

Call for Concept Notes

The challenge

The potential for interventions in agriculture to improve nutrition outcomes, either directly or indirectly, has been tested in many settings around the world over the past 30 years. With the important exception of biofortified crops, there is currently little evidence that demonstrates a robust beneficial impact of agriculture on nutrition. A major reason for this lack of evidence has been the relatively weak study design and unrealistic expectations of many earlier studies. There has also been a distinct lack of innovation in this area and only a very small number of agricultural interventions have been formally tested.

This call for concept notes as part of LANSA's research programme tries to address these two problems. First, it aims to provide funds specifically for formative and feasibility research to enable researchers to properly design agricultural interventions that have the potential to benefit nutrition. And second, it seeks to stimulate innovation in agricultural interventions

What is LANSA?

LANSA is a research programme consortium (funded by the UK's Department for International Development) of six organisations that seeks to address the following core question: *"How can South Asian agriculture and related food policies and interventions be designed and implemented to increase their impacts on nutrition, especially the nutritional status of children and adolescent girls?"*

The programme covers four countries in the South Asian region: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. LANSA partners in the region are: M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), India (lead organisation); BRAC, Bangladesh; and the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR), Pakistan. LANSA's international partners are: the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK; the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), USA, India, Bangladesh; and the Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH), UK.

LANSA's research portfolio is structured according to three research pillars and three cross-cutting thematic issues. Research Pillar 1 relates to the challenge of creating and sustaining enabling environments for pro-nutrition agriculture, posing the question – how can agriculture and food policies be more strongly linked to other underlying determinants of nutrition such as women's status, poverty-induced food insecurity and poor sanitation? With a strong focus on the agri-food system, research Pillar 2 aims to understand how nutrition can be improved through agricultural growth strategies and policies beyond the farm gate including food storage and trade. Research Pillar 3 aims to understand the role of interventions in agriculture and how they can be designed to improve nutrition outcomes. The three cross-cutting themes are gender, fragility and innovation systems. Further details of LANSA can be found on www.lansasouthasia.org

LANSA's "Responsive Window"

LANSA's responsive window facility seeks to engender a wider sense of engagement among national and regional stakeholders in the core challenge of improving the impact of agri-food systems, policies, programmes and interventions on nutrition. The responsive window was specifically designed to attract academic input from beyond existing LANSAs research consortium members and support the delivery of high quality research from within the South Asia Region.

The responsive window of LANSAs has enabled two open calls for research proposals. The first responsive window call (June 2014) focused on policy-relevant research to identify options for promoting an enabling policy and institutional landscape for nutrition-sensitive agriculture in South Asia. Four excellent studies were funded in a competitive process and the grantees are now partnering directly with LANSAs in delivering regionally-relevant research outputs. More information on the grantees from the first responsive window call is available here: <http://lansasouthasia.org/article/lansa-announces-four-successful-policy-related-research-bids>

We are now announcing the call for applications for the second responsive window.

Research Call

The second responsive window call focuses on research Pillar 3 of LANSAs that aims to define a suite of interventions in agriculture that have the potential to have positive impacts on nutrition outcomes, especially in women and children. Current research under LANSAs Pillar 3 includes formative and/or feasibility work on the Farming System for Nutrition in India, land-grants for women in Pakistan and video technologies in India.

We are now seeking applications for funding to design new and innovative interventions in any area of agriculture for nutrition and/or to test the feasibility of scaling-up such innovations. We are particularly interested in interventions that recognise the importance of on-going environmental changes (including climate and water resource scarcity). We recently requested ideas to support our responsive window call via an online consultation hosted by the [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition](#) and received more than 50 responses with potentially important innovations that require further exploration and testing. We would be pleased if ideas posted on the online consultation were developed further for this call.

This responsive window call is specifically designed to attract applications for the conduct of high quality formative or/and feasibility research. Formative research helps researchers understand the interests, behaviours and needs of target populations and is critical for developing effective interventions. Feasibility research assesses the viability of ideas or interventions and helps answer important questions about whether and how interventions can be implemented. High quality formative and feasibility research are essential for the design of interventions that have the potential to have impact at scale.

Additional eligibility criteria and considerations

- Research studies may be of 12-18 months duration.
- Applicants should familiarise themselves with work in LANSA's Pillar 3 (Annex) to maximise "added value" by seeking complementarity with ongoing work and avoiding duplication.
- Concept notes will need to make clear reference to gendered aspects of agriculture and nutrition and may also address one of the other cross-cutting issues in LANSA (fragility and innovation systems) if relevant.
- Expected budgets per study will range from £50 - 70,000. Studies that are more expensive may be considered so long as there is guaranteed co-funding to meet requirements beyond this range. It is expected that up to seven studies will be funded through this responsive window including at least two studies focused on Bangladesh, and at least one study in Afghanistan.
- Joint applications by more than one organisation are encouraged, but one organisation must be specified as the lead. At least one organisation must be based in a LANSA focus country.

Evaluation criteria

The primary evaluation criteria are:

- quality of the concept note and proposed research;
- relevance to LANSA's priorities;
- value for money;
- internal capacity.

Format of concept notes

In the first instance, please submit a concept note of no more than 3 pages (single-spaced; Arial font 12 point size; 2.5cm margins) that clearly states:

1. problem statement including relevance to LANSA's primary objectives;
2. context including what is known already;
3. aim and research questions;
4. study design and methods;
5. expected outputs and outcomes;
6. partners and research capacity;
7. indicative budget (with breakdowns of personnel, travel and other expenses).

Concept notes that do not follow this format will not be reviewed.

Review timelines and selection process

The following process will be adopted:

1. Applicant organisations are invited to respond to this call by August 21, 2015 with a concept note in the requested format.
2. Concept notes will be screened against the evaluation criteria to select a shortlist by a review

- team comprising members of the LANSAs consortium.
3. Shortlisted applicants will be informed by September 18, 2015 and invited to prepare and submit full research proposals by October 23, 2015.
 4. Research proposals will be reviewed by the internal review team and an external panel using a standard scoring system and the selected projects will be announced by November 20, 2015.
 5. Research studies should be designed to commence by January 4, 2016.

Concept notes should be emailed to lansa.rw2@gmail.com

Final deadline for concept notes is August 21, 2015

Annex: LANSAs's Research Pillar 3

The research conducted under Pillar 3 is assessing the feasibility of a suite of potential large-scale agricultural interventions to improve nutrition outcomes especially in women and children. The studies have been selected because of the scale and potential for significant impact of the interventions.

The Farming System for Nutrition intervention led by MSSRF in India will provide information on whether and in what format it is possible to tailor agricultural support to resolve defined nutrition problems. This study focusing on 19 villages (5 intervention and 3 comparison, in one location and 7 intervention and 4 non-intervention in the other), will provide important information on the feasibility of rolling-out the FSN initiative at a greater geographic scale. More details are available in a conceptual paper on the Farming System for Nutrition (FSN) initiative, and a paper on protocol for the study. A short documentary film was also produced to communicate the FSN concept.

The feasibility of agricultural asset transfer programmes to women to support nutrition outcomes will be studied by CSSR in Pakistan. The feasibility research will provide important information for the nutrition-sensitive design of potentially transformative policies on the provision of land and other assets to small-scale farmers in South Asia.

A formative study to understand the perceptions and needs of local farming communities to promote their farming systems for better nutrition was undertaken by BRAC in Bangladesh.

The feasibility of using digital technologies to spread agricultural and nutrition knowledge has been studied by IFPRI in India. The study assessed the feasibility of the Digital Green community-led approach to spreading agricultural and nutrition knowledge and demonstrated that the Digital Green model was feasible. This feasibility study by LANSAs has demonstrated that it was ripe for upscaling and has now attracted significant additional funding to deliver a robust, large cluster-randomised controlled trial in India to assess the impact of the technology on nutrition outcomes.