

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy Technical Working Group on Food Environments

Technical Working Groups of the ANH Academy are established to synthesise experience in methods and metrics in order to facilitate their greater use and accelerate research on measuring impacts of agriculture and food system change on nutrition related outcomes.

The Technical Working Group on Food Environments is a group of experts in food systems, nutrition and/or health research, with a particular focus on concepts, methods and metrics in food environments.

The low and middle income countries (LMICs) are undergoing a rapid transition in the food supply chains, with potential consequences for tackling persistent undernutrition and rising rates of nutrition-related chronic disease. A significant body of literature, mostly from high-income countries, motivated by obesogenic environments has characterised “food environments” in relation to diet quality and health. However, the extent to which the prevailing definitions, frameworks and metrics are applicable to LMICs with both formal and informal markets and the dual burden of malnutrition is yet to be determined. Given the global nature of food systems and local contexts that determine the affordability and access to foods it is becoming increasingly pertinent to disentangle and quantify the different elements that make up food environments and local food systems.

The Working Group will a) conduct a critical and comprehensive assessment of the applicability of definitions, frameworks and metrics predominantly used within this area of research to rapidly changing LMIC contexts and b) propose a way forward to harmonise definitions, frameworks and metrics to extend the food environment research to LMICs. The Working Group’s output is envisioned to be an authoritative academic journal article on this topic that will serve as a guide to research in this area. Following the finalisation of the journal article, the Academy will support the production of a technical Brief to facilitate research uptake.

I. SCOPE

The Group will focus its work on the development, synthesis and sharing of innovative research methods and approaches to food environments.

I.1. Aim

To facilitate the shaping of the research agenda on food environments in LMICs by advancing knowledge and scientific understanding among the global research community of frameworks and metrics relating to food environments and their applicability to LMICs.

I.2 Objectives

- To critically examine the applicability of definitions, frameworks, metrics and tools, currently used in food environments research to LMICs.
- To produce a summary of current gaps and challenges related to the above

- To advance a harmonized definition and framework applicable to rapidly changing LMICs where formal and informal markets co-exist and in the context of dual burden of malnutrition
- To provide a critique of metrics currently used and suggest a way forward
- To identify needs and opportunities for extending research on food environments in low and middle income countries

I.3. Activities

The group will meet regularly over the period of six months at the end of which it will produce a final draft of the academic paper, to be presented at the Annual Conference in June.

1.4. Outputs and outcomes

The group will produce, with support from IMMANA, a technical brief and a journal publication on measuring food environments aimed at identifying best current approaches and important future issues for new researchers in this area, with a particular focus on encouraging research in LMICs.

IMMANA will use these outputs to encourage and support development of new research through the ANH Academy.

II. MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Working Group:

- Are recognised experts in food environments, food systems, agriculture, nutrition and health research, with particular focus on methods and metrics in these areas
- Participate in the Working Group for a period of 6 months
- Participate in the Working Group in their personal capacity
- May, as appropriate, bring other experts to provide additional information and share experience in the meetings of the Group.

The total membership of the Group shall not exceed 10 members (but please note that travel funding will only be available for up to four members with priority given to members from LMICs).

The Group may from time to time invite additional members and/or observers on an ad-hoc or continuing basis.

IV. ROLES

Each Working Group will consist of:

Coordinator – mid-career expert in the area of food environments. The Coordinator will be responsible for identifying other Group members, chairing meetings and/ or leading the delivery of outputs, supported by the IMMANA Research Uptake Manager and IMMANA Research Assistant.

Chairperson – a senior expert in the area of food environments. The Chairperson will help identify group members and provide general strategic direction.

Core Group Members – 4-6 experts in food environments who will be actively involved in the production of the technical brief.

Associate Members/ Advisors – a small group of high-level experts in food environments who will advise the Working Group and review the academic paper.

IMMANA Research Assistant – a part-time junior researcher working under the supervision of the Group Coordinator. The RA will help produce literature reviews and draft the technical brief.

IMMANA Research Uptake Manager – a full-time staff member who will support the Coordinator with day-to-day coordination of the group, and who will help produce and promote the technical brief.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Within available resources, LCIRAH/ IMMANA will provide administrative and technical support required by the Working Group, including meeting facilities, an online platform for virtual meetings, and maintenance of records and distribution of documents.

The IMMANA Research Uptake Manager will support the group with general meeting coordination, and the production and dissemination of outputs.

Research support, if required, will be provided by the IMMANA Research Assistant.

VI. METHODS OF WORK AND DELIVERABLES

The Group will determine its own methods of work, including time for consideration of requests, preparation of its agenda, establishment of special groups, keeping of records and other documents and report on its activities and findings.

The main deliverable of the Group will be an academic paper, to be presented at the Annual Conference. A suggested structure of the outputs is as follows:

- Review of current methods and metrics in food environments research
- Summary of gaps and challenges related to these methods and metrics
- Research toolkit for use by researchers considering work in this area (including sources of data, software platforms available and guides to metrics/methods)
- Recommendations for development of new metrics and methods

Additionally, the Group will be requested to support other activities of the ANH Academy, for example by offering a webinar for Academy members, contributing a blog post, or offering training at the Annual Conference.

VII. MEETINGS

The Group will meet at regular intervals – ideally six times in one year, mostly virtually. Most of the meetings will take place within the first six months.

VIII. COSTS

Membership in the Working Group is voluntary and non-remunerated.

ANH Academy will cover the cost of up to four Group members' travel to the Annual Conference and to one meeting to be held in London.

ANH Academy will provide modest funds towards the production and dissemination of the technical brief.

Administrative and research support will be provided to the Group in-kind.