



## **ISPC Commentary on the pre-proposal for the CRP on Agriculture for Nutrition & Health (A4NH) for Phase 2 (2017-2022)**

### **Summary**

Nutrition is high on the donor agenda and prominent in the SRF. Further, the CGIAR has a long history of achievements in nutrition and health on which to build. This preproposal reflects that legacy and offers a promising platform for the future. The ISPC considers this preproposal **Satisfactory with adjustment** and recommends that the following substantive issues (elaborated upon in the subsequent commentary) be addressed in the full proposal, or a justification for the lack of change be given.

- The preproposal makes little mention of the impact of major nutrition trends/interventions on the environment. Not only is this a major gap relative to the SRF, but also little work has been done elsewhere. As such, this would be an ideal opportunity for the CGIAR to make a mark in the area.
- In the Biofortification CRP, a strategy for greater consideration of trade-offs between bio-fortification and other breeding objectives should be elaborated, together with a strategy for comparing the cost effectiveness of biofortification in relation to other methods of meeting micro-nutrient requirements.
- The Food Systems FP, though a welcome addition to the CRP, is not well defined in terms of its research activities. The FP needs to clearly specify the research questions as well as the approaches that will be adopted. More details are needed to make the case that the CRP has appropriate partners and a sufficient understanding of the enabling environment for effectively managing diets in the developing world.
- The FP on Improving Human Health is speculative at this stage, though it seems like a promising direction. Greater emphasis is needed on understanding where the system may not have comparative advantage and if the CGIAR should be active in certain areas of research.
- The Integrated Programs FP's research agenda needs to be designed proactively and its evaluation work should be aligned more closely with the other FPs. The expansion into topics such as education interventions or delaying pregnancy goes beyond what was described in the call and does not capitalise on the comparative advantage of the CGIAR.
- Policy engagement clearly is a reasonable target for the CRP. However, at present, the preproposal does not make a convincing case for this activity as a stand-alone FP on Supporting Country Outcomes. The FP needs to focus on policies relevant to the CGIAR's SLOs, and justify the proposition that A4NH is the right actor to influence the policy environment in developing countries.

### **Overall CRP score: B**

#### **1. Overall analysis of the preproposal as an integral part of the CRP portfolio (Score: A)**

Maintaining a strong research program focused on nutrition and health is essential for the continued success of the CGIAR as a whole (reflected in the CGIAR's addition of SLO2 on improved food and nutrition security). The ISPC considers that the preproposal for a second

round of A4NH activities is much stronger than the first phase and shows that work on nutrition-sensitive agriculture within the CGIAR is maturing. The proposal is generally well integrated into the overall portfolio, and it describes thoughtfully how this research area could contribute to the SLOs (mainly 1 and 2) and IDOs. Nevertheless, there remains a strong sense that the work of this CRP is dictated by external interests. A large fraction of the anticipated budget is expected to come from bilateral and Window 3 sources. To the extent that bilateral funding necessarily come attached to specific donor priorities, the ISPC is concerned that this dominance of W3 and bilateral funding may limit the ability of the program to act as a Global Integrating Program that would add value to the whole CGIAR system.

The A4NH agenda convincingly addresses the grand challenges in nutrition and health, which are highly relevant to the CGIAR. Climate change has been considered and is mentioned in the document (primarily in the FPs on Food Systems and Improving Human Health), but there does not yet appear to be much serious thought about how (or whether) this CRP's research strategies should reflect the future impacts of climate. A4NH also does not explicitly target potential unintended consequences of nutrition trends and interventions on the environment. Given the lack of evidence in the literature on this interaction, success in delivering SLO2 IDOs could come at the cost of delivering SLO3 IDOs at the System level. For instance, there are surely environmental implications - and potential tradeoffs - associated with increasing consumption of animal-sourced foods, fruits, and vegetables. The ISPC recommends that consideration of these potential unintended consequences be given more consideration during development of the full proposal.

Some of the priorities for A4NH should be driven by the success of CGIAR work in other CRPs, and conversely other CRPs should benefit from the success of A4NH. The CRP proposes strategic linkages with other CRPs through "docking stations", as well as through the development of a community of practice and a convening role. Annex 3 details the activities and how both A4NH and other CRPs will contribute to the planned outputs. While the integration is clear structurally, the operational details remain (understandably) a work in progress. Therefore the ISPC recommends that the CRP's full proposal should explicitly address integration as an issue for future M&E. The CRP states that it will work in most of the CGIAR priority countries, and Annex 3 gives details of planned links with other CRPs and countries. These could be interpreted as laying the groundwork for potential site integration, but the topic is not addressed convincingly. The ISPC looks forward to seeing more details of how A4NH plans to undertake its agreed role as a GIP in the full proposal.

There is some overlap in the objectives of A4NH and PIM, as much of the nutrition and health agenda operates through policies, institutions and markets. It would be helpful to be more explicit about the allocation of responsibilities and scientific specialization between these CRPs, in terms of which kinds of data, methods and research outputs each aims to produce. Another issue that has affected A4NH's linkages with other CRPs has been the dual role of HarvestPlus/Biofortification as a donor and a collaborator. It is important that biofortification should not crowd out other potential areas of collaboration with other CRPs. Biofortification should not be seen as the *only* approach to addressing micro-nutrient deficiencies and important knowledge might emerge from more genuine co-design of research with other CRPs.

While generally impressed with the description of strategic relevance, the ISPC has some concerns. The importance of the various areas of research is spelled out fairly well, and the scientific literature is cited appropriately, but there is little effort put into a discussion of the scientific opportunities. Currently, the A4NH preproposal is written as if each FP will be managed and held accountable to a logical framework with predictable impact pathways all the way from program outputs to development outcomes. This is a useful intellectual exercise, but it then offers little detail at the level of research activities and outputs. For the full proposal, the ISPC would like more detail about what each FP will do, including some discussion of intermediate outputs, in the sense of specific datasets, analytical methods or type of R&D to be conducted.

In general, the preproposal follows closely the recommendations made in the CRP-commissioned external evaluation team's report, as well as the ISPC comments on the first phase extension of A4NH from 2014. The CRP has taken on board some of the recommendations from the 2013 Science Forum (SF13) and the follow-up workshop. ToCs for each FP are now provided. Other applications of lessons learned include greater attention to food safety, the partnership with Wageningen regarding food systems, and the LSHTM partnership to provide access to expertise on human health.

## **2. Theory of Change and Impact Pathway (Score: A)**

At the CRP level, there has been considerable deliberation on impact pathways and ToCs and this is to be commended. Causal pathways to development outcomes are clear. The CRP is well aligned with the SRF (contributes to all four of the IDOs under SLO2, as well as to specific IDOs under SLO1 and, together with the CRP on WLE, specific IDOs under SLO3) but there is much more to do in terms of prioritization of W1 and W2 budgets. It is challenging to talk about the coherence of the portfolio or the integration with the system-level portfolio when such a large fraction of the total budget comes from W3 and bilateral sources that necessarily dictate their own targets and priorities. The full proposal should be prepared to defend the proposition that there is clear alignment between donors' research interests (especially with respect to biofortification) and the ToCs of the CGIAR.

## **3. Cross-cutting themes**

Consideration of gender research priorities and recognition of the constraint of women's time comes through strongly. The CRP proposes a cross-cutting unit for research on GEE, to work with each FP and the other CRPs. This approach has the advantage of mainstreaming specialist knowledge and research methods about the role of gender, age and socioeconomic differences into all aspects of the CGIAR's work. The potential disadvantage is that it risks spreading those strengths too thinly, but the track record of the A4NH staff in this domain is sufficiently strong that they can sustain multiple collaborations with high productivity. The importance of enabling environments is recognized through the work of two FPs but there seems to be a lack of connection between them and the enabling environment work within the other FPs. Developing the capacity of CGIAR partners in research and development is a major focus of this preproposal, building on the system-wide CapDev framework and a separate document detailing the A4NH Capacity Development Strategy.

#### **4. Budget**

The total funding request for A4NH anticipates continued rapid growth in bilateral donors' demand for CGIAR work on nutrition and health. Expansion so far has been financed mainly by bilateral projects, making this among the largest CRPs with the smallest shares of W1/W2 funding. The preproposal calls for an increased W1/W2 funding to a total of USD 53 million for 2017 activities. With the large amounts of funds flowing in from bilateral and W3 sources, the allocation from W1/2 that is requested seems a bit excessive. The ISPC believes that W1/W2 spending needs to be prioritized. For example, given the level of external support and the delivery phase of this work, the ISPC suggests consideration be given to a downward revision of the W1/W2 budget for FP1 (Biofortification). Distribution of the budget among the FPs does not seem appropriate to their relative cost, positioning along the R4D continuum and expected impacts. Further, the ISPC is concerned that the W1/W2 funding is not being used to target the global public goods with the greatest potential impact. There may be missed opportunities to propose new initiatives to fill specific research gaps.

#### **5. Governance and management (Score: A)**

The scientific structure of A4NH is appropriate for conducting impactful research, and the governance arrangements appear to meet the specified requirements. Still, differences between A4NH's scientific structure and IFPRI's management structure could impose very significant costs to researchers' time and attention. To address that concern, it would be helpful for the full proposal to specify more precisely how the CRP will align with the operational structure of the lead center. The CRP leadership team is strong. Most of the Phase 1 leadership team will continue, with some restructuring and two major new recruitments. The ISPC appreciates the inclusion of ToRs for these recruitments. The ISPC also applauds the ways in which this CRP has strengthened their partnership approach through identifying gaps in their own comparative advantages and filling those with world-leading experts (for example, Wageningen and LSHTM). There remains a question whether other activities (for example, impact evaluation) could also be done in partnership with other providers.

#### **6. Flagships**

##### **Flagship 1: Biofortification (Score: B)**

Biofortification is a well-proven technology, with increasing evidence of nutritional benefits. The description of the challenge is honest in saying that the long-term solution is to improve the quality and diversity of diets, but the ISPC considers that there are risks that what is proposed is too dominated by the one technology. For example, neither the trade-offs between biofortification and other breeding objectives, nor the advantages and disadvantages of biofortification relative to old-fashioned fortification, diversification, and supplementation receive much attention. Further, the ISPC would have expected to see strong links with PIM regarding the intention to mainstream biofortification into policy.

The section on evidence gaps, research questions and issues is sound but not exciting. The ISPC is not convinced that facilitator and convenor roles should be priorities for precious W1/W2 funding. It is acceptable if these roles are fully supported by W3/bilateral funding. Similarly, the ISPC questions why HarvestPlus should develop regulatory standards and advocacy partnerships - both of which seem to veer into deep waters, especially given the complexity of the enabling environments in many target countries. More discussion of the priority setting within this FP, i.e.

how decisions will be made on which biofortification interventions should be scaled up in an equitable manner would be prudent. An enhanced focus on understanding the nutritional benefits to inform the longer-term strategy of diversifying and improving the quality of diets would be more convincing. In terms of leadership, the FP leader is well respected in the area of biofortification but if this FP needs to be setting the scene for the future agenda of diet diversity then the team would do well to move beyond just biofortification skills.

Capacity development is dealt with well in terms of delivery partners. Gender also receives some consideration but perhaps not enough, especially with respect to the selection of specific targets for biofortification. The ISPC would encourage more discussion of interaction around value chains with PIM and other CRPs. The ISPC notes that this FP has the largest budget of all FPs: USD 50 million for 2017, whereas the guidance gave a maximum budget for a FP (over 6 years) of USD100 million.

### **Flagship 2: Food safety (Score: A)**

The strategic relevance and links to the SRF are very well expressed. The ToC could have focused more on who the key stakeholders are and how have they been engaged, but the description of how this FP will have impact is well thought through, and trade-offs are effectively handled. The research questions are novel and interesting, with promising and interesting work proposed on scaling up. A particularly important aspect of the FP is its balanced approach to work on new concerns about aflatoxin with better known but still more damaging effects of bacterial contaminants and other micro-organisms. There is good evidence of lessons learnt from Phase 1 and the team has a strong track record.

The FP has matched its focus to its comparative advantage in an appropriate manner and is engaging with a broad suite of relevant partners, including national universities in target countries as well as partners whose service delivery will use A4NH discoveries to achieve development outcomes. A lot of partners are mentioned, however, and in the full proposal it will be imperative to see a strategic partnership strategy. Who are the core partners? What is their role in the FP? What is the role of donor partners, of international agencies, and other actors, etc.? The ISPC suggests that the full proposal should provide additional information about links with other CRPs as well as how this FP will be embedded with other FPs in A4NH. Gender consideration seems to be implicit in the preproposal rather than explicit, and it will need to be more obvious in the full proposal. There are also key issues related to value chains. The exposure to different food safety issues will depend critically on where the processing is done; and this in turn will have implications for gender, since in many systems women are responsible for guaranteeing household food safety through their selection of ingredients, methods of food preparation, and food service. Consideration of the enabling environment and capacity development are very strong in this FP. The budget seems appropriate for what this FP plans to deliver.

### **Flagship 3: Food Systems for healthier diets (Score: B)**

The proposed new FP is potentially an excellent addition to the CRP. Decision-makers have been asking for more research on the wider food system and there is increasing recognition in the research community of the need to focus on diets rather than individual food components. Likewise, the partnership with Wageningen is promising, but there is a lack of specific detail on

the kinds of data, methods and research products which will be targeted. This would, for example, be the place to house large-scale modelling and cross-country analyses on nutrition impacts. Much more detail on what approaches will be adopted is required in the full proposal. Regarding the Performance Indicator Matrix, measures for dietary quality need to move beyond simple diet diversity.

The Team Leader has yet to be identified but the ToRs indicate a “respected scientist” is being sought (a track record in multi-organization leadership should also be an essential qualification). Other members of the team have strong credentials. The ISPC commends the way the CRP has dealt with this topic by recognizing its importance to the SRF, recognizing they do not have a comparative advantage in the CGIAR, and passing the lead to an organization that does have relevant expertise. By including scientists from 3 CGIAR centers in the team, the FP will also be developing capacity within the CGIAR.

The FP’s attention to cross-cutting issues is, however, weak. Given the lack of comparative advantage within the CGIAR in this area, the FP has to involve capacity building, not just within the team but also of delivery partners. Issues of gender are, of course, essential. Environment and climate change should also emerge as important issues, since dietary patterns are bound to change. While each cross-cutting issue is recognized, there is not much detail on how they will be addressed. It is also not clear how A4NH’s recommendations for food systems would be put into practice. Sufficient understanding of the enabling environment, especially the policy space, to be able to affect policy choices and other instruments of public policy in developing countries is critical. The ISPC recommends that these issues be mainstreamed and addressed in more depth in the full proposal. More details on co-funding arrangements with the lead partner will also be essential in the full proposal. It is difficult to comment on the budget given the lack of detail.

#### **Flagship 4: Improving human health (Score: B)**

This FP seems appropriately framed with respect to the ToC and its focus has been well thought through with partners including some from the public health sector. This illustrates an excellent understanding of what is needed to have impact. It recognizes other players in the field and promises the sort of multi-disciplinary partnerships which have been identified by those supporting the One Health agenda as being the best way forward. For the full proposal, it would be helpful to draw more focused conclusions from the convened consultations and the researchers’ specialist knowledge about the most significant agriculture-related diseases to offer more granular detail about the datasets, epidemiological methods and interventions that are likely to have the greatest impact.

This FP has three main areas of research and although speculative at this stage, it seems like a promising direction. The one at the landscapes level raises some concerns (as did the nutrition-sensitive landscapes in the extension proposal) in terms of the impact pathway - how will the research outputs lead to outcomes? The focus on prioritization as an initial step is encouraging, but this will need much more development for the full proposal. For the second area on zoonotic diseases, a lot of information already exists. The text mentions two priority diseases but then has a research question on “Characterization and prioritization” (presumably on the two priority diseases to keep the focus tight, but that is not clear). There is evidence of building on lessons learnt, but not strong enough. The third area on global challenges is more innovative, looking at

the intersections of agriculture and health and has more potential. The FP leader is yet to be appointed but the ToRs are included (leadership should be one of the essential qualifications). Some of the team members have strong reputations in their own field, which is reassuring, but they will still need to be “led”.

The combination of the CGIAR and a public health research organization gives a strong comparative advantage and the CRP management team has shown they are able to pull cross-institutional teams together. However there are some potential pitfalls and some reasons to be wary. This FP involves a move into areas where the CGIAR has not historically been very active. For instance, it seems to make sense to look at issues of farm management to reduce exposure to zoonoses, but it probably does not make sense for the CGIAR to get pulled in to issues like “vector resistance to bednet insecticides” or WASH interventions, where other organizations have far greater expertise and capacity.

This FP is strong on capacity development and claims good links with key players in the enabling environment. There is also some reference to climate change impacts. Gender questions at least refer to women’s time but without more definition of the agenda, it is difficult to see where and how these cross-cutting issues will enter. While the budget is probably appropriate for what is promised, more detail on the co-funding arrangements with the lead partner would be desirable (interactions with partners can become quite unequal if they are the ones bringing all of the resources; there is a danger that the partners would end up driving the intellectual agenda).

**Flagship 5: Integrated programs to improve nutrition (Score: C)**

This FP seems to be testing the boundaries of what CGIAR research should be doing. Is the CGIAR the logical actor to look at WASH and malaria prevention and treatment or to be involved in nutrition education programs for adolescent girls? A key question is whether this FP is simply an umbrella for evaluations that are already taking place as a consequence of all the bilateral/W3 funding, or whether these are studies designed from scratch to test methods and theories. If the latter, it is important to test the effectiveness of different nutrition theories of change, but again there are valid questions about whether this CRP is the right entity to do this work. There are partners that can be mobilized more effectively; the CRP should not duplicate the work of entities like 3ie or J-PAL. The CGIAR is not responsible for nutrition work taking place in other sectors, and development budgets should be funding their own evaluations. CGIAR research funds should be targeted at considering how evaluation methods could be improved, not actually undertaking lots of evaluations. This FP would also do well to provide input to the other FPs, for example Biofortification, Food Safety, and to the policy-oriented FPs and PIM.

A major issue for this FP is the relevance of the research that is proposed. The FP research agenda needs to be designed proactively and be driven by a more specific set of questions to avoid having project-related evaluations lumped together without much rationale. For example: What are the unintended consequences on the environment? What is the best way to deliver social safety net benefits to the poor, if the objective is to reduce undernutrition? Are the nutritional needs of adolescent girls best delivered through school-based programs or through cash transfers to the households in which they live?

This FP is led by a strong team who have gained considerable respect for their work, but the ISPC believes it is not being sufficiently challenged as to whether this should be a priority for diminishing W1/2 funds. The team indeed has multi-sectoral skills but environmental expertise should arguably be included. It would be important to see explicit attempts to pull in one or more external partners. The ISPC would recommend closer links with other CRPs so that the CGIAR can also benefit from the lessons learnt through undertaking these evaluations and not just donors in the nutrition sector. The FP is strong on capacity development and enabling environment, which is an integral part of the FP's work. Nonetheless, a key question to consider is: who is the constituency for these evaluations? Are they meant to inform science in the CGIAR or policy within donors or policy at the national level? Different issues arise with respect to the enabling environment depending on how these questions are answered. Avoiding unintended consequences on women's time and health is mentioned which is encouraging.

The ISPC believes that this FP is over-funded relative to the main focus of the SRF. It is drifting away from its agricultural roots and not sharing the knowledge gained with other CRPs in an effective manner. The research is undoubtedly important to the nutrition development community, but there is a risk that this FP is following an externally imposed agenda rather than identifying priorities closer to the SRF.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Research agenda needs to be designed proactively and driven by specific questions that reflect the CGIAR's comparative advantage.
- Evaluation work should be aligned more closely with other FPs.
- Clarity is needed on the constituency for the evaluations conducted.

#### **Flagship 6: Supporting country outcomes through research on enabling environments (Score: C)**

The proposed new FP6 is not convincing and does not come across as a research FP. It looks like an umbrella for a lot of activities, not well specified, that are country-based. Some of these are probably donor-funded activities. Even though IFPRI's country support programs have been very successful, it is not clear that these activities really belong in the A4NH research portfolio, as they are service activities rather than research activities. This FP seems to be moving away from the core focus of the CGIAR into nutrition programs rather than *agriculture* for nutrition and health outcomes. Policy initiatives often depend to a large degree on the involvement of local influential nationals of the targeted country, and therefore a very strong partnership strategy is required. There is the potential for good research to be done, but presumably much of what is needed is not research, but policy advice. Whether the CGIAR is the right entity to provide policy advice is an open question. The ISPC is supportive of research on enabling environments but Stage 1 activities do not have any focus. If the CGIAR is really delving into cross-sectoral policies, then it needs to focus on policies relevant to its SLOs. Again, as throughout this CRP's preproposal, environmental policies and impacts do not seem to get any attention.

The ISPC does not doubt that this team has a lot of experience of working in the area, but the outcomes are not that obvious. The IFPRI team has many nutrition experts and has reached out to others, but it is not working closely with academic researchers who are specialized in studying governments' choices, such as economists, political scientists and sociologists. It is also not clear

whether the CGIAR has a comparative advantage relative to consulting firms, university-based teams, or donor offices with direct presence in countries. The full proposal will need to defend strongly the proposition that A4NH is the right actor and has the right skills to affect the policy environment in poor countries. Even in rich countries, the nutrition research community does not often have clear pathways of impact into policy; in the developing world, the challenges will be greater. Are there opportunities related to new media or behavioral “nudges” that might provide better opportunities at the country level? What are the activities that will lead to impact? And does the CGIAR have any comparative advantage here?

The nature of this FP means that the enabling environment is considered and there is quite a bit about capacity development. The gender-related questions are fairly generic rather than targeted at nutrition. This FP has the smallest W1/2 budget which is appropriate. The ISPC does not have a problem with this activity being done under the auspices of IFPRI or this CRP, but it is a side activity rather than a research FP.

**Recommendations:**

- Revisit focus on policies relevant to the CGIAR’s SLOs.
- Justify the proposition that A4NH is the right actor to influence the policy environment in developing countries.