

Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) Meeting November 7, 2012, IFPRI, Washington, DC Summary of Comments and Recommendations

Introduction

Members of the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), IFPRI Director General's office, the program component leaders, the program management committee, and the program management unit met on November 7, 2012, at IFPRI headquarters in Washington, DC. A list of participants can be found at the end of this summary. Robert Paarlberg chaired the meeting. This was the first meeting of the IAC and provided the first opportunity for the group to meet the A4NH program leadership team at IFPRI and one another, and to become familiar with the program's strategic development and initial stages of implementation. Over time, the IAC is expected to provide advice on the A4NH program strategy, alignment of budget with research priorities, research quality and relevance, and program performance.

Meeting objectives

The objectives of the IAC meeting were to:

- Ensure all advisors have an understanding of the A4NH program and its contribution to the mission of the CGIAR;
- Obtain specific advice and recommendations on:
 - a) Plans for research components,
 - b) Partnership strategy including regional engagement, and
 - c) Gender strategy;
- Influence program planning and the finalization of strategy documents;
- Obtain advice at an early stage on:
 - a) Development of program impact pathways and theory of change, and
 - b) Monitoring and evaluation plans and implementation;
- Advise on other matters of program management.

The IAC agreed that the meeting's objectives were met and complimented the program management unit on the quality of advance preparation for the meeting and the materials that were shared. This document summarizes the IAC's key comments **and recommendations** to the A4NH program.

Research Program

Fertile Research Environment (comment)

The IAC recognized the advantage that inclusion of the longstanding HarvestPlus program, focused on biofortification of staple crops for better nutrition of the rural poor, presents for the A4NH program. The maturity of this component provides concrete evidence of research relevance, great performance, and some lessons of experience. It also suggests the potential that the new components of the A4NH program might achieve. The IAC appreciated the range of challenges and perspectives that the A4NH program leaders highlighted as needing to be explored in further development of the A4NH component programs.

The IAC agreed that there is a fertile environment for development of a relevant and high-quality research program focusing on issues that link agriculture to nutrition and health. The IAC agreed that the A4NH program has great potential to be a wonderful “brand” within the research portfolio of the CG system.

Strengthening the Health Agenda (comment and recommendation)

The IAC agreed there was not yet a strong enough connection between the agriculture and health dimensions of the program. **The plan for strengthening the connection to health should be more clearly articulated.** Health is part of the program’s name and, as the only CGIAR Research Program to explicitly address health, it is important for the program’s longer-term credibility to strengthen the health dimension, both via food consumption and nutrition, and directly, as through the management of aflatoxins and zoonotic diseases. The A4NH program needs to build an explicit search into the health sector for partners and actively develop health-oriented research activities. **The IAC emphasized the need to develop strategic partnerships with the health sector and to build internal research capacity to address the health-related research questions.**

Developing and Communicating Research activities (comment and recommendation)

While the biofortification component seems very strong and well-developed, the IAC noted that the challenge for the A4NH program is to develop synergies between this component and the newer components, which have fewer legacy projects and more room for innovation, but still need to be more clearly defined. The emphasis needs to be placed on the development of new research ideas that will be distinctive and of interest to the CG system and donors.

An additional challenge identified by the IAC was external communication. **The research portfolio of each component, including synergistic research towards the overall A4NH program goal, needs to be communicated more clearly and easily to outsiders.** As part of this, the A4NH program must identify appropriate partners to participate in the A4NH research for development agenda. This is a work-in-progress. As it stands now, it was not clear to the IAC what activities each component was currently undertaking or planning to undertake. The IAC looks forward to increasing understanding of the portfolio as it is developed further in coming months.

Partnership Strategy (comment and recommendation)

The IAC did not think the A4NH partnership strategy started in the right place. Alternatively, some suggested that the strategy should start with the identification of blockages in the system, the known best practices, and then ask each component leader to outline what types of partnerships are relevant to their program and how they will use them.

More specifically, the IAC recommended that the partnership strategy articulate what *types* of partners would be valuable to the A4NH program. They encouraged program management to think about this in terms of a) who has information the A4NH program doesn’t have, b) who is working on the ground in communities where the A4NH program plans to engage, and c) who has resources, both financial and capacity, to contribute. Partnership engagement should be thought about in terms of its relationship to program impact. The IAC agreed that some key partners were missing, including from the private agribusiness sector, public health and curative health (in addition to vet health/epidemiologists), public-private partnerships in the marketing of food products, and international partners on value chain work. The need for engagement with the private sector was emphasized and the IAC encouraged the A4NH program to think about what will motivate or incentivize the private sector to build partnerships in order to address issues where there is agreement.

The IAC indicated that the strategy should articulate how centers can work better with one another, how the A4NH program will guide the centers in their own partnership development, and how the A4NH program plans to manage the current list of 200+ partners. In addition, the strategy should be clear that the research agenda for the A4NH program is still evolving, more so for some components than others, so partners will be needed at different stages of the program design for different purposes.

After some clarification about the purpose of the partnership strategy, **the IAC recommended that two partnership documents be developed. One could serve as a longer document to detail the implementation and operational strategy and the other, shorter document could be used as a strategic, invitational document for partners.** The strategy as it is currently written came across to the IAC as too “top down.”

Gender Strategy (comment – note that these were taken into account in the final A4HN gender strategy, submitted to the Consortium November 16, 2012)

The IAC’s feedback on the gender strategy was that questions on gender as it relates to health were not emphasized enough. Some of the advice they provided to increase the emphasis on health was to examine the time women spend seeking health care and services for themselves in their families in research on women’s time allocation in agriculture. In the value chain work, the A4NH program should consider the engagement of women in their roles as both consumers and agents of change and as community health workers are traditionally women, the A4NH program should be mindful of women as actors who can communicate change.

Acknowledging that gender does not mean focusing only on women, the IAC suggested the addition of more research questions on how men influence women in the agriculture, nutrition, and health sphere. Some IAC members expressed a desire to see more research questions around bigger issues of power and capacity and that perhaps a Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health Index, modeled after the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index, be developed. They encouraged the A4NH program to be mindful that in gender research, the process indicators are just as important as the outcome indicators. Finally, they suggested minimizing the list of questions in the annex to a few priority questions in each of the four components that identify which gender-agriculture-nutrition-health questions need to be asked in order to refute or build up the evidence base. These questions could be used to guide the research agenda for each component and help them report on how what they are doing is contributing to answering these questions.

A few partnerships related to gender that should be included in the strategy document include UN Women, ICRW, and in-country organizations working on gender. The IAC mentioned that school feeding programs and adolescent girls as a target population may be other possible research areas to consider.

Other comments and recommendations

The **IAC agreed that one annual face-to-face meeting** would be adequate, but encouraged the program management unit to contact them individually through virtual means to get feedback on particular issues. In the interim, **IAC members requested regular, simple summaries of the research projects** underway on what the A4NH program expects to be underway in the next two years. A list of the projects with the talking points that members should use to communicate the A4NH program to outsiders would be useful.

A more detailed summary of the meeting is available from the program management unit upon request.

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