



Standing
Panel on
Impact
Assessment

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Assessing the impacts of international agricultural research on nutrition and health in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia



Email concept notes to: Erwin Bulte, erwin.bulte@wur.nl no later than 5pm CET, Friday 20th September 2013

Background

Despite a renewed interest in agricultural development, the global extent of malnutrition and poor health remain persistent challenges. The agriculture-health-nutrition nexus is multi-faceted. For example, farming is the primary source of income (and calories and nutrients) for most of the rural poor, agriculture-related diseases and health losses are significant in many countries, and labour productivity on the farm depends on workers' health and nutrition status.

These linkages suggest scope for leveraging agriculture for improving nutrition and health. This implies redesigning agricultural practices, research and policies to enhance health and nutrition benefits. Levers may range from changing crops or crop varieties to integrating agricultural, nutrition and health sectors at the policy level. Impacts may be direct, for example via dietary changes or changes in nutritional value of food consumed, or indirect, e.g., via changes in income or food prices.

In the past, much of the CGIAR research targeted interventions aimed at raising farm-level productivity which, when adopted on a sufficiently large scale, helped increase the overall supply of food, thereby lowering food prices. By making food cheaper and more available to the poor this indirectly contributed to improving the diets and nutrition of the poor. Historically, therefore, this was probably the main channel by which CGIAR research influenced health and nutrition outcomes – though good evidence of this indirect causal relationship is scarce. A major thrust of one of the current CGIAR Research Programs, i.e. the CRP on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH), is examining more effective ways to exploit and enhance the synergies between agriculture, health and nutrition. The key research components in that CRP are biofortification, improving nutrition and food safety along value chains, and integrating agriculture, nutrition and health sectors at the program and policy level. It is understood that the nature of the agriculture, nutrition and health nexus varies from one region to the next, and that cross-sectoral links are mediated by conditional factors such as local infrastructure, market structures, women's empowerment, and the distribution of assets (including land).

Program scope

This call for proposals is motivated by the need to broaden and deepen the evidence base regarding the potential for agriculture research and development to leverage health and nutrition benefits. The intention is to complement, not to duplicate, on-going work in the A4NH and other CGIAR research programs, and to give priority to areas that until now are relatively "under-evaluated." This prominently includes activities related to measuring the impact of research-derived interventions that plausibly impact on nutrition and health. Further, to enhance synergies and coherence across individual projects, this impact assessment program has a geographical focus on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This call focuses in on the following two themes:

Theme 1: Changes in crops, varieties, technologies and farm practices. This theme will examine the impact of international agricultural research on health and nutrition via on-farm production modalities. A prominent example

is an exploration of the effects of improved productivity of staples (and non-staples), and how this impacts on nutrition via relative price effects, income, gender and other effects. While this may sometimes happen along fairly narrow and discrete pathways, e.g. golden rice providing Vitamin A for subsistence farmers, the predominant effect of agricultural research on people's nutrition and health has probably come about by making food more abundant and cheaper. Establishing that linkage is a major challenge as the channels through which impacts on health and nutrition occur are often indirect and complex. For this reason the focus of some impact assessment studies may have to concentrate on short causal chains along the pathway, i.e., from productivity improvements to higher incomes, or from increased incomes to greater diet diversity, or from changes in diets to improved nutrition. (Note: it would be preferable if the case studies being examined were, at least plausibly, related to a CGIAR research output, e.g. an improved variety).

Theme 2: Changes in markets, value chains, and consumer demand. This theme will examine the impact of international agricultural research on health and nutrition via changes in marketing channels and the governance thereof. Examples include an exploration of changing market structures, trading arrangements and value chains in the context of emerging commodity exchanges (such as the Ethiopian ECX), or due to increasing quality standards imposed by supermarkets. How does this impact on nutrition via production incentives, income, gender and other effects? Here again, the linkages are complex and indirect, so focusing on particular hypothesized causal relationships along the impact pathway may be the best option.

For both themes, we encourage studies that extend beyond the identification of average treatment effects. In addition to being context/site specific, the impact of interventions and policies may also vary across social groups. We are interested in the identification of such heterogeneous treatment effects – conditional on mediating factors and household characteristics – and the pathway via which agriculture affects health and nutrition. Studies should carefully look at complementary interventions and conceptualise each case study. [Recent reviews](#) indicate this is fundamentally important in achieving sustainable impacts, i.e. adoption of new agricultural innovations has the greatest impact when associated with (and sometimes no impact without) nutrition (biofortification, nutrition education, etc.) and sanitation (access to clean water, toilets) interventions.

A range of methodologies may be brought to bear on the proper identification of causal effects. These methodologies include desk research and meta-analysis (including systematic reviews), econometric techniques for observational data (e.g., propensity score matching, diff-in-diff, and instrumental variables), and randomized controlled trials. We are seeking a portfolio of complementary and mixed methodologies to show plausible health and nutrition impacts from research-contributed agricultural development initiatives and to enhance our understanding of impacts in the above-mentioned domains.

Proposals should spell out clearly the specific agricultural research purporting to contribute to the impact, the types of nutrition and health outcomes (specific indicator) to be measured and the populations of interest. Thus the study should clearly address the attribution problem—showing how they will identify the contribution of specific agricultural research outputs to the particular health and nutrition outcome of interest.

Dates, modalities and restrictions

- 1) The application procedure is organised as a two-stage process and will be led and managed by [Erwin Bulte](#), Professor of Development Economics at Wageningen University and an associate member of SPIA. In the first stage we solicit two-page concept notes. Following a process of external review, a subset of applicants is invited to develop a full proposal. Concept notes should be emailed to Erwin.bulte@wur.nl no later than 5pm CET on 20th September 2013.
- 2) Applicants will be informed about the outcome of the concept note stage by Monday 14th October 2013. The deadline for submitting full proposals is Monday 16th December 2013.

- 3) Successful proposals will consider the themes identified above, and have a geographical focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and/or South Asia. While it is not a prerequisite that studies responding to this call should focus on specific CGIAR activities, it is considered an advantage if research speaks to issues of interest to the CGIAR network. We are also very interested in funding desk studies that summarise and critically review what we know about the linkages between agricultural research and intermediate health and nutrition outcomes.
- 4) There is *no* obligation that proposals should be partnerships involving CGIAR centres. This call for proposals has particular relevance for the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) 4 on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health, but is open to all CRPs with a sufficient health and nutrition focus, and to academic and other researchers outside the CGIAR.
- 5) A total budget of approximately USD 500,000 is available for the programme. We seek to fund a few desk studies and two or three field studies. The budget of individual proposals should not exceed USD 250,000. We give preference to proposals that provide some co-financing to the study.
- 6) Studies should start January 2014 and are likely to extend over 6 months (for desk studies) to 24 months (for studies involving field work). The final output from the research should be a working paper of publishable quality.

Suggested concept note format

Concept notes should be no more than **two pages** and should have the following information:

- Title of proposed study
- Names and affiliations of principal investigators and main collaborators
- Abstract (max 200 words)
- Brief description of the technology / intervention / policy / institutional innovation under study
- Geographic scope and target population of study (be as specific as possible)
- Description of the main causal relationship(s) under study and main indicators to be measured
- Proposed study design / methodology
- Budget overview with total amount requested from this call broken down by: Personnel; Travel; Workshops / Meetings; Data collection / surveys / consultancies; Supplies / Miscellaneous. Where a study is to be co-funded from another source, please indicate the source and whether this is secured or subject to another grant application being approved.
- Approximate timeline for the study, down by main activities

Criteria for selection and weights

We will score concept notes according to the following set of criteria:

1. Likely scale, size and relevance of impacts (20%)
2. Link with existing theory, development of 'theory of change,' and identification of pathway of impact, theory-informed analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects (30%)
3. Rigour of the research design, clear identification strategy, credible counterfactuals (30%)
4. Relevance and quality of partners proposed (including CGIAR), capacity and reputation of proposed grantee (10%)
5. Cost effectiveness, availability of co-financing (5%)
6. Other outstanding aspects of the proposal (5%)