

Call for Concept Notes

The challenge

Nutrition is foundational to the achievement of major social and economic goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Undernutrition in early life is responsible for 45% of under-five child deaths, reduced cognitive attainment, increased likelihood of poverty and is associated with increased maternal morbidity and mortality. Despite rapid economic growth, undernutrition rates in South Asia are among the highest in the world and progress in addressing this challenge is slow. Ensuring food and nutrition security in the region can only occur through a combination of targeted “nutrition-specific” interventions and wider “nutrition-sensitive” development interventions, backed up by enabling policy, political and institutional environments and processes.

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood of half of the region’s population and has the potential to be a strong driver of nutritional improvement. But that potential is far from being realized due to slowing in agriculture growth rates, the apparent disconnects between agriculture and nutrition and the uncertainties resulting from environmental stresses and conflict in the region.

What is LANSA?

Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) is a consortium (funded by the UK’s Department for International Development) of six organizations that seeks to address the following core question: “How can South Asian agriculture and related food policies and interventions be designed and implemented to increase their impacts on nutrition, especially the nutritional status of children and adolescent girls?”

The programme covers four countries: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. LANSA partners in the region include M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), India (lead organisation), BRAC, Bangladesh, Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR), Pakistan while its international partners comprise the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USA, India, Bangladesh and the Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH), UK.

LANSA’s research portfolio is structured according to three research pillars and three cross-cutting thematic issues. The first research pillar (Pillar 1) relates to the challenge of creating and sustaining enabling environments for pro-nutrition agriculture, posing the question -- how can agriculture and food policies be more strongly linked to other underlying determinants of nutrition such as women’s status, poverty induced food insecurity and poor sanitation? The second pillar focuses at the agri-food system itself to generate research to understand how the nutrition sensitivity of

agricultural growth strategies, and broad policies in areas such as food storage and trade, can be improved? And the third pillar focuses on how agricultural interventions can be designed to improve nutrition outcomes, whilst ensuring livelihood security? The three cross-cutting themes are gender, fragility and innovation systems.

Further details of LANSA can be found here www.lansasouthasia.org.

LANSA's "Responsive Window"

LANSA's Responsive Window facility seeks to engender a wider sense of engagement among national and regional stakeholders in the core challenge of improving the nutrition sensitivity of agri-food systems, policies, programmes and interventions. LANSA will channel some of its funds through this window to enable the launch of two open calls for research proposals.

This first wave of this call focuses on *policy-relevant research* that identifies options for promoting an enabling policy and institutional landscape for nutrition-sensitive agriculture in South Asia.

The second wave (to be released mid-2015) will be oriented toward measuring success in integrated interventions, including issues of scaling and replicability – to show how policy can draw upon, and thus support, grassroots success.

Research themes

We seek *high quality research proposals* on one of the following policy-relevant priorities that were generated by recent stakeholder consultations in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The title of each theme is followed by several indicative questions that elaborate on scope.

1) Coordination, collaboration and convergence of policies and programmes to leverage agriculture for nutrition.

- Harmonized policymaking – how can it be done?
- What incentivizes cross-sectoral collaboration on nutrition?
- Intersectoral collaboration – how to build bridges between different disciplines, sectors and actors (government, NGO, private sector) and break out of silos? How to do this at the level of policy as well as at provincial, district and community levels?
- From policy frameworks to implementation realities (how to translate policy into real action)?

2) Knowledge and evidence of leveraging agri-food systems and policy for nutrition security

- How to improve the vocabulary, grammar and language of policymakers, to improve knowledge, understanding and ultimately action.
- Farmers' nutrition knowledge and understanding, risk perception (for example, regarding extension programme opportunities).
- The incorporation of nutritional priorities in food industry value chain policy interventions and private sector initiatives.

3) Women's empowerment

- How to empower women within agricultural systems?
- Gender, women's empowerment pathway, and how to reconcile trade-offs e.g. between engagement with agriculture labour and caring capacity (for young children).
- Addressing intra-household inequalities in resource allocations.

4) Fragility

- Role of climate change and its effect on the agriculture-nutrition link.
- How can/should agri-food policy respond/adapt to fragility and protect nutrition?

Additional eligibility criteria and considerations

- Multi-country/multi-site studies are encouraged.
- Research studies may be of 6-24 months duration.
- Applicants should familiarize themselves with work in LANSA's Enabling Environments for Nutrition research, pillar I (see annex, and web) to maximize "value added" and complementarity with ongoing work, and avoid duplication.
- Concept notes need to incorporate LANSA's three cross-cutting issues (gender, fragility and innovation systems) as and where relevant.
- Expected budgets per study will range from £40-70,000. Studies that are more expensive may be considered so long as there is *guaranteed* co-funding to meet requirements beyond this range. It is expected that 3-4 studies will be funded through this first window.
- Joint applications by more than one organization are encouraged, but one organization must be specified as the lead.

Evaluation criteria

The primary evaluation criteria are:

- quality of the concept note and proposed research
- relevance to LANSA's priorities
- value for money
- internal capacity
- clearly specified policy relevance

Format of concept notes

In the first instance, please submit a concept note of no more than 3 pages (single-spaced) that clearly states: problem statement, context (including what is known already), objectives, research questions, study design, methods to be used, expected outputs, outcomes and impact; partners and indicative budget (with breakdowns of personnel, travel and other expenses.)

Review and selection process

The following process will be adopted:

- Applicant organizations are invited (through this call) to respond by 30 June, and according to specified eligibility criteria, with a short (2-3 page) concept note;
- Concept notes will be screened against these criteria and quality filters by a review team comprising members of the LANSa consortium, to select a shortlist;
- Shortlisted applicants will be invited to prepare detailed research proposals (by 15 September);
- These proposals will be reviewed by the internal review team and an external panel, using a standard scoring system before 30 September. At least one (virtual) selection panel meeting will be held to identify the winning proposals;
- The winning research proposals will be announced by 15 October;
- Contracts will be passed with lead organizations by 31 October;
- Studies will start 1 November 2014.

Concept notes should be emailed to the Mara van den Bold (IFPRI) at m.vandenbold@cgiar.org

Final deadline for concept notes is 30 June 2014.

ANNEX: Pillar 1: How enabling is the wider context in linking agriculture and food systems to other determinants of nutritional status?

As the UNICEF (1990) model of the determinants of malnutrition makes clear, nutritional status is driven by various interacting factors and processes which play out at different levels and over different time spans. At an immediate level, an individual's dietary intake and her/his health status is paramount, but these indices are themselves determined by underlying household-level drivers (including food security, health service access, water and sanitation and child caring capacity and practice), and more structural drivers relating to policy, politics and power. Environments in which the basic social, economic and political conditions are broadly favourable to nutrition have been referred to as "enabling environments". By contrast, such macro-level conditions or environments may be neutral or disabling for nutrition.

In South Asia, many underlying factors, processes and environments are not "nutrition-sensitive". Nutrition-relevant programmes often have low coverage, poor targeting and poor quality and/or intensity of service delivery. Violence and fragility may in certain places and certain times characterize a disabling environment, not only for agriculture but also for nutrition in general. This raises the question of whether there are interventions that need to be made *outside of agriculture* to further catalyse significant improvement in nutritional status. A corollary of this hypothesis is that agricultural growth in South Asia may have weak impacts on nutrition when the supporting investments outside agriculture are not in place. Under such circumstances, is it reasonable to expect even the most broad-based agricultural growth to have a positive impact on nutrition status?

In this pillar we will *locate agriculture in the broader development context* within which investments outside of agriculture (for example, in direct nutrition interventions, health, and education) can leverage agricultural performance for nutrition. In so doing, we will better understand the barriers and facilitators to nutrition-sensitive agricultural development in the region.