



UK Research
and Innovation



NUTRITION FOR GROWTH SUMMIT 2021

The Global Challenges Research Fund and Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy Nutrition for Growth Summit Official Side-event

Nutrition Research in Policy: Research impact on policy and practice in nutrition

14th December 2-5pm GMT

Summary

This workshop used the opportunity of the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit (7-8th December 2021) to discuss how research focused on nutrition can most effectively impact policy and practice in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The virtual workshop was attended by 40 people representing academia, research funders and non-government organisations. The event included plenary presentations, breakout group discussions, a fireside chat, and a Q&A session to focus mainly on the two following questions:

- 1) What are the challenges to nutrition research outcomes finding their way to policy and practice and how can these be addressed?
- 2) What are the current gaps with reaching Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 for nutrition and how can these be filled?

Context, Objectives and Speakers

The N4G Summit held in Tokyo on 7-8th December 2021 provided a global opportunity to identify and discuss solutions to worldwide nutrition challenges. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) partnering with the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy brought together academics, research funders, and non-government organisations working on nutrition challenges, focused on how research outcomes can best impact policy.

The workshop objectives were to:

- Share learning and experiences of nutrition focused, interdisciplinary research programmes and outcomes, enhancing learning and ultimately contributing to a stronger and more agile food systems research community.
- Enhance existing relationships, build new connections across disciplines and stakeholder groups, and break down barriers, leaving a legacy beyond the workshop.
- Showcase the work of research funded as part of UKRI's GCRF programmes of relevance to nutrition and food systems to other stakeholders to raise awareness and transfer knowledge of different aspects of global nutrition, maximising the value beyond knowledge creation into policy and practical impact.

Chair	Dr Tahrat Shahid , GCRF Challenge Leader for Food Systems & Cross-portfolio Gender Advisor, UKRI
Panellists	Professor Francis Zotor , Professor of Public Health Nutrition at the University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ghana and Trustee, former President of the African Nutrition Society and GCRF grant-holder Dr Namukolo Covic , Nutritionist and Senior Research Coordinator at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) for the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health and President of the African Nutrition Society Professor Suneetha Kadiyala , Professor of Global Nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), Principal Investigator for the Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions (IMMANA) Programme and GCRF grant-holder
Guest speaker	Professor Sandy Thomas , Director of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition and Emeritus Professor at the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex
Fireside chat speakers	Professor Patrick Webb , Professor of Nutrition at Tufts University, USA, and USAID's Feed the Future Nutrition Innovation Lab Dr Shakuntala Thilsted , 2021 World Food Prize Laureate and Global Lead for Nutrition & Public Health, WorldFish One CGIAR
Breakout facilitators	Dr Bharati Kulkarni , Deputy Director at National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), India, & GCRF Stunting Hub India Lead Professor Claire Heffernan , Director of the London International Development Centre (LIDC) and Professor of International Development at the Royal Veterinary College and GCRF Stunting Hub Principal Investigator Greg Hallen , Senior Program Specialist Climate-resilient Food Systems at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada Dr Habiba Hassan-Wassef , Health and Nutrition Policy in Sustainable Development, Egypt, Chair of the Working Group on Data and Knowledge Management of the North Africa-EU Alliance for Research and Innovation on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA), Vice-President, African Society of Mycotoxicology, Former Director WHO, Geneva Professor Nicola Lowe , Professor of Nutritional Sciences and Director of the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) Research Centre for Global Development and former joint GCRF Challenge Leader for Food Systems

Key Messages Identified from the Workshop:

1. System-based, interdisciplinary research built on equitable partnerships, including policymakers and civil society groups, enables research outcomes to be context specific, demand-driven, culturally appropriate and feasible, ultimately facilitating research uptake
2. Research outcomes should be positioned for uptake from the start by understanding the questions policymakers and food systems stakeholders require answers to, including metrics that policymakers require, for example, economic metrics
3. Organisations focused on evidence synthesis and decision-making tools help to build consensus around the body of evidence, identify synergies and trade-offs about policy objectives and actions for coherence, as well as enabling the development of context-specific transformation pathways for healthy and sustainable food systems
4. Building collaborations between networks of researchers supports capacity development, knowledge translation and evaluation of policies against international best practice, helping decision-makers to identify and prioritise policy options
5. Research on diet quality and the food environment in LMICs is vital to enable evidence-based policy decisions focused on tackling food and nutrition insecurity, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs)
6. Research programmes focused on improving nutrition outcomes specifically, as well as leveraging funding for nutrition-related and nutrition-sensitive research through research programmes focused on other societal challenges, for example, climate change and gender inequality, could help ensure solutions to nutrition challenges are prioritised
7. Culturally appropriate solutions combined with digital innovations can support adaption and scale-up across different contexts, including south-south partnerships
8. To achieve food systems transformations, it's important to think about influencing policies across all stakeholders, including corporate policies, whilst managing conflicts of interest and considering where the boundary should be between researchers and advocacy organisations

Challenges, Gaps and Opportunities Identified

What are the challenges to nutrition research outcomes finding their way to policy and practice and how can these be addressed?

1. Using research funding to encourage interdisciplinary, systems-based approaches built on equitable partnerships

Using interdisciplinary and systems-based approaches in research funding, including linking this through to co-creation and buy-in with policymakers, needs to be further enhanced. Participants identified that this approach could be very effective at solving challenges from different perspectives, building consensus and coordination around the issues, whilst minimising unintended consequences. Ensuring equitable partnerships helps research outputs to be appropriate for local contexts, develop capacity in country, frame the research for more effective uptake and implementation, and furthers multi-directional knowledge sharing. These approaches can help to create policy-ready research with a better chance of research outputs being successfully used. Research funders, donors, and policymakers should consider how to incentivise these mechanisms within their strategies. Researchers should seek to co-design research with local stakeholders and end-users.

2. Ensuring researchers can better engage with and understand the policymaking process and the metrics valued to maximise research uptake

Researchers' and policymakers' objectives and priorities and ways of working can be very different. Building relationships with policymakers to understand their challenges and the policy agenda, audience, timing and political will can help to develop trust. Participants identified that researchers should involve policymakers and other kinds of end-users in the research process from the start, ideally as co-designers with other stakeholders, so that there is an uptake route when the research is completed. Research projects should include metrics that policymakers are influenced by in their research outputs, for example, economic metrics. Research funders, donors, and policymakers should consider how to incentivise these mechanisms within their strategies.

3. Promoting the role of organisations who can synthesise evidence and provide a knowledge brokering role between researchers and policymakers

Participants identified that there was a mismatch between the way in which they are required to measure impact and real-world impact as not all individual research projects will have, or should have, an impact on policy. Research outputs should form part of a body of synthesised evidence, and the resulting strength of this evidence is more appropriate for influencing policy. Often, this evidence synthesis will not be undertaken by individual researchers and can span across disciplines and sectors. Therefore, there is a vital role of a trusted knowledge broker between academia and policymakers to enable this synthesis of evidence, identify the broader synergies and trade-offs, as well as identify the remaining uncertainties, evidence gaps and implementation options for policymakers to consider. Organisations like the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (Glopan), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)-funded International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) were identified as being well placed to undertake this role. Research funders, donors and

policymakers should consider how better to connect with organisations who perform this knowledge broker role, how to use their convening powers to build connections between stakeholders, and how to incentivise and demonstrate policy impact from research grants.

4. Building collaboration between networks of researchers for capacity development and knowledge translation

Building collaboration between networks of researchers focused on nutrition challenges supports capacity development and knowledge exchange. Networks can help researchers identify and build research agendas and evaluate current policies against best practice to help identify and prioritise research requirements and policy options in collaboration with policymakers. This can also help support development of south-south partnerships, as well as provide opportunities for learnings to be considered or applied in a UK context. Research funders, donors and policymakers should consider how best to build and maintain networks focused on nutrition challenges in LMICs within their strategies.

What are the current gaps with reaching SDG2 for nutrition and how can these be filled?

5. Research focused on diets and the food environment in LMICs to address the triple burden of malnutrition, sustainable and healthy food systems, and equitability in food systems

Participants identified several research areas requiring further exploration as part of the workshop. Research focused on diets and the food environment in LMICs was specifically identified as an area of priority to address the triple burden of malnutrition, sustainable and healthy diets in the context of resilience to climate change, and equity in food systems. The Food Environment Research Network (FERN) and the Drivers of Food Choice Programme were identified as positive examples of research in this area. The United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit has also led to the identification of a number of coalitions and commitments in this area. Research funders, donors and policymakers should consider how best to support such research agendas within their strategies.

6. Funding for research focused on nutrition specifically, as well as funding for, and engagement with nutrition-related challenges and commitments

There is a large financial gap between current investments and the level needed to meet the scale of the challenge for nutrition. LMICs are already dealing with critical issues related to a number of different policy areas and sometimes nutrition policies and programmes are not prioritised. Participants identified the emergence of global commitments and missions, for example on climate change, that provide opportunities to consider where there are synergies with other global challenges. Research funders, donors and policymakers should consider how best to build and maintain nutrition-specific research agendas as well as where there are synergies with other policy areas like climate-resilience or planetary health. Researchers should consider how best they could leverage research funding to support multiple policy goals synergistically.

7. Research focused on culturally appropriate solutions that can be adopted, transferred and scaled up between LMICs

Participants identified that the use of context-specific, local and traditional knowledge is important in the development of culturally appropriate and feasible solutions. Combining this with technological innovation and tools can support scale up and knowledge exchange between contexts. More emphasis on south-south partnerships could also support knowledge exchange, capacity development, and collaboration whilst supporting the overarching approach to decolonising research. Research funders, donors and policymakers should consider how best to incentivise these approaches within their strategies. Researchers should seek to co-design research with local stakeholders and end-users.

8. A deeper conversation regarding how researchers should engage with, and seek to influence corporate behaviour and policies, and how this should inform research funders agendas

Participants identified the strong corporate influence on many parts of the food system and policy. Whilst recognising this, there is also an opportunity for researchers to work with and influence corporate policy. Researchers, research funders and donors should consider how to obtain further insights on the opportunities and risks of working with industry to influence corporate policy, managing conflicts of interest, and advocating for any changes to public policy on corporate behaviour.

Next Steps

These findings originate from a UKRI and ANH Academy stakeholder workshop and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of UKRI or ANH Academy or its individual partners. The recommendations identified in this report will be discussed as part of ongoing strategy development.

Workshop Registration Demographics

We targeted invitations to a small number of experts representing a diversity of food systems disciplines and sectors, as well as across different regions globally. 50 people registered for the event and we asked for the following demographic information:

Sector	Number
Academia	28
Food Industry	2
Central or Local Government	2
Research Funder	3
Donor (Philanthropic/Foundation/Endowment)	2
Non-governmental Organisation	8
Other	5
Area of focus	Number
Food Production - Agriculture	3
Food Production - Fisheries or Aquaculture	3
Food Production - Livestock	0
Food Production - Alternative/Novel	0
Agritech and Supply Chain Innovation	2
Extension Services or Training	0
Food Storage and Distribution (including trade)	0
Food Processing and Packaging	0
Food Retail and Markets	2
Food Environments	2
Food Consumption and Diets	3
Food Safety	2
Food Loss and Waste	0
Food Security	4
Nutrition and Health (including malnutrition and diet related non-communicable diseases)	23
Environmental Sustainability	0
Climate Change	0
Economic and Social Development	0
Food Systems Resilience	2
Social Justice and Equality	0
Other	4
Gender	Number
Man	20
Woman	29
Other	0
Prefer not to say	1