



SUNRAY: Sustainable Nutrition Research for Africa in the Years to come

Only nine out of the 46 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are on track to achieve the MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger). Despite this, investment in nutrition and in nutrition research has been grossly insufficient. High-income countries have dominated the research agenda while the capacity of African national and regional research institutions to respond to research needs in human nutrition is seriously limited.

Recent events including the food price crisis, global recession and climate change are having a profound global influence on hunger, health and agriculture. Future environmental, economic, technological, socio-cultural and political changes are likely to present new challenges in the field of nutrition. Changes in climatic and demographic patterns, water and land availability, the stability of national food reserves, food and oil prices, migration and resettlement patterns, urbanisation, health care systems and emerging conflicts will all affect food and nutritional security in new ways. Future research needs for nutrition in Africa may be very different from current research needs and will require the development of new conceptual thinking accompanied by innovative research methods.

The SUNRAY project will develop a nutrition research agenda for sub-Saharan Africa.

The main activities in SUNRAY are:

1. **Mapping of current research.** SUNRAY will identify the main actors and lines of research in the field of malnutrition in Africa. An inventory of all academic and applied research in the field of nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa will be made. The major research topics, research locations, actors and funders will be identified through desk research and mobilisation of existing networks. In addition, a sample of the researchers will be interviewed to analyse the drivers and constraints doing nutrition research in Africa, and understand unmet needs as perceived by African researchers.
2. **Stakeholder analysis.** The relevance of the on-going nutrition research will be evaluated from the perspective of different stakeholders such as local policy makers, small and medium size enterprise, health and agricultural professionals, social sector etc. Multi-criteria mapping analysis will be used to identify the research options that each interviewee deems significant, capture their ranking of the options and their weightings of the relative importance of each option.
3. Assessment of the **future research needs in nutrition research.** A series of papers (i.e. climate change, markets, demography, social dynamics, water and political dynamics and governance) will identify emerging research challenges for the nutrition research community.
4. **Regional workshops** (Tanzania, Benin, South Africa) will be organised to build consensus between stakeholders, develop a coherent research agenda and outline the conditions and actions required to implement it.

The new nutrition research agenda for Africa will be translated into a **strategic framework for decision-makers**. A Roadmap document will summarise research priorities, strengths and gaps in existing research operating environment, resource requirements, opportunities for linkage and support between African and Northern institutions or synergies with existing initiatives and research in other sectors and both identify risks and potential constraints and funding requirements. Stakeholders (local, national and international) will be consulted to collect their views and perceptions on the document.

SUNRAY will mobilise existing networks of researchers, amongst others through the African Nutrition Leadership Programme, Federation of African Nutrition Societies, nutrition researchers funded by IFS and various alumni networks from the academic institutions involved.

The SUNRAY project is built around 5 concepts:

1. *Future landscape*: Within the next a decade, new nutritional problems and nutritionally vulnerable groups will emerge and as a result pose new challenges for nutrition research and programming. It is essential to understand the future environmental, economic, socio-cultural and political landscape in order to predict their impact on nutrition and identify emerging research needs as well as immediate research challenges.
2. *Sustainable and broad-based solutions*: Nutrition research needs to be integrated with initiatives in other sectors such as agriculture, health, education, social protection and rural development, to address the root causes of malnutrition and to avoid ‘technical fixes’. This will require an understanding of and engagement with broad-based organisations that will incorporate nutrition within a wider research agenda.
3. *African centre of gravity*: African institutions need to identify their own research opportunities and constraints to ensure appropriate and sustainable solutions to African problems. The constraints and opportunities for African institutions need to be understood to ensure empowerment and identify appropriate capacity development mechanisms for future research.
4. *Broad stakeholder involvement*: The link between research and action needs to be strengthened and for this a broad stakeholder viewpoint is needed. This will also help to fully understand nutrition research needs, opportunities and constraints.
5. *Political engagement*: Policy-makers at the highest level need to be persuaded that investment in nutrition is essential. Research needs to provide the evidence for action and present research findings in a clear and irrefutable manner so that action becomes imperative.

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