

Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)
Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) Meeting
IFPRI, Washington, D.C.
October 19-20, 2016

Summary of Recommendations, Comments, and Action Items

Introduction

The Independent Advisory Committee (IAC), the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) flagship leaders, the A4NH program management unit (PMU), members of the current and new Planning and Management Committee (PMC), and the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Director General's Office met on October 19-20, 2016, at IFPRI headquarters in Washington, D.C. for their fifth 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

- To review A4NH's progress in Phase I (2012-2016) and provide guidance on the plans outlined and resources allocated for 2017 in the CRP's annual plan of work and budget (POWB);
- To provide advice on the strategy and implementation of the three, new cross-cutting units: (1) Gender, Equity, and Empowerment, (2) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning and (3) Country Coordination and Engagement; and
- To provide recommendations on A4NH's communications strategy and specific activities in 2017.

This document summarizes the IAC's recommendations and key comments. At the end, is a list of the main issues raised by the IAC and the actions A4NH proposes to take in response.

Recommendations

At the end of the meeting, the IAC gave recommendations to the A4NH Director on each of the five Phase II flagships and four additional aspects of the program. The chair remarked that the IAC observed progress across the board in all flagships and they did not have serious complaints to register, only some questions and constructive suggestions.

Flagship 1: Food Systems for Healthier Diets

The IAC agreed that moving from a value chains to a food systems approach will provide a stronger basis for research and may provide more guidance for other flagships. The IAC remarked that one thing missing in Flagship 1 seemed to be a characterization or emphasis of the role of the private sector in markets, retail, and, trade. In terms of the food system, the private sector is huge with multitudes of independent agents with different incentives. The IAC noted that how the private sector functions and

how it can influence healthy food choices, the quality/composition of diets, and ultimate nutritional status is a researchable area for Flagship 1.

Flagship 2: Biofortification

HarvestPlus is at a critical moment in its development. The IAC challenged itself to think about how it can add value to both HarvestPlus – given that HarvestPlus has a Program Advisory Committee (PAC) that provides oversight and effectively acts as a board of trustees – and A4NH. The IAC wants to be cognizant of the existing structure and avoid appearances that they are second guessing decisions made by the PAC. One conclusion the IAC reached is that there is inherent value in identifying synergies across the two programs (A4NH and HarvestPlus) and across the A4NH flagships and that nutritional improvement through biofortification is only one part. There are linkages to food safety and occupational health that are not being realized. The IAC suggested that another leverage point would be to strengthen the use of existing methodologies that have been developed (or will be developed) in Flagships 1 and 4 by applying them in HarvestPlus. The IAC encouraged other flagships to consider how to leverage the impacts HarvestPlus is reaching. At the same time, the IAC acknowledged that there are transactional costs. As part of facilitating HarvestPlus participation in A4NH, the IAC encouraged A4NH to be mindful of keeping these transactional costs as low as possible and of making the incentives more apparent. Overall, the IAC said there was tremendous opportunity for HarvestPlus to have a halo effect on A4NH – to attract funding and generate outcomes. Lastly, the IAC remarked on the recurring need to press the CGIAR System to fulfill its commitment on mainstreaming nutrition in breeding.

Flagship 3: Food Safety

More than once, Flagship 3 has presented findings to the IAC that suggest that regulating informal markets, if not done properly, can be detrimental in terms of livelihoods and food safety to participants in these markets, which are typically smallholder producers and poor consumers. The IAC was eager to see this work reach completion and reported in peer-reviewed publications so it can be communicated more widely. For cases like these – when research results seem surprising or critically important – the IAC would be very interested to see A4NH develop and implement a targeted communication strategy. The IAC suggested that Flagship 3 have a stronger policy component, a component that works on designing sets of country-specific policy recommendations related to food safety. The IAC saw an unrealized synergy between Flagships 3 and 4; they suggested that Flagship 4 could be enlisted in a cooperative effort with Flagship 3 to be bit a more systematic in its policy engagement activities, e.g., developing country-specific recommendations and facilitating country-level consultations in the food safety arena.

Flagship 4: Supporting Policies, Programs and Enabling Action through Research (SPEAR)

The IAC recognized that Flagship 4 is doing very important work and has some remarkable achievements from Phase I. In Phase II, the IAC would like to see more focus and more clearly articulated links to other parts of A4NH, particularly around policy. One suggestion was that Flagship 4 could include policy research linked to the issues in other flagships, such as policies relevant to biofortification or food safety in informal markets. Another suggestion was for Flagship 4 to identify implementation science issues emerging in other flagships and add these to its agenda.

Flagship 5: Improving Human Health

The IAC was very pleased to see a new flagship devoted to addressing human health outcomes and understood that 2017 would be quite focused on planning, partnerships and mobilizing resources for

the agenda. As the theory of change for this flagship is developed, the IAC would be very interested in reviewing the progress and expressed confidence that with a ToC, the research and development aims of Flagship 5 would be clearer. Some IAC members felt like there was a need for some novelty in the research agenda. Agriculture and health may look new within CGIAR, but to local researchers in Africa, for example, it may not look so new or novel. The IAC advised the team to expand the research focus to include occupational health and to provide clearer links between agriculture and nutrition *and* health.

Monitoring

In December 2016, A4NH, along with four other CRPs, will begin implementing an integrated online planning and reporting platform that will improve efficiencies and support adaptive management and the ability to better monitor progress along theories of change. The new system is called MARLO (Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes). The IAC was very pleased to see the progress the PMU has made to improve the systems that can support monitoring and reporting. Next year, they would like their meeting materials to include at a glance and in summary form, A4NH's Phase II portfolio – project descriptions, researchers involved, timelines, budgets – and progress made to date.

Gender

The IAC was pleased to read about the gender research being conducted in the flagships. However, the presentation during the meeting did not elaborate on this work and the IAC was interested to hear more. In the cross-cutting realm of the Gender Equity and Empowerment unit, there was some debate within IAC about what a gender approach means. Their conclusion was that A4NH's gender work should not look like everyone else's gender work. The IAC remarked that they would like to see something imaginative about the special role gender plays in agriculture, nutrition, and health.

Communication

Following a significant discussion about communication with the PMU and the PMC, the IAC concluded that one person is not enough if A4NH is going to achieve the communication goals it described. The IAC recognized that communication is an increasingly important activity for the program that cannot be done with the traditional model; A4NH needs a communication team. The IAC expressed a wish that more people were committed to the task of communication.

Quality of Science

We had previously asked to see guidelines on quality of science or understanding processes that exist. We want to understand the methodology used to ensure QoS. Perhaps we can discuss that at a future IAC meeting.

Word of Caution

Lastly, the IAC encouraged A4NH management to be aware of how much they are taking on. The IAC expressed confidence in A4NH's high quality, motivated team. Nevertheless, A4NH was founded on a conviction that there was a lot to be gained from working across silos and institutions. The IAC still believes that rings true. Nevertheless, you can have too much of a good thing. The IAC observed that the A4NH agenda is growing long and the boundaries around the agenda have not been drawn with heavy enough lines to give A4NH the freedom to say no to certain issues, activities, or approaches.

Conclusions

John McDermott thanked the IAC for their time and valuable inputs in designing the second phase of A4NH and advice for its first year. Once the PMU receives the plan of work and budget (POWB) template from CGIAR, it will send the draft POWB for 2017 to the IAC for review and approval. John expects this to be in November or December. John suggested during the meeting that the next meeting would be in March 2017 in Nigeria. Once the PMU has a better sense of the 2017 budget and the CGIAR's expectations for the steering/advisory committees for the CRPs, a final decision about the meeting will be communicated. John expects that by the middle of 2017, we will have a better idea of what governance and management arrangements the CGIAR expects for CRPs in Phase II and how this could affect the purpose of the IAC. Until then, the IAC will continue to operate as it did in Phase I.

Main areas of IAC concern and A4NH plan for action

Area	Plan for action	Timeline Who is responsible
2017 Plan of Work and Budget (POWB)	Once the new template is received from the CGIAR System Management Office, the draft POWB will be provided to the IAC with a matrix of their comments and how they were addressed. This will include a description of each flagship, the cross-cutting units, and overall CRP initiatives in 2017.	Mid-December 2016 <i>PMU coordinates with flagship and cross-cutting unit leaders</i>
Communication	Develop 2017 work plan and staffing plan for IAC's comments. Plan will be shared along with the 2017 POWB.	Mid-December 2016 <i>Led by the Communication Specialist, A4NH Director, and Program Manager</i>
How A4NH progress is presented to IAC for review	With a new planning and reporting tool in place for 2017, better descriptions, summaries, reports, and so on can be prepared for the IAC meeting to help members understand what makes up the A4NH portfolio (project descriptions) and assess annual progress towards the plans (monitoring).	October 2017 IAC meeting <i>Led by the MEL Unit</i>
Quality of Science	Document quality of science methods and processes in A4NH. PMU, with Managing Partners, will conduct an internal review of quality of science and findings will build upon on CGIAR System-level efforts that will be reported in a June 2017 report.	October 2017 IAC meeting <i>Led by the A4NH Director and Program Manager</i>

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