

Agriculture, Nutrition & Health (ANH) Academy

Draft Concept Note

1. Background and rationale

There is a growing need for methods and tools to evaluate the impact of agricultural practices on nutrition and health. Agriculture and food systems are recognised today as key future contributors to reducing both persistent under-nutrition and the growing burden of overweight, obesity and food-related non-communicable diseases, both of which affect low and middle income countries. But until recently national agricultural policies and agricultural interventions in international development have not been directed at these outcomes. There is little established methodology for designing and evaluating agricultural programmes for nutrition and health outcomes, and its development is challenged by scarcity of collaborative research involving agricultural, nutrition and health experts, whose methodologies have been developing independently for decades.

In order to address the pressing need for research on agriculture and food systems for improved nutrition and health, the concept of the Agriculture, Nutrition & Health Academy has been developed.

The Agriculture, Nutrition & Health Academy was envisaged by the Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH) and the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) and their partners. The LCIRAH conference in June 2013 emphasised the need for new tools and better and consistent application of existing tools and frameworks across disciplines; better quality and availability of integrated data across subjects; better research conceptualisation; and more understanding of mechanisms and incentives for multi-disciplinary research and multi-sectoral working. At an initial meeting held back-to-back with the annual LCIRAH conference, a commitment was made to create an 'Academy' to build interdisciplinary capacity and foster a community of researchers working in agriculture and food systems, health and nutrition.

In 2014 LCIRAH and its partners were awarded funding for the Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions (IMMANA) programme which has among its three workstreams

the creation of a global network of researchers to develop and ensure the uptake of innovative methods and metrics. Since the objectives of both initiatives are convergent, the IMMANA network and the Agriculture, Nutrition & Health Academy will be joined up.

2. Aims

The aim of the Academy is to foster a global community of interdisciplinary researchers working on agriculture and food systems for improved nutrition and health.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the Academy are:

1. To share innovative research in agriculture and food systems for improved nutrition and health;
2. To stimulate the development and harmonisation of new research;
3. To help strengthen the capacity of the research community to undertake inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary research;
4. To facilitate the uptake of robust evidence in policies and programming in agriculture and food systems for improved nutrition and health.

4. Coordination of the Academy

The founding partners of the Academy are:

Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH)

LCIRAH was established under a five-year £3.5m grant from the Leverhulme Trust to build a new intersectoral and interdisciplinary platform for integrating research in agriculture and health, with a focus on international development goals.

Innovative Metrics and Methods for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions (IMMANA)

IMMANA is a new research initiative funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated by LCIRAH. The aim of IMMANA is to accelerate the development of a robust scientific evidence base needed to guide changes in global agriculture to feed the world's population in a way that is both healthy and sustainable.

CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)

A4NH, led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), helps realise the potential of agricultural development to deliver gender-equitable health and nutritional benefits to the poor.

The founding members will collaborate to establish the Academy and coordinate its initial activities, however, it is hoped that other partners will get involved.

5. Membership

Eligibility

Membership in the Academy will be open to a wide range of individuals with a demonstrated commitment to exploring the interlinkages between agriculture and food systems, nutrition and health research, affiliated with institutions such as universities (university departments, institutes and centres), research institutes, research consortia and networks. In order to enable wide uptake and sharing, users of research (NGOs, policy-making bodies and the private sector) will also be encouraged to get involved.

Research excellence and capacity strengthening

Academy membership will be open to individuals affiliated with relevant institutions located anywhere in the world. Particular focus will be placed on engaging individuals associated with institutions based in low and middle income countries, especially from Africa and South Asia. The Academy seeks to strike a balance between developing cutting-edge research and building institutional capacity in research. For that reason Academy activities will be open to both established and early career researchers.

Membership benefits

Members of the Academy will benefit from extensive opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills base and to showcase their research work. The Academy will facilitate links among research institutions and individual researchers, and create and foster a community that enables unrestricted learning and the development of innovative research with new partners. The Academy will also support the uptake of members' work with policy-makers and practitioners.

Members will be invited to participate in and present at an annual conference and take part in both face-to-face and online training sessions. Funding opportunities will be available to Academy members through the IMMANA Grants and IMMANA Fellowships.

How to join

Individuals (researchers, PhD students, policy advisors, programme managers, etc.) working in at the intersection of agriculture and food systems, nutrition and health will be able to join the Academy through an online application process. Prospective members will be requested to seek of support from their head of department or line manager to encourage institutional support for their membership in the Academy.

Membership in the Academy will be free of charge and will in the first instance be for a fixed period, subject to renewal. Application for membership will open from spring 2015 onwards.

6. Activities

The Academy will be designed to complement existing research and training initiatives in the area of agriculture and food systems, nutrition and health, adding value to them, rather than creating overlap and duplication. Academy activities will be open to all members and will have a global focus, but in the future regional activities will be considered as well.

The initial core activities of the Academy will be:

The Annual Conference

The annual conference will showcase the work of IMMANA Grantees and Fellows as well as other Academy members. It will provide a platform for knowledge exchange and learning in the form of presentations, workshops and training sessions.

Academy activities will first be presented at the LCIRAH Conference 2015, which will also provide an opportunity to formally launch the Academy. The first Academy conference will be held in 2016.

Working Groups

The Academy will convene and support a range of working groups. These will include both technical, research-focused groups and policy working groups that will prepare relevant evidence-based technical and policy briefs to inform scientific research and policy dialogue. The groups will receive modest funds to facilitate work at the annual conference.

Workshops and seminars

The Academy will convene face-to-face and online workshops and seminars allowing its members to present and discuss their research work, as well as engage with policy-makers and development practitioners. The Academy will also help its members participate in existing activities and meetings, where appropriate.

Training and mentoring

The Academy will offer face-to-face and online training in both hard and soft skills, ranging from specific research methods and metrics, to communication skills. In addition to organising its own training, the Academy may support its members' participation in external training.

Online knowledge-sharing platform

The Academy will have a dedicated online space that will support activities such as forums and webinars as well as offer access to relevant educational resources and participation in research networks, meetings and collaborations. Rather than duplicate existing platforms, the Academy website may evolve to serve as a one-stop-shop linking other initiatives and providing a guide to using resources already available. Academy members will be encouraged to interact online, share their work, comment on the work of others, and collaborate online on research proposals, working group outputs and/ or conference contributions.

7. Outputs

The Academy will aim to generate:

- A measurable increase in research productivity and collaboration resulting from participation in meetings, reflected in publications and co-authorship by the Academy members, respectively;
- A measurable increase in research and career skills amongst professionals resulting from mentoring, training sessions at meetings and online training;
- Technical and policy briefs which are valued and used by the research and policy community;
- An established and interacting research community, led by its members with a mechanism and resources for sustainable collaboration after the end of the project.

8. Governance

The Academy will be designed as a partnership of organisations, supported by a coordinating activity. LCIRAH/ IMMANA and A4NH will play the initial coordinating role in order to get the Academy established and will continue to support the core activities.

A Steering Committee composed of members of LCIRAH, IMMANA and A4NH as well as external organisations will be established to advise on the activities of the Academy. Members will be regularly consulted to ensure that the Academy stays useful and relevant to their needs.

9. Branding

As a partnership project, the Academy will not be branded by any organisation. LCIRAH, IMMANA and A4NH will be referred to as founding partners and funders.