

**Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)**  
**Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) Meeting**  
**IFPRI, Washington, D.C.**  
**December 12, 2013**  
**Summary of Comments and Recommendations**

## **Introduction**

The Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) research theme leaders, the A4NH program management unit (PMU), and the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Director General's Office met on December 12, 2013, at IFPRI headquarters in Washington, D.C. for their second annual meeting. A list of participants can be found at the end of this summary. Robert Paarlberg chaired the meeting.

The purpose of the IAC is to provide independent advice to the IFPRI Director General, the IFPRI Board, and to the A4NH Director on the following issues: program strategy; plans of work and budget; research quality, relevance, and innovation; monitoring and evaluation; potential for outcomes and impacts; and other advice relative to the strategy, implementation, and performance of the program.

## **Meeting objectives**

The IAC members reviewed the following areas:

- A4NH progress to date, by theme, and proposed new initiatives
- A4NH progress in implementing the gender strategy

The IAC members provided advice to A4NH on the following issues:

- Proposed Plan of Work and Budget for 2014
- Theory of change and impact pathways plans
- Partnerships, capacity development, and regional strategies
- Monitoring and evaluation plans

This document summarizes the IAC's **key comments** and **recommendations** to the A4NH program.

## **Research Program**

### ***Leadership for Theme 1: Value Chains for Enhanced Nutrition (recommendation)***

One major short term challenge is leadership continuity in the Theme 1 research area, following the departure of Laurian Unnevehr. The IAC is impressed with Maximo Torero's willingness to step in, but he has many other responsibilities beyond A4NH that could limit his ability to remain consistently focused on this task. A4NH is working to balance its portfolio by growing program areas other than HarvestPlus, and this will be more difficult without a full time, senior leader for Theme 1.

### ***Health in A4NH (recommendation)***

The IAC did not think their concerns about health in A4NH had been fully addressed and indicated the need for more health research projects. Health outcomes need to be strengthened and distinct from nutrition outcomes. The Phase 2 proposal might provide an opportunity to add research projects more closely linked to health topics such as: non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and obesity, health risks from animal keeping in urban slums, or occupational exposure to agricultural chemical use. To move forward in this area, it might be worth considering recruitment of a medical doctor to the research team. Robert Paarlberg and Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo volunteered to review and respond directly to

the PMU after the meeting on the *Session 7: Health in A4NH* document that had been prepared for this meeting.

#### ***Progress and plans for research areas (comment and recommendation)***

The IAC noted that A4NH is well-regarded within the CGIAR system and its global visibility has increased this year, due in part to involvement in the high-profile *Lancet* series. The IAC reiterated that Theme 1: Value Chains for Enhanced Nutrition needs its own dedicated senior manager. Theme 2: Biofortification remains a standout program area, but HarvestPlus should develop a proactive response to the pro-vitamin A findings in Zambia, which may otherwise be used by skeptics of biofortification to weaken the program in Africa and question the value of biofortification more generally. The IAC appreciated the Theme 3: Agriculture-associated Diseases presentation on food safety and observed that Theme 4: Integrated Programs and Policies has grown significantly this year under what seems to be an appropriate and disciplined vision. The IAC encouraged A4NH to think about how to integrate the many programs in Theme 4 into a cohesive narrative. Finally, although agriculture and nutrition projects have traditionally concentrated on impacts in rural areas, the IAC noted that the conversation is shifting to consider the impacts on urban poor populations.

In terms of the POWB for 2014, the IAC noted that it did not have enough time to thoroughly discuss the list of new ideas – 24 items – at this year’s meeting, but the plan of work is creative. In the future, it would like the PMU to provide a stronger sense of priorities and explanation of the new initiatives under consideration. The IAC sees a healthy growth in funds available. After some further explanation from John McDermott, the IAC noted it had a better understanding of the differences with the Window 1 (W1) and Window 2 (W2) funding sources.

#### ***Development of impact pathways and theory of change (comment and recommendation)***

The IAC understood the strategic importance of the conceptual work completed to date on the impact pathways and theory of change. Nevertheless, the IAC felt that the work as presented for this meeting was quite abstract and general, without enough in the way of a narrative, vivid examples, or essential distinctions between different regions or societies at different levels of development. The IAC encouraged the PMU to consider who their target audience would be for this product. The IAC made reference to its suggestion from last year that A4NH make a stronger effort to find a language that can communicate what the program is doing to non-specialists or people outside the CGIAR who are not familiar with the terminology and ideas associated with this new research space.

#### ***Regional plans and partnerships (comment and recommendation)***

There was not enough time to discuss the regional plans. The IAC said it looked forward to seeing more details at next year’s meeting. Regarding partnerships, the IAC understood that building partnerships – beyond financial or contracted relationships – is challenging, even within the CGIAR. Outside the CGIAR, building partnerships that bridge A4NH to the health sector will be most difficult, but very necessary, for work in this area. For scaling-up biofortification, HarvestPlus is developing strong experience with partnerships, including with public sector extension services, and may serve as a good source of lessons learned for A4NH to draw upon. In the coming year, the IAC encouraged A4NH to give more thought and effort on partnerships across the portfolio. For example, the members noted that the division of labor among the partnerships mentioned for the scaling up of biofortification was not clear and it was not clear how the private sector is, or would be, involved in A4NH, particularly in value chains.

### **Gender (comment and recommendation)**

The IAC sees promising developments from a year ago, but the goals for the gender research program are still not clear. The IAC suggested that a precise list of research questions – the unanswered questions that A4NH could address – would make it more clear how A4NH plans to operationalize the gender strategy. Specifically, exploring what types of value chains would benefit women and thinking broadly about what type of development initiatives and technologies (e.g., provision of drinking water nearer to homesteads) can reduce the burden on poor women. The IAC noted that time use surveys can be a useful tool for framing policies in ways that clearly reflect women’s challenges in achieving good nutrition and health for themselves and their children, and devising interventions that will reduce burdens on women and increase their chances for success. Gender research within A4NH should not exclude considerations of men.

### **Monitoring and evaluation (comment)**

The IAC said it would like the idea of an externally commissioned review of A4NH research, such as the food safety work, and later working outward to other areas based on results from the first evaluations. The IAC agreed that it would be appropriate for the members to react to the A4NH evaluation plan once it has been developed in March 2014. Robert Paarlberg and Mahendra Dev volunteered to review the plan and provide input to the PMU and the IFPRI Board for its review of the plan.

### **Communications strategy (comment and recommendation)**

The A4NH research program is young and does not yet have a fully balanced research portfolio, yet the IAC observed the research program is moving ahead nicely. The members’ advice was for A4NH to constantly remember to maintain its identity, distinct from IFPRI and from other CRPs located in IFPRI, while looking for opportunities to synergize communication strategies. Although the Committee did not have enough time to discuss communications during the meeting, it noted that by the time A4NH reaches the time when Phase 2 proposals are submitted, they should be able to clearly communicate what the program is trying to achieve. The IAC advised that developing an effective external communications strategy would help A4NH achieve both of these communication goals related to identity and objectives.

### **Other comments and recommendations**

The IAC agreed that next year’s meeting should be expanded to **a day and a half** to provide adequate time for discussions of Phase 2 planning. Due to lack of time, some interesting 2013 issues, such as regional plans and partnerships with social entrepreneurs were not quite discussed during this year’s meeting. The members requested holding next year’s meeting **earlier in November**, prior to the IFPRI Board meeting.

A more detailed summary of the meeting is available from the PMU upon request.

## List of Participants

| <b>INDEPENDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>   |  |
|---|--|
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### List of Recommendations, Actions, and Deadlines

| Recommendation   | Actions   | Deadline                                   |
|--|---|--|
| Strengthen senior leadership for Theme 1               | - Identify a full-time leader for Theme 1   | - ASAP                                     |
| Strengthen health in A4NH                              | - Robert Paarlberg and Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo will provide feedback to the PMU on the <i>Session 7 document: Health in A4NH</i>   | - January 2014                             |
| Finalize the draft evaluation plan                     | - PMU will share the evaluation plan with Robert Paarlberg and Mahendra Dev for comments<br>- Robert and Mahendra will provide inputs to the PMU<br>- PMU will share evaluation plan with IFPRI Board | - March 2014<br>- March 2014<br>- May 2014 |
| Highlight key new initiatives for IAC review           | - Provide a summary of priority future initiatives under consideration  | Next IAC meeting<br>- October 2014         |
| Clarify regional plans                                 | - Prepare a discussion document on regional plans for 2015-2016   | Next IAC meeting<br>- October 2014         |
| Increase efforts in the area of partnerships           | - Prepare a discussion document on partnership priorities and plans for 2015-2016   | Next IAC meeting<br>- October 2014         |
| Clarify goals of gender research                       | - Prepare a discussion document on implementing gender research   | Next IAC meeting<br>- October 2014         |
| Clearly communicate A4NH's goals to external audiences | - Develop strategic communication plan  | Next IAC meeting<br>- October 2014         |