

NSFC General Assembly Stresses Its Role in Innovation

The 3rd Plenary Session of the 6th National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) General Assembly was held in Beijing on March 23, 2010, with the participation of members of NSFC General Assembly, members of NSFC Supervision Committee and NSFC staff. During the opening ceremony, NSFC President Chen Yiyu delivered a working report under the title of “Striving for Substantial Contribution to China’s Sustainable Development by Adhering to Strategic Guidance and Encouraging Indigenous Innovation”. Prof. Zhu Daoben, Chairman of NSFC Supervision Committee presented the working report on behalf of NSFC Supervision Committee. Mr. Xu Qin, Director-General of the Department of High-Tech Industry of the National Development and Reform Commission, and Dr. Song Qiuling, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education, Science and Culture of the Ministry of Finance attended the meeting and delivered speeches. Participants in the meeting also included representatives from the General Office of the State Council, State Commission Office for Public Sector Reform, Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, Research Office of the State Council, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China Association for Science and Technology, etc. The opening ceremony was presided over by NSFC Vice President Wang Jie.

The keynote of the meeting is to summarize the work done in 2009 against the requirements of government work report, analyze the trend of development for the National Natural Science Fund, and develop the working plan for the future.

President Chen pointed out in his report that NSFC accepted 102 000 research proposals in total from 1 674 research institutions across China in 2009, an increase of 18 000 proposals in comparison with that of the previous year (or an increase by 21.6%). Facing the dramatic increase in proposals received, NSFC, on the basis of analysis of the practical situation, succeeded in scheduling a reasonable and feasible timeline for fulfilling the funding plan. 20 343 projects proposed by 1 056 research institutions all over China were approved for funding under NSFC’s three program pillars of Research Program, Talent Training Program and Research Facilities & Environment Construction Program respectively, with a total budget of 7.054 billion yuan.

As introduced by President Chen, outstanding achievements and talents in basic research cropped up continuously under the long-term support by the National Natural Science Fund and other National Science and Technology Programs. Significant progresses have been achieved in 2009 by Chinese scientists on such research frontiers as superconducting-based highly charged ion sources, solar magnetic field, stem cell, protein structure, North China craton destruction, etc. Momentous contribution has been done to China’s socioeconomic development by various research achievements obtained in the research on nano and high polymer materials, ultra precision machining of complex curve parts, development of new drugs for diabetes, clean use of coal, digital home, terrestrial carbon sink, disaster prevention and mitigation, financial crisis response and so on. 27 of the 28 scientists who were granted the National Natural Science Award have been supported by the National Natural Science Fund to various extent. Besides, all first prize winners of the State Technological Invention Award and most first prize winners of the National Science and Technology Progress Award have been long financed by the National Natural Science Fund.

In 2009, NSFC attached greater importance to strategic research, through which plans for science and technology development were further defined. The funding plan for the fiscal year 2009 has been consummately fulfilled with an emphasis on indigenous innovation. The macro strategic guiding role of NSFC has been further enhanced owing to the creative funding mechanism.

President Chen pointed out that the 12th Five-Year Plan Period and an even longer period of time to come in future will be a critical phase for the construction of China into an innovation-oriented nation and a comprehensive and comparatively well-off society. Based on the accurate judgment of the real situation, timely seizure of the opportunities for development, comprehensive consideration of the diverse funding pattern for basic research, strategic planning and working policies, scientific and democratic decision-making mechanism, law-based management and the establishment of favorable environment for creative research, it is a strategic orientation for NSFC to better its service for the nation's innovative capability by attaching more emphasis to basic, frontier research and talent training.

Under the great support by the Ministry of Finance, the state budget for NSFC in the fiscal year 2010 will exceed 8.3 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase by 30%. It is our bound duty to grasp in-depth understanding of the strategic plan by the central government and enhance our sense of responsibility and mission for the promotion of indigenous innovation. The year 2010 will witness not only the fulfillment of the programmatic goals of the 11th Five-Year Plan, but also the beginning of all planned endeavors of the 12th Five-Year Plan. Apart from the daily work, NSFC should pay due attention to the following:

1) Further promotion of the stable development of basic research on the basis of coordinated funding planning. In line with the reform of the state budget system and the needs of basic research, NSFC plans to arrange a total funding of around 9.5 billion yuan for the year 2010. 114 955 research proposals from 1 837 research institutions were received during the concentrated window for application in 2010, an increase by 17.5% in comparison with that in the previous year. More oriented and flexible use of the increased funding budget should be considered according to the new trends and needs of the development of basic research in China, featuring more emphasis on basic research, frontier research and talent training;

2) Formulation of the 12th Five-Year Plan on the sound basis of strategic research in accord with the strategic plan by the central government;

3) Standardization of academic review management to further enhance the accountability of the National Natural Science Fund system;

4) Introduction of international performance evaluation with a view to improving the management of the National Natural Science Fund; and

5) Promotion of science spirit in furtherance of research integrity.

NSFC Planning and Financial Working Report 2009 was presented in paper and the 3 reports were delivered and approved by vote during the meeting. NSFC President Chen, Vice Presidents Wang Jie, Shen Wenqing, Sun Jiaguang, Shen Yan, Yao Jiannian and He Minghong attended the meeting and subsequent group discussions. President Chen delivered a concluding speech during the summary session chaired by Vice President Wang Jie.

The meeting concluded successfully by calling for all NSFC staff to fulfill the goals set for 2010 and the 11th Five-Year Plan, formulate the 12th Five-Year Plan, create a favorable environment for innovation, promote indigenous innovation, and contribute more to China's S&T-led sustainable development.