

Call for Applications: Competitive Research Grants to Develop Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions

Led by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)

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1. Funding Opportunity

Background

Donors, national governments, civil society and private sector entities around the world have all expressed growing interest in changing agriculture and food systems to optimise nutrition outcomes. Many publications have noted the potential for agriculture-food systems to influence nutrition on a large scale, while acknowledging uncertainty about how best to fulfil that potential. Linkages between agriculture-food systems, health and nutrition outcomes are multiple, complex, direct and indirect, and also difficult to document. Recent and current research investigating these linkages demonstrates important methodological limitations leading to major gaps in the state of knowledge about nutritional improvements attributable to agricultural policy and interventions. A recent mapping of research on agricultural interventions for improved nutrition¹ found that only a small fraction of over 150 current and planned research projects have rigorous methods and metrics to further understand this relationship.

Widespread confusion and lack of common standards for rigorous research limit our understanding of the inherent complexity of agriculture and nutrition interactions, and hampers the development of metrics, methods and tools for design and evaluation of the range of possible cost-effective policy and programmatic actions. Demand is high for innovative metrics and methods with which to assess causal mechanisms, and to evaluate policy and programme impacts and estimate their cost-effectiveness to guide agricultural intervention designs for nutrition improvement.

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

IMMANA, a new five-year research partnership supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), aims to accelerate the development of a robust and coherent scientific evidence base which will support effective policy and investments in agriculture-food systems for improved nutrition. IMMANA is led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) in partnership with SOAS, University of London; and the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Boston, MA (USA). The IMMANA partnership is brought together and

¹ Report on “Current and planned research on agriculture for improved nutrition: a mapping and a gap analysis” on DFID’s website: <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Output/190847/>

coordinated by the Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH).

The IMMANA programme will deliver its aims through:

- **Competitive Research Grants to Develop Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions (IMMANA Grants):** A research grants programme directed at accelerating the development of innovative and interdisciplinary metrics and methods filling the key knowledge gaps including theory-driven impact evaluation. It is expected that this workstream will consist of 15-20 research grants of up to £250,000 to be awarded in two rounds.
- **Post-Doctoral Fellowships for Emerging Leaders in Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health Research (IMMANA Fellowships):** A fellowship programme directed at building a cadre of early career researchers who are using and developing or adapting these new methodological approaches with mentors in ongoing research programmes in low and middle income countries (LMICs). Twenty four fellowships of one year in duration are expected to be awarded in four rounds.
- **Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy:** A global research network connecting researchers and research groups, to ensure rapid sharing, development and use of the best approaches emerging from their work and from the grants and fellowships proposed in this project. The Academy will hold an annual meeting as well as specific technical and policy working groups.

You can find more information about IMMANA on <http://www.lcirah.ac.uk/immana>.

How to Get Involved

We encourage researchers to participate in all aspects of IMMANA, and provide the following guidance on how IMMANA can best support your research interests:

- If you are a researcher in an institution engaged in and committed to linking research in agriculture, nutrition and health, your institution can join the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy, and you can participate in its conferences, meetings and working groups.
- If you are an early career researcher who wants to improve skills in working across agriculture, nutrition and health programmes in a development context at another institution, then you might consider applying for an IMMANA Fellowship, for which you will need the support of your home institution and the institution that will host you.

- If you are a researcher who would like to develop innovative methods and metrics or adapt existing ones in diverse contexts, then you may wish, through your institution, to apply for an IMMANA Grant.

All Fellows and Grant holders will be expected to participate in the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy and its meetings for the duration of their funded programme. We will not normally provide IMMANA Fellowships to researchers to join IMMANA Grants, but it would be acceptable in principle for an institution to be hosting both an IMMANA grant and an IMMANA Fellowship, as long as they are clearly separate activities.

For further information, please contact: immana@lshtm.ac.uk.

2. Award Information for IMMANA Grant Funding

Objectives and Scope

The IMMANA Competitive Research Grants are aimed to accelerate the development of innovative and interdisciplinary methods, metrics and tools to advance the scientific understanding of the linkages between **agriculture and food systems** and **health and nutrition outcomes**, in order to better inform policy and programmatic actions to improve nutrition outcomes in low and middle income countries (LMICs).

IMMANA will fund innovative research initiatives to develop and validate methods and metrics for measuring agriculture or food system, nutrition and health interactions of importance in a development context. We are particularly interested in proposals to construct new tools that bring together ideas and resources from different relevant disciplines. However, innovative proposals for applying existing tools and metrics in novel contexts to generate new insights are also welcome. For the purpose of this call, **agriculture and food systems** include the production, distribution, processing, marketing and consumption of food and people, resources and institutions involved in these processes. **Nutrition and health outcomes** include impacts on malnutrition in its broadest sense, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and diet-related overweight, obesity and associated non-communicable diseases, as well as other impacts on human health with implications for nutrition outcomes e.g. food borne diseases or toxins.

By **methods** we mean the processes and approaches involved in a systematic inquiry of relationships between agriculture, nutrition and health and generally refer to study design (for example, impact evaluations using various types of counterfactuals, pathway analyses). **Metrics** refer to parameters or indicators used for measurement, comparison or tracking performance (for example, disability adjusted life years; household dietary diversity score and women's empowerment in agriculture index - WEAI). A **tool** is a vehicle or aid to collect information and data to arrive at the metric (for example, the survey module to collect data required to compute an index).

As well as being **innovative** and of **excellent scientific quality**, research supported through these Grants must demonstrate clear **development relevance**. Specifically, applicants should make a convincing argument for the **potential of the new methods proposed to make a meaningful impact on nutrition and health in LMICs**, for instance through their use to improve the design, monitoring or evaluation of important nutrition- and health-enhancing interventions or policy change. Proposals which build links to programmes in LMICs and which will make use of the methods developed are encouraged, but more general methods research will also be considered as long as it has development relevance. Applicants are also encouraged to identify how the proposal will mainstream gender issues in the research activity and outputs. Grants funded will normally be expected to deliver outcomes that are likely to make a practical impact - either directly, or through further, more applied research - within five years.

Indicative Research Topics and Approaches

The IMMANA partnership will consider a wide range of proposals that address the objectives outlined above, based on selection criteria explained in the section below. In order to give an indication of the kinds of projects that IMMANA will support, we present a list of example topics. Please consider these only as indicative as we welcome other topics that meet IMMANA's objectives.

- Develop a suite of indicators or a composite indicator to measure the impact of different interventions on agriculture *and* nutrition outcomes in a standardised way in different settings.
- Design and test nutrition indicators which can be used effectively across a range of target groups and at different points in agricultural value chains.

- Design and test appropriate methods and tools to measure the indirect effects of agriculture on health and nutrition outcomes, e.g. through effects on income, time allocation, environment.
- Develop analytical methods to measure and compare the contribution of different agriculture-to-nutrition pathways to health and nutrition outcomes in different settings.
- Develop an indicator to measure access to and affordability of a diverse, safe, and nutritious diet in a given geographic area over a given time period, taking into account seasonality.
- Develop innovative tools for food system surveillance, e.g. measures of access, preference and diet quality, to improve understanding of evolving food environment and its health and nutrition impacts.
- Evaluate or develop methods to analyse the impact of agricultural programmes on nutrition and health in emergency situations, as well as in fragile states and post-conflict or emergency situations.
- Link diverse sources of data through new tools to measure the effect of changes in agriculture or food systems on agriculture, health and nutrition outcomes.

IMMANA places particular importance on research which brings together expertise across sectors, including agriculture, food systems, water, sanitation, nutrition and health, and between disciplines relevant to development of novel methods, metrics and tools, including, for instance, economics, sociology, agricultural science, psychology, physiology, gender studies, and political science. We are interested in applications proposing innovative use of quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods development as long as they can demonstrate practical potential to address programmatic and development needs.

Funds Available and Duration of IMMANA Grants

Each grant in the first round of funding will be up to **£250,000** and approximately **seven to eight grants** will be awarded through a competitive selection process. Because the nature and scope of the proposed research will vary from application to application, it is anticipated that the size and duration of each award will also vary. Each grant will be assessed vigorously for value for money. The recommended duration is two to three years. The total project period for an application submitted in response to this funding opportunity must be completed by January 2019.

3. Application Process

Eligibility

Applicants must have demonstrated the ability to conduct research of international standards of excellence in the topic proposed. Researchers and institutions from both developed and low and middle income countries (LMICs) are eligible. However, the panel will particularly welcome proposals that demonstrate strong partnerships, the added value that would be created by the proposed partnership, and the contribution it would make to enhance the scientific capacity of Southern partners. The roles and responsibilities of all named applicants should be defined accordingly, together with a description of the added value arising from the bringing together of complementary expertise.

Applicants may submit more than one application, provided each application is scientifically distinct.

Proposal Submission and Selection Process

The application and assessment process will comprise the following stages:

- Open call for concept memos
- Invitations to selected applicants to submit full applications
- Selection of successful proposals by an interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral Independent Panel of Experts

Assessment of concept memos will be undertaken by IMMANA project management with oversight by the Chair of the Independent Panel of Experts, and full applications will be assessed by the Panel itself.

Concept memos must be submitted by email to immanagrants@lshtm.ac.uk by 21 November 2014 by 11.59 PM GMT.

A concept memo should comprise the following ([click here for the template](#)):

1. **A cover sheet** setting out basic details of the proposed project
2. **A case for support** of not more than **three numbered pages** (a page is a single side of A4 typescript) describing the proposed research and how it would address the aims of the programme, and comprising the following elements:
 - an introduction to the scientific significance of the research and rationale

- a summary of the research to be carried out, its scope, objectives and a brief summary methods to be employed
 - its innovative and original features
 - its development relevance (including inclusion of gender considerations) and an assessment of the potential impact of the research in the near to medium term and, if successful, the nature and extent of its contribution to the alleviation malnutrition
 - collaborative approaches and partnership mechanisms to support development or use of innovative methods and metrics cutting across disciplines and sectors and to strengthening the research capacity in LMICs
3. An indicative timeline and a **summary of the funding required** in British pounds sterling by the participating institutions, which should be presented separately with estimates of each institution's costs under the following headings:
- direct costs of the research - staff (salary and salary-related costs), consumables, travel, equipment etc.
 - associated indirect and estates costs or overheads.

Concept memos should be submitted as PDF documents in a font size no smaller than 11. Standard character-spacing must be used, and not less than single line-spacing. All margins should be of at least 2 cm. Proposals that are not submitted in the correct format will not be accepted.

Selected applicants will be invited to submit **full applications**.

Eligible Costs

Funding may be requested for all research costs that are attributable to the project, including, for example:

- Salary costs for research staff
- Data collection
- Standard class travel related to implementation of the proposed research
- Publication costs
- Attendance at the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy annual conference (mandatory for IMMANA Grant holders for the duration of the grant – this should therefore be included in the budget)

- Indirect and estate costs.

All applications will be scrutinised for value for money.

Timelines

Submission of concept memos	21 November 2014
Invitations to submit full proposals	10 December 2014
Submission of full proposals	20 February 2015
Notification of awards	15 May 2015
Grants start between	1 September 2015– 31 December 2015

Assessment Criteria

The potential of the research and its overall impact will be an important criterion in the assessment of proposals. The proposed research is expected to generate **innovative and high quality methods, metrics and tools for application in the short to medium term for improving agriculture and food systems’ contributions to nutrition and health in LMICs**. The research is expected to generate global public goods and publications in high quality scientific journals. The applicants and co-applicants are expected to have a demonstrable capacity to deliver high quality research in the relevant areas.

Applications will be assessed using the following four criteria:

1. Innovative nature of the research proposed, relative to existing approaches
2. Scientific excellence and originality of the research proposed
3. Development relevance of the research and its potential for application in LMICs
4. The collaborative, inter-sectoral and/or interdisciplinary nature of the research proposed

Assessment will be made on the basis of all the criteria listed above for both outline and full proposals. These criteria are described in more detail below. Concept memos that best meet the above criteria will be invited to submit a full application. Assessment at both concept memo and full proposal stage will also consider the overall scope and balance of the programme in the final selection of projects.

Innovation

Does the proposed research represent a new and imaginative approach to measuring and understanding how agriculture and food systems affect nutrition and health?

Does the research involve the development of new methods, the integration of existing methods into new tools, or the application of existing methods in a novel way that improves and extends their utility? Proposals which simply apply existing methods in conventional contexts will not be considered innovative.

Scientific excellence and originality

Is the proposed research potentially of very high quality in relation to the highest international standards of scientific excellence in all of the sectors and disciplines that it includes?

Would the project add value to existing research on the topic of the proposal?

Are the methods proposed sound and is the proposed research feasible?

Development relevance

Does the proposed research address issues that present significant challenges to agriculture and food systems for improved nutrition and health in LMICs?

Are the anticipated development outcomes and possible pathways to impact clearly and convincingly argued?

Have gender issues been mainstreamed in project design and objectives?

Collaborative approaches

Does the proposed research convincingly bridge the gap between the measurement of agriculture and food system processes and the measurement of nutrition and health outcomes?

Does the research make a convincing argument for its selection of methods and approaches and how they will be integrated?

Are there satisfactory partnership mechanisms to support inter-sectoral or interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration?

Review Process of Full Application

The Independent Panel of Experts will assess the full proposals and recommend applications for funding. The review process will be overseen by the IMMANA Steering Committee comprised of staff

from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), USAID and CGIAR's A4NH programme, who will have final approval.

4. Dissemination, Data Sharing and Intellectual Property

Information about research funded through IMMANA Grants will be made available on the public IMMANA website (www.lcirah.ac.uk/immana). Recipients of grants will also be required to provide information about their projects for DFID's Research for Development portal (www.research4development.info). Grant holders will be asked to collaborate with the funders and IMMANA project partners on research uptake and dissemination activities, which may include, among others, presentations at seminars and conferences, blogs, interviews and opinion pieces.

Grant holders will be expected to promote the dissemination of the results of their research as widely as possible, based on the premise that publicly-funded research data are a public good, produced in the public interest, and should be made openly available to other researchers in a timely manner to the maximum extent possible. **As well as scientific communication, emphasis is placed by the funder on engagement with potential users and beneficiaries of research, and the route to application of its outcomes. Consideration of possible pathways to impact will form an important element of the assessment of proposals.**

All intellectual property rights for all material (including but not limited to reports, data, designs, whether or not electronically stored, and technologies) produced by the investigator(s) or the investigators' personnel, and arising from research funded through the Grant, will be the property of the investigators' institution(s). The investigators' institution(s) will grant to the funders of the programme, if requested, a world-wide, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use all such material. However, if investigator(s) wish to apply for a patent for a particular application arising out of the information, they may request that publication of data is withheld until the patent has been applied for. After that time, the data must be made freely available. The funders should be consulted about any request of this kind at an early stage, and any license(s) granted must be managed in a way that is consistent with the core principles of Global Access, i.e. that the findings of the research would be disseminated promptly and broadly, and that products and technologies arising from the knowledge gained would be made available and accessible at reasonable cost to people most in need in developing countries.