



# A4NH AND LARGE-SCALE NUTRITION OUTCOMES

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## **A4NH CAN PROVIDE EVIDENCE ON WHAT WORKS FOR DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING LARGE-SCALE NUTRITION-SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.**

In its first phase (2012-16), the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) identified what agriculture and food interventions would improve nutrition and health. These studies were crucial to [fill the evidence gap](#) A4NH was designed to address. This section describes A4NH-generated evidence on large-scale nutrition-sensitive development programs, and how knowledge, evidence, methods, and tools can support scaling up and accelerating nutrition and health impacts in EC programs.

## **APPROACHES, FRAMEWORKS, AND TOOLS**

A4NH researchers have played critical roles in developing and adapting frameworks and tools for understanding the multiple pathways through which agricultural development influences nutrition outcomes (see [Gillespie, Harris, and Kadiyala 2012](#), [Kadiyala et al. 2014](#), and [Ruel and Alderman 2013](#)) and how [gender](#) mediates the pathways. The findings have implications for how to support [nutrition-sensitive interventions in value chains](#), and [enabling policy environments](#). Researchers, donors, NGOs, inter-governmental organizations, and governments have widely adopted these frameworks and tools to inform and guide programs and investments.

A key innovation of A4NH's work on nutrition-sensitive agricultural programs is the use of rigorous impact evaluation methods, such as experimental designs complemented by process evaluations and cost-effectiveness assessments. A4NH's multi-disciplinary team first developed its strong reputation for impact evaluations by [assessing the impact](#) of large-scale social protection programs (e.g. Mexico's path-breaking conditional cash transfer program) on a variety of outcomes, such as poverty, food security, diet quality, women's empowerment, and child nutrition. Since this high-profile impact evaluation, the team has evaluated the nutritional impact of a variety of complex nutrition-sensitive programs in agriculture and other sectors, such as health and social protection, in [Brazil](#), [Ecuador](#), and [Haiti](#). The team's strong multi-disciplinary focus, combined with more than a decade

of experience using experimental designs to evaluate complex development programs around the world, puts A4NH in a unique position to generate a rich [body of evidence](#) on successful programming in agriculture and nutrition and documenting impacts on a wide range of indicators on households and individuals at all stages of the life cycle. Now, the A4NH team is compiling the [lessons learned](#), contextualized with findings of other relevant research in recent years.

- **Targeting and measuring impacts on different age groups (including adolescent girls):** A4NH research has shown that a nutrition-sensitive homestead food production program (HFPP) in Burkina Faso [improved mothers' and children's diets and nutritional status](#). New evidence emphasizes the need to focus on adolescent girls to accelerate nutrition progress because they are nutritionally vulnerable (e.g. high iron requirements due to menses; early pregnancy) and need to be better prepared for pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. A4NH is now looking for new opportunities and funding to explore using agriculture platforms to reach and support the nutrition of adolescent girls, in addition to mothers and children.
- **Assessing long-term impacts and intergenerational effects:** Preliminary results from earlier research suggest the Burkina Faso HFPP had [sustained impacts](#) on some nutrition outcomes in mothers and young children. Researchers are looking for opportunities to further assess the sustainability of impact and test whether improvements in outcomes, such as maternal empowerment and nutrition and health knowledge, confer long-term benefits on women and their future children.
- **New platforms and approaches to empower women and improve nutrition through agriculture:** A4NH has identified women's health, nutrition, empowerment, and time use as key factors to ensure agriculture leads to improved diets and optimal use of income to protect the health and nutrition of vulnerable household members. In [Nepal](#), researchers saw low production diversity was associated with poorer maternal and child diets and poorer child nutritional status, while women's empowerment mitigated these negative effects. Results from an A4NH study in [Burkina Faso](#) with



Helen Keller International (HKI) showed a nutrition- and gender-sensitive agricultural program improved women's nutritional status and empowerment. Other reviews and studies have highlighted links between [women's empowerment and nutrition](#) and changes in [gender relations and women's assets](#) in agriculture. A4NH's nutrition-sensitive agriculture program evaluation portfolio has grown to allow for exploration of new platforms including [self-help group networks](#) focused on agriculture, livelihoods, and financial services (in India) and [women-focused agricultural credit programs](#) and [government agricultural extension services](#) (both in Bangladesh). A4NH is also testing and evaluating new approaches to sensitize men/communities on gender equity. The importance of gender for nutrition impacts is critical and the overwhelming evidence for this has been a major result from Phase I. A4NH continues to use the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and a lighter version for program use, [A-WEAI](#), for program design aimed at empowering women and reducing gender gaps in agriculture. A4NH is also working with a portfolio of agricultural development projects to develop indicators for project use, or pro-WEAI, with a closer focus on dimensions of women's empowerment that matter for nutrition outcomes.

#### **AGRICULTURE-PLUS, COMBINING AGRICULTURE WITH OTHER NUTRITION-SENSITIVE INTERVENTIONS**

- **Behavior change communication:** A4NH has developed a growing knowledge and evidence base for multi-sectoral, nutrition-sensitive programs bringing together agriculture, health, social protection, and education. One major lesson is that improving nutrition outcomes from agriculture and other nutrition-sensitive development programs requires strong behavior change communication strategies. A4NH research has shown that nutrition-sensitive health; food assistance and other social safety net programs; and agricultural programs that include well designed and carefully implemented behavior change communication interventions led to greater impacts on diet diversity, infant and young child feeding practices, and micronutrient intakes.
- **Multi-sectoral approaches to reduce stunting and wasting:** Additionally, rigorous evaluations all reinforced the importance of the contribution of multiple sectors for eliminating stunting and wasting. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food

interventions are necessary components, improving diets of mothers and children and micronutrient levels during the intervention periods. However, the contributions of agriculture, health, and social development sectors aligned within comprehensive nutrition strategies and implementation plans are necessary to achieve ambitious reductions in stunting and wasting.

Demonstrating that combining behavior change communication and other multi-sectoral interventions with nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions is critical to reduce stunting and wasting. Investigating how these interventions can be feasibly and cost-effectively implemented in different country contexts is an important next step to meet ambitious global and national targets.

#### **IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY**

Beyond evaluating what interventions are effective, A4NH has put increasing focus on **how** programs are implemented and how service delivery can be strengthened to maximize impacts. Most A4NH evaluations have a mix of process and impact evaluation, with special attention to working with program implementers such as national governments (e.g. Bangladesh Ministry of Agriculture) and national and international non-governmental organizations such as BRAC, HKI, and Concern Worldwide on assessing implementation bottlenecks and ways to strengthen service delivery and utilization by targeted beneficiaries. Even [high-performing implementers](#) have learned from process implementation evaluations and used the findings to replicate and adapt their programming models. Ongoing evaluations look at a variety of approaches, and modalities for nutrition-sensitive development linked to women's self-help groups, micro-finance, and rural social protection programs in addition to assessing cost-effectiveness of different program models.

#### **A4NH STRENGTHENS GLOBAL ACTIONS, COUNTRY OWNERSHIP, AND LEADERSHIP FOR NUTRITION-SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.**

Country-specific needs require country-specific solutions, and while lessons can be learned from experiences elsewhere, stakeholders within a country need the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions on how to create appropriate policies for their own unique populations. Recognizing that there



is no "one size fits all" approach to development strategies, A4NH designs and implements its research for development through a country engagement perspective, providing the resources and support to national partners on how to best implement programs and solutions to the particular nutrition and health challenges each country faces. This approach supports country ownership that is central to achieving the SDGs, and is also critical to empowering those able to enact change with the tools they need.

While the program is working in at least 30 countries, A4NH focuses on five in particular. In these countries, there is a critical mass of A4NH investments in terms of funding, people, and partnerships across the program flagships. More intensive national and subnational food system analysis is being done in four (\*):

- Bangladesh\*
- Ethiopia\*
- India
- Nigeria\*
- Vietnam\*

### **National food systems**

Food system transformation is a central part of most LMIC's economic development plans. There are many entry points for food system analysis and intervention. A4NH focuses on national and sub-national food systems to understand not only the impacts and effectiveness of specific types of policy interventions and business innovations for different target populations, but also possible environmental and economic trade-offs. The four focus countries (\* from the list above) provide a range of diet and (sub)-national food system contexts at various stages of food system transformation and urbanization. A4NH engages in assessment of diets and foresight studies for food system change, collaborates with partners on food systems innovations that cut across value chains, and works with a range of food system actors and national authorities on scaling and anchoring.

WUR brings experience and leadership in European and international projects related to food systems, allowing A4NH to draw lessons from European food systems relevant to LMICs, and a robust capacity component for training young researchers and development professionals worldwide. The EU-funded Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security ([SUSFANS](#)) project provides a conceptual framework and analytical tools for understanding food policies and

their impact on consumer diet, implications for nutrition and public health, the environment, and the competitiveness of the agri-food sectors. Another relevant group of lessons comes from the [FoodSecure project](#), which developed instruments to test, analyze, and coordinate short- and long-term policy effects in achieving food and nutrition security. The results can be operationalized into projects and program interventions, with a focus on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. Multi-stakeholder partnerships between food system actors (business, research organizations, government, and civil society) are essential to identify and test innovations at scale. Experiences in public-private partnership platforms like the Amsterdam Initiative against Malnutrition suggest [key action areas](#) to identify pathways for institutional anchoring and establish networks to expand reach. This also broadens the scope for innovations on incentives (nudging) to motivate individual consumers and the private sector towards healthier food choices.

### **Capacity, collaboration, convening**

A4NH has dedicated activities to strengthen capacity and leadership, foster collaboration, and convene stakeholders to support country-driven success in nutrition. The independent evaluation of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and the 2015 Global Nutrition Report both highlighted these areas as critical for progress in the next phase of SUN implementation. In Africa, new requirements to mainstream nutrition within the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) monitoring processes via the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS) have also created a unique opportunity for A4NH and its partners to promote [research uptake](#) to maximize the impact of agriculture on nutrition.

Although capacity development is critical to the success of several global and regional nutrition initiatives, it is often undertaken without adequate documentation for meaningful lesson sharing and guideline development. A4NH is using a participatory qualitative research approach – analyzing the content of group discussions before and during learning events for emerging themes to ensure systematic documentation of capacity strengthening processes. This is an adaptation of an approach successfully used by the Africa Nutrition Leadership Programme (ANLP); the EU-funded Evidence-informed Decision-making in



Nutrition and Health ([EVIDENT](#)) partnership uses a similar approach responding to decisionmakers' expressed needs. The documented process will be a learning guide to increase impact of nutrition-sensitive agriculture programs and policies. Targeted resources are needed for this important and unique addition to the A4NH portfolio of activities. A4NH is working with national academic institutions on capacity strengthening activities to promote enhanced systemic capacity development in the targeted countries. Small competitive research grant schemes have been put in place for four of the A4NH countries, starting with Ethiopia to foster engagement of youth in A4NH research programs. Contextualized capacity strengthening activities target both grantees and their supervisors, including universities whose students did not get awarded any grants, to foster an enhanced enabling environment for systemic capacity development for evidence generation by national academic institutions.

### ***Specific knowledge and tools for countries***

A4NH work includes papers in *World Development* and *Food Policy* on innovative research on the role of governance among other cross-country predictors of nutrition outcomes and on the role of leadership and capacity in country constraints and success. With the CRP on Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM), the team has developed a toolkit and bibliography to understand, engage, and evaluate policy processes in agriculture, nutrition, and health. With regard to nutrition-relevant policy analysis, IFPRI through A4NH plays a key leadership role in multi-partner consortia such as [Transform Nutrition](#), Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia ([LANSAs](#)), and Partnerships and Opportunities to Strengthen and Harmonize Actions for Nutrition in India ([POSHAN](#)).

### ***Results from Major Phase I Programs***

**Transform Nutrition:** By pushing nutrition higher up the political agenda – through strengthening the evidence base and engaging decisionmakers and program implementers in dialogue – Transform Nutrition stimulated more effective action to improve nutrition. Specific impacts include revisions to the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia on the basis of research on the program's limited nutritional impact and active engagement in nutrition policy development working groups in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and India (at the national level and in Maharashtra

state). The Government of India used Transform Nutrition's situation analysis on nutrition-sensitive policies, and the December 2015 launch of the first India Health Report (with a focus on nutrition) generated media coverage, with a joint launch by two ministers. The Bangladesh National Five-Year Plan drew on Transform Nutrition evidence for the Nutrition Background Paper (including an assessment of National Nutrition Services, the Transfer Modality Research Initiative evaluation, and work on nutrition drivers). It also informed the 2016 National Nutrition Plan of Action for Children.

A4NH builds on the innovative [Stories of Change methodology](#) to understand drivers and pathways of change in focal countries, and, in India, at state level. These detailed narratives respond to the paucity of well-documented contextualized experiential knowledge on how to improve nutrition – a demand expressed by many countries. The methodology – replicated by several research and development nutrition programs, reflected in SDG Stories Initiative (UN Geneva), and highlighted in the 2017 SUN Global Gathering – has been at the forefront of a new move to highlight “stories behind the data” (e.g. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Gatekeepers initiative).

**POSHAN:** By synthesizing, generating, and mobilizing nutrition evidence, POSHAN has enabled policymakers, program implementers, researchers, and other stakeholders to readily access the latest, best evidence to support effective decisions to improve maternal and child nutrition in India. POSHAN outputs include a review of the Integrated Child Development Services' Supplementary Nutrition Program and District Nutrition Profiles for Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. The team has been invited to engage in strategic policy and programming discussions in India, including providing inputs for the Odisha Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan, a strategy for women's nutrition, and Bihar's state nutrition strategy. POSHAN's study that attempted to estimate the cost of scaling up two packages of nutrition-specific interventions to fully cover target populations in India's 35 states and union territories was featured in a special issue of Budget Track, a publication by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability and UNICEF India. The team also builds capacity, with nutrition data workshops for district nutrition specialists in Uttar Pradesh and for district nutrition officers in Bihar.