



The CGIAR Research Program (CRP) on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) is led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and includes 11 other CGIAR Centers and numerous other research and development partners. The main objective of A4NH is to ‘work to accelerate progress in improving the nutrition and health of poor people by exploiting and enhancing the synergies between agriculture, nutrition, and health’. A4NH had a budget of around \$60-80 million dollars per year in Phase 1 (2012-14) and four main research components or ‘Flagships’: Biofortification, Integrated Programs and Policies; Value Chains for Enhanced Nutrition, and Agriculture-Associated Diseases.

In 2014, A4NH commissioned an independent, external evaluation of the CRP¹, at the request of the CGIAR and with guidance and oversight from the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA). The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the design and implementation of the A4NH CRP, and to make recommendations to enhance the contribution that A4NH is likely to make towards reaching the CGIAR objectives and System-Level Outcomes (SLOs), especially the SLO on improving nutrition and health. The evaluation aims to contribute to both accountability and learning. The scope of the evaluation includes all A4NH activities, structures, and institutions, including activities that started earlier and have continued under A4NH.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was organized around four main evaluation questions (EQs), set by the A4NH Program Management Committee and refined through wide consultation and quality assurance.

Evaluation questions

EQ1. Is A4NH on course to achieve its outputs, outcomes and impacts? Why or why not?

EQ2. Within the CGIAR, has A4NH added value in comparison to pre-reform ways of doing business? Any disadvantages?

EQ3. Does A4NH have the right resources, systems and approaches to partnerships?

EQ4. Is the scope and focus of A4NH relevant and appropriate?

The evaluation team employed a ‘utilization-focused’ approach, closely involving key decision-makers in the design of the evaluation, facilitating self-evaluation and early feedback and discussion of emerging findings—at the same time maintaining appropriate independence. An Expert Panel was commissioned to look at the pros and cons of different areas of focus of A4NH ([Bos et al., 2015](#)). Other methods used in the evaluation included: Individual interviews involving over 250 stakeholders; country visits to Bangladesh, India and Kenya, and a “virtual visit” to Nigeria; review of a random sample of A4NH projects; analysis of project documentation, publications and other outputs and financial information; [stakeholder surveys](#); mapping of agriculture, nutrition and health (‘ANH’) activities undertaken by other CRPs; observation of key A4NH meetings; and review of nearly 400 documents.

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Evaluation Question 1: Is A4NH on course to achieve its planned outputs, outcomes and impacts? Why or why not?

We judge that the CRP is generally making good progress against its planned ‘deliverables’, although with some slippage on dates. We discuss the main reasons for delays and dropped ‘deliverables’: in the majority of cases, the underlying factors are unstable funding and fragmented bilateral support to the CGIAR, issues which the CGIAR reform was intended to address.

It is not currently possible to assess whether A4NH will reach all its expected impacts, as much of the research is in the discovery or proof-of-concept stage. The A4NH Program Management Unit (PMU) is putting in place theories of change which rigorously identify the assumptions in impact pathways and the strength of the evidence for each assumption, which will form a good basis for judgment of risks and prioritization of research. Some areas like Biofortification are already at delivery stage, and have amassed rigorous evidence that expected impacts can be achieved at a broad scale.

¹ Compton, Julia, McLean, Diana, Emmens, Ben and Balagamwala, Mysbah (2015): Independent CRP-Commissioned External Evaluation of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health. Washington, DC: IFPRI. xvi + 95pp

Evaluation Question 2: Within the CGIAR, has A4NH added value? Have the advantages of the CRP outweighed the disadvantages?

We conclude that the CRP has added value to CGIAR research and that its advantages outweigh the disadvantages, although there are some areas for improvement. In staff surveys and interviews, A4NH was praised for its “inspiring” leadership on ANH issues across the CGIAR and its flexible inclusive approach. The main area for improvement cited was internal CRP/cross-CGIAR communications. The evaluation team also found that communications (internal and external) was under-resourced, and have suggested that a study be made of this area.

A4NH aimed to add value, as a CRP, to four specific areas: impact orientation; gender; coordination; and monitoring, evaluation and learning. We find that A4NH has added value in all these areas, despite the short time frame (most investment started less than two years ago), and we support further investment in each area to increase the results. One issue is that much of this highly technical, research-oriented work is being undertaken by the PMU – and is therefore counted as an administrative overhead.

The principal negative effects of working in a CRP reported by A4NH staff are similar to those reported by staff in other CRPs. They include: the burden on researchers from multiple systems of planning and reporting, reducing research productivity; and the multiple negative effects of funding instability, including delayed and dropped ‘deliverables’ and strained relationships with partners. The overall effect is that Center managers and researchers increasingly see CRPs as “difficult small donors”, and they are putting increased effort into getting bilateral funding, undermining the objectives of the CGIAR reform.

Evaluation Question 3: Does A4NH have the right resources, systems & approaches to partnerships?

This question covers a wide variety of structures, systems, processes and resources that are essential to attaining A4NH outputs, outcomes and impacts. A4NH, like other CRPs, has limited room for maneuver, as many of the key systems (e.g. science quality, human resources and contracting, monitoring) are largely the responsibility of Centers or the Consortium. We make recommendations for cross-CGIAR work to address some important issues which are beyond the control of CRPs. These include harmonized monitoring systems, which we consider an urgent priority, and also Center systems for assuring science quality and ethics. We also recommend some improvements to governance and management structures, in line with recommendations made for other CRPs in IEA evaluations.



Photo: CIAT/N.Palmer

This question also raises a variety of issues related to A4NH policies, such as conflict of interest and problems that can arise in partnerships. We recommend that A4NH clarify and publicize the policy and minimum standards that it is using in each area, using Consortium policies wherever available, or other suitable policies e.g. from the lead Center. We also recommend that the Consortium move swiftly towards developing and promulgating fundamental policies for CRPs in Phase 2, building on existing policies and on experience.

Evaluation Question 4: Is the scope and focus of A4NH relevant and appropriate?

During the course of this evaluation, A4NH was engaged in preparing its pre-proposal for Phase 2 of the CRPs, and consulting with a wide range of technical experts and other stakeholders. The evaluation Expert Panel made specific suggestions on the pros and cons of specific activities in five key focus areas for A4NH: agriculture-associated diseases; value chains, food systems and the private sector; urbanization, obesity and dual burden; policy and enabling environment; and nutrition-sensitive agriculture/ development, which fed into these discussions.

As A4NH gears up for Phase 2, it is important to reflect on the lessons from Phase 1. In our view, the Biofortification flagship (HarvestPlus) - which is the most mature - provides a model for managing a complex, long-term, multi-Center research program: it has maintained a clear vision of impact and the various steps in the impact pathway, conducted rigorous research to generate evidence and test assumptions, and moved to address risks. This has resulted in a virtuous circle, as the program has then been able to mobilize sufficient long-term funding to bring Centers and other partners together and to conduct long-term trials, without the need to chase short-term funding opportunities to keep its researchers employed. In contrast, some parts of A4NH (and the

CGIAR in general) have assembled a loose group of research projects around a central idea, partly because A4NH could not fully control what research projects were ‘mapped’ to the CRP, and partly because the uncertain funding environment encourages CGIAR researchers to take on a variety of bilateral donor funded projects. While the evaluation team would encourage A4NH to follow the HarvestPlus example and focus on a few core research questions, we also recognize that A4NH cannot cut itself off from the rest of research in agriculture, nutrition and health (ANH). A4NH has - and will continue to have - an important role not only in raising the quality of ANH work across the CGIAR but also in supporting innovative research in ANH.

We conclude therefore that putting clear boundaries around A4NH, and defining a ‘core research program’ that is clearly separated from a broader ‘ANH value added program,’ is potentially an important organizing principle for A4NH in Phase 2. This would allow A4NH to focus its research efforts and resource mobilization on a few core research questions that could attract a critical mass of research talent. It would also give A4NH sufficient resources to continue to support innovative and relevant NH work across the CGIAR, without having to take on the management burden for this ‘value added work’ in its core flagships.

Gender issues have been a prime focus of A4NH, and this has resulted in an increased focus on gender in research across the program, as well as some high-quality research on gender and nutrition. However gender cannot be addressed in isolation while ignoring the way that gender interacts with other social differences (e.g. wealth, caste, and ethnicity). We find that social equity has not been adequately addressed in A4NH, although it is crucial for ANH outcomes. Although many A4NH programs target “the poor”, social analysis and disaggregated data are often lacking. The lack of information about differences between and within communities affects practical decisions made by technical programs, e.g. which types of households should be targeted for certain technologies, or whether to work mainly with the formal or informal private sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation yielded three main recommendations for CGIAR Central Institutions.

- **C1** Scientific leadership in the CGIAR System should set standards for science quality and research management and monitor and support Centers to achieve these.

- **C2** The Consortium should develop key CGIAR-wide policies that can be adopted by CRPs, in areas where these do not already exist: for example on conflict of interest, social equity, partnerships
- **C3** The Consortium should urgently work with CRPs and funders to agree a harmonized monitoring system that meets management and reporting needs for all CRPs and (if possible) key bilateral funders, taking into account the balance between management and accountability needs and not imposing excessive demands on researchers. This should include agreeing minimum standards and harmonized formats for basic information to be provided on every research project.

The evaluation yielded eight main recommendations for A4NH:

- **A1** Establish clear boundaries around A4NH in the final Phase II proposal, clearly distinguishing two primary modalities of A4NH work: (a) A4NH’s ‘core’ research activities and (b) A4NH “value-added” activities, supporting ANH work in the CGIAR and elsewhere.
- **A2** Build up a high-quality A4NH-branded core research program focusing on a few centerpiece research areas linked to the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework (SRF).
- **A3** Make a coordinated investment in support to ‘value added’ ANH work across the CGIAR, managed as a coherent program, with clear goals and targets, adequate funding and human resources.
- **A4** Adopt CGIAR standards of research quality as soon as these become available (see C1).
- **A5** Adopt key CGIAR policies as soon as these become available (see C2), making reference to them in key contractual agreements, research program strategies, and in the Phase II proposal. In the absence of CGIAR policies, A4NH should adopt existing policies from the Lead Center or other suitable sources.
- **A6** Make a commitment to systematically address social equity issues, including attention to disaggregated data and social analysis
- **A7** Strengthen the A4NH monitoring and evaluation function
- **A8** Strengthen A4NH governance and management to support the above agenda

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

A4NH Management thanks the evaluation team and the many A4NH staff, partners and stakeholders who provided information, responded to questions, and gave feedback throughout the process. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation are thorough, thoughtful, and constructive.

A4NH Management accepts all eight recommendations directed to it, and is already taking steps to implement them, as outlined in the [management response](#). In most cases, recommendations would be implemented as part of Phase 2 of the CRP and are currently being incorporated into Phase 2 plans and budgets. Four of the eight recommendations would require additional resources for full implementation.



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