

Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)
Independent Steering Committee (ISC) Meeting
IFPRI, Washington, D.C.
October 31 – November 1, 2017
Summary of Recommendations, Comments, and Action Items

Introduction

The Independent Steering Committee (ISC), the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) Planning and Management Committee (PMC), the A4NH Program Management Unit (PMU), and representatives from the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) Director General's Office met on October 31-November 1, 2017, at IFPRI in Washington, D.C. for their first annual meeting as an ISC. A list of participants can be found at the end of this summary. Robert Paarlberg chaired the meeting.

The purpose of the ISC is to propose strategic direction to the CRP, including priority setting, which includes review of A4NH proposals to the CGIAR, as required; annually review and provide written recommendations to the A4NH Director and IFPRI Board of Trustees and Director General on the performance of A4NH overall and its flagship research programs, including their plans and budget for the subsequent year; review the external evaluation plan of A4NH and the individual external evaluations undertaken and provide comments for the IFPRI Board of Trustees and the A4NH management response to evaluation recommendations; and provide advice to the A4NH Director and PMC on partnerships and stakeholder perspectives and needs.

Meeting Objectives

- To review A4NH's progress in 2017 and provide recommendations on the performance of A4NH overall and each of its five flagship research programs
- To review the plans outlined and resources allocated for 2018 and provide strategic guidance for A4NH overall and for each of its five flagships
- To review A4NH's progress in 2017 and provide strategic guidance on the strategies and plans outlined for 2018 for the five country teams that make up A4NH's Country Coordination and Engagement unit
- To provide strategic guidance to A4NH on its draft strategy for coordination of policy engagement (including policy research) and implementation plans
- To review and provide initial comments on the draft results and recommendations from the external review of equity research in A4NH

At the beginning is a list of the main issues raised by the ISC and the actions A4NH proposes to take in response. After that is a summary of the ISC's recommendations and key comments.

Main Areas of ISC Concern and A4NH Plan for Action

The ISC chair requested that before their next meeting, they would like to see a formal response from the PMU on what actions have been taken to address the recommendation they made in 2016 as an IAC on the Quality of Science. This table includes both the 2016-17 recommendations.

Topic	Plan for Action	Timeline Responsibility
Request for more information on 2018 plans and budget, by flagship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the current and future food systems landscape analyses reports for the four focus countries • Send an update to the ISC once the outcome from the MacArthur Foundation grant is known • Address requests for additional details on the flagships' activities in the 2018 plan of work and budget • Prepare a matrix of the comments made on each flagship and A4NH more broadly and how they have been incorporated into the POWB 	<p>November 2018 <i>PMU with Flagship 1</i></p> <p>January 2018 <i>PMU with Flagship 2</i></p> <p>Late-February 2018 <i>PMU with inputs from flagship leaders and cross-cutting unit leaders</i></p>
Quality of Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare short report on CGIAR System-level efforts in 2017-18 and explain A4NH's role, our methods and approaches for monitoring quality of science across the Managing Partners • Share findings of 2017 internal review of quality of science in A4NH conducted by the PMU 	<p>March 2018 <i>A4NH Program Director</i></p>
Plan for Policy Coordination across A4NH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the current description of the Policy Coordination Working Group with an implementation plan summarizing next steps 	<p>October 2018 <i>Policy Coordination Working Group</i></p>
Country Coordination and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize Country Coordination and Engagement reporting in 2018 with additional metrics and information on key collaborations, including with IFPRI's Country Strategy and Support Programs in A4NH's focus countries • Discuss how to assess progress of the country teams in a more systematic fashion in the ISC's next meeting 	<p>October 2018 <i>PMU with country team leaders</i></p>

Recommendations and Comments

In response to comments raised last year and at the PMC's bi-annual meeting in Nigeria in March 2017, A4NH introduced a new way of reporting to the ISC and structured the 1.5-day meeting in a different way than it had in the past in order to facilitate engagement between the ISC and Flagship Leaders around strategic issues. A slide deck served as A4NH's full report on 2017 achievements and 2018 plans. It was sent to the ISC members to review before the meeting. The agenda was structured so that for each flagship, the ISC could provide strategic comments and clarify issues on the report, but spend most of the time discussing and providing advice on a single 'big issue' that each flagship was facing. The ISC expressed appreciation for the new reporting and meeting format. They requested that next year, the slide deck report should incorporate more footnotes and hyperlinks to provide more details, while keeping the overall report succinct. The ISC also requested a slide per flagship on potential for impact and progress towards CGIAR-level development outcomes. In addition, when possible the 'big issue' narratives should include some discussion of any looming flagship choices relevant to the issue.

The ISC provided the following recommendations and comments to the A4NH Director on each of the five flagships and four additional aspects of the program. The ISC did not perceive any flagships to be in crisis or any reason to consider sharp departures from the current paths described. Members of the ISC did note that two concepts were largely missing from the materials and discussion at this year's meeting: fragility and resilience. There are significant policy implications for the extremely poor that currently live and will live in areas of conflict. Donors and the development community are increasingly interested in understanding and increasing the resilience of production systems in response to climate or political shocks. The ISC encouraged A4NH to keep such concepts in mind this coming year and look for ways to communicate what it's doing.

Flagship 1: Food Systems for Healthier Diets

Flagship 1's research efforts in 2017 remain more at a stage of description rather than analysis, but the ISC understands this is the essential ground work for identifying entry points for interventions and policy recommendations. The ISC requested that Flagship 1 make it clearer where they are working with other A4NH flagships. More specifically, the ISC asked for more information about how Flagship 1 works with Flagship 4 around issues of overweight and obesity and policy issues linked to agriculture and food and nutrition (*see more in the recommendations for Flagship 4*). Although the flagship appears to be a work in progress, it has an ambitious research effort moving forward. The PMU offered to share the food systems landscape analyses that have been completed with the ISC members to help them understand Flagship 1's food systems approach. The ISC recommended that Flagship 1 make it clearer who the users or clients or the research from the flagship will be in the focus countries and beyond.

Flagship 2: Biofortification

There were no reservations about the direction Flagship 2 is going, although the ISC recognized that HarvestPlus faces serious challenges. The ISC noted that it would probably be better to have a discussion on 2018 plans with Flagship 2 three months from now, once HarvestPlus has heard the outcome from the 100&Change award from the MacArthur Foundation in December 2017. The new dual initiative model of HarvestPlus (research and evaluation / delivery operations) seems like a good idea to the ISC members. The ISC chair commented that he had always hoped that HarvestPlus' work in A4NH would preserve a distinctly separate research space while it moves towards scaling up biofortified crops.

Flagship 3: Food Safety

The ISC was comfortable with the direction Flagship 3 is going and appreciated the balanced emphasis on robust research activities on food safety issues in low- and middle-income countries alongside the scaling-up of already developed technologies or innovations. They commented on the lack of detail on 2017 achievements and specific activities in 2018 related to both scaling out aflasafe™ and innovations for food safety in informal markets in the Flagship 3 portion of the full A4NH report. There were several questions about the results and messaging of the randomized controlled trial on aflatoxin consumption and child stunting. Flagship 3 and the PMU will be working together on communicating a consistent message. They expressed appreciation for Flagship 3's candid presentation on the challenges it's facing to scale up aflasafe™, particularly in an uncertain bilateral funding environment and the descriptions of the options it's considering for partnerships with the private sector.

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

The achievements from the many activities of Flagship 4 were appreciated by the ISC. A few comments on future actions were made. Specifically, in terms of policy, the ISC would like to better understand what policy coordination or support Flagship 4 (through Cluster 4.3 on Capacity, Collaboration, Convening or 3C) has provided, or plans to provide, to other flagships compared to what coordination and support the Policy Coordination Working Group might provide (*read more below in their set of recommendations*). Policy responses to overweight and obesity must play a strong, visible role in A4NH or A4NH will not be taken seriously as an agriculture and nutrition program. Flagship 4 is only one part of the A4NH response to this challenge, but an important part. The ISC's advice to Flagship 4 was not to restrict itself to public sector nutrition and health interventions, but to explore the potential of nudging agents, like private food companies or civil society organizations, for example, alongside Flagship 1. The ISC suggested that perhaps, A4NH through Flagship 1 and Flagship 4, could look for ways to sharpen the global discussion around codes of conduct, for example on advertising, for private food companies.

Flagship 5: Improving Human Health

The 2017 achievements that were listed by Flagship 5 seemed solid and credible. Flagship 5 is a very early stage flagship for A4NH, so the ISC felt it was still too soon for them to make any significant recommendations. The ISC expressed confidence that the flagship would move forward. Although the ISC expressed concern about the 2018 bilateral funding gap, they recognized that the Managing Partners involved have a very strong reputation and proven record in raising resources, so this is expected to be different next year. As with Flagship 3, the ISC commented on the lack of detail about geographical locations of work, relationships with national partners, and the significance of some of the findings that were mentioned, for example, in the Flagship 5 portion of the A4NH report. The ISC would like to see more focus, less generalities, for all of the clusters of activities in Flagship 5 in the 2018 POWB and in next year's report.

Country Coordination and Engagement

The ISC was pleased with the arrangement for the country coordination and engagement unit in A4NH's five focus countries and expressed eagerness to see continued progress. One suggestion was to make better use of IFPRI's Country Strategy and Support Programs (CSSPs) that are also active in the A4NH focus countries. It would be useful to coordinate with these entities, particularly if the individuals in the CSSPs are co-located with national governments. The ISC commented that \$50,000/year per country team might not be sufficient. In terms of reporting, they would like the country teams to report on their annual progress again in next year's meeting as part of A4NH's full report to them. One agenda item for

the October 2018 meeting will be around whether or not a more systematic and external review of the focus country initiative should be conducted during 2019.

Policy Coordination Working Group

The ISC learned a great deal about who’s doing what on policy across A4NH from the annex in the draft strategy for coordinating flagship engagement on policy. There were no obvious overlaps and the light touch approach at this stage seemed fine. Although the ISC was not looking for a formal strategy, they would like a more detailed description of the planned or ad hoc initiatives that will be undertaken by the working group. As an example, the Policy Coordination Working Group could identify some areas where more than one A4NH flagship need to coordinate or harmonize messages (e.g., overweight and obesity) or joint policy research areas with other CRPs (e.g., agri-food policies with the CRP on Policies, Institutions, and Markets or PIM). Some of the ISC members had hoped to see Flagship 4 initiating or suggesting policy work in other A4NH flagships, but this is not what the working group had proposed. One recommendation was to clarify the roles of Flagship 4 (through the 3C cluster) and the Policy Coordination Working Group in coordinating policy research within A4NH.

External Review on Equity Research in A4NH

Equity is a very important new theme for A4NH to emphasize, particularly in the eyes of the donor community. The ISC commended A4NH for being proactive and was pleased to hear that the process of participating in the review provided opportunities for knowledge sharing within A4NH. The ISC recognized that equity research will be challenging to ground scientifically, so they look forward to receiving the first draft of the management response, including the work plan or next steps. The preliminary suggestions for next steps looked affordable and advantageous to the ISC.

Communication and Outreach

The ISC was pleased to see the new communication and outreach activities that have been added since last year’s meeting. For next year’s meeting, they asked that the PMU include trend lines of key metrics, e.g., number of Twitter followers, re-posts, clicks, and visits to the web site. The ISC emphasized the importance of A4NH having an identifiable brand. The ISC members know the A4NH brand, but said they all had the experience of speaking to colleagues from the food and agriculture space about A4NH and receiving questions about whether or not they were referring to ‘CRP4’ or HarvestPlus.

Conclusions

John McDermott, A4NH Director, thanked the ISC for their time and advice and reviewed the anticipated responsibilities and activities for the ISC in 2018 (listed below).

ISC’s Anticipated Activities in 2018

Activity	Timeline
Review management response to the external review on equity research in A4NH	January 2018
Review 2018 Plan of Work and Budget (POWB) <i>PMU will include a matrix of the ISC’s comments on each flagship and how they’ve been addressed</i>	Late-February 2018
Submit nominations for two new ISC members (1 st term: 2018-2020)	By February 2018 To discuss with PMC at March 2018 meeting
PMC Bi-Annual Face-to-Face Meeting <i>ISC members are welcome to attend as observers.</i>	Week of March 19, 2018 (dates/times tbc) Hanoi, Vietnam
ISC Annual Meeting	Week of October 15, 2018 (dates/times tbc) Wageningen, Netherlands

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