32 million by 2018 to fund and accelerate innovations that can disrupt the current water-food security nexus.

This \$7.5 million global call for proposals has an increased focus on cutting-edge, advanced technologies and business models. The Challenge also seeks innovations that prioritise the engagement of women and encourages high quality applications, especially from women-owned/women-led enterprises and developing country entrepreneurs.

Prize money

Awardees will receive between \$100,000 and \$2 million in funding and acceleration support to bring their innovations to scale. Awardees must continually demonstrate their progress through milestone-based funding.

Sweden's Ambassador to the United States, Björn Lyrval, noted that, "For Sweden, gender equality is stressed in all development cooperation, which is strengthened by our feminist foreign policy. In sub-Saharan Africa, women produce as much as 80% of the food. It is therefore crucial that Securing Water for Food continues to strengthen the role of women. We look forward to seeing the grantees from this fourth round of calls include women in all parts of their businesses."

Securing Water for Food represents a new approach to foreign assistance. Through a competitive process the program identifies and invests in a portfolio of innovative solutions. The program seeks connections and strategic relationships that help its innovators implement and scale their water-for-food solutions.

The program seeks exceptional innovations that have already demonstrated success during pilots that go beyond traditional development programs and conventional approaches. Dr Isayvani Naicker, for South Africa's Department of Science and Technology, notes that, "South Africa is a water scarce country and our strategic partnership within the Securing Water for Food Grand Challenge seeks to identify and accelerate science and technology innovations that improve water sustainability, while simultaneously improving food security, creating jobs and ultimately alleviating poverty."

In its first three rounds, Securing Water for Food selected 30 winners out of nearly 1,000 applications from universities, start-ups, and NGOs in more than 93 countries. Innovations range from crops for saline environments and flying water sensor technologies to organic seed protectants that defend against drought and heat stress.

"The support we have received to date through the Securing Water for Food has been a game changer for scaling our social enterprise. The award is enabling us to test at scale and is providing us with the guidance we need to adapt our business model to better serve the sustainability of our cause. Last year, we were able to positively impact the lives of over 300,000 people - all due to the grand challenge and our match funding partner Unilever," said Claire Reid, founder and CEO of Reel Gardening, one of Securing Water for Food's first round of innovators.

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