AFRICAN ECONOMIC RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD POLICIES ON NUTRITION OUTCOMES IN AFRICA

Background

Established in 1988, African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) has grown to be a premier capacity building institution for the advancement of research and graduate training to inform economic policies in Africa. The consortium’s mandate and strategic mission is built on the basis that sustained development in Sub-Saharan Africa requires well trained, locally based professional economists. A highly integrated knowledge organization spanning research, training, and policy outreach, AERC is now a vast network of universities, policy makers, researchers, educators, and international resource persons.

The AERC collaborative research program addresses topical issues of interest to Africa and brings together seasoned researchers from both Africa and elsewhere to generate policy-oriented research. Collaboration enables researchers to tackle complex yet contemporary research issues with a bearing on policy making in Africa that otherwise could not be adequately addressed by one or a few researchers, and leverages the diverse skills of the various researchers in the project to deliver high quality research outputs.

The Project and Its Context

Investment in agriculture is widely seen as “a critically important opportunity for reducing malnutrition.” (Herforth et al. 2012; FAO 2013)\(^1\,\,\)\(^2\). There have been repeated calls for the international community to place a higher priority on “unleashing”, “leveraging”, “reshaping”, or “realizing” the opportunities offered by agriculture to enhance nutrition and health. The donor community has responded, bringing a larger budget share to bear on the agriculture sector since the mid-2000s, reversing the steep decline of the previous decade. One of the stated aims of the renewed focus on agriculture is to encourage agricultural policies and programs

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to become “nutrition-sensitive” (BMGF 2012), or more specifically, to make “agriculture work for nutrition” (FAO 2012).

Recently, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) awarded a grant to AERC to undertake rigorous research on the impact of agricultural and food policies on nutrition outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa for informed policy development, program design and improved nutrition outcomes.

The majority of Africans either live in rural areas or are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In their efforts to address food and nutrition security challenges in the region, governments in sub-Saharan Africa have developed and implemented various agricultural policies. Therefore, understanding the pathways and impacts of agricultural policies on nutrition bears promise to addressing mal- and undernutrition challenges in the continent. However, the efficacy of these policies has not yet been assessed, and this project is an attempt at that.

The project seeks to establish the effect of agricultural policies on nutrition with specific reference to the following domains: (i) food prices, food security and macro-economic policy; (ii) nutritional outcomes along the agricultural value chain; (iii) food prices, including consumer subsidies and price ceilings; (iv) food security policies, including stocks and price stabilization schemes; (v) resource access and women empowerment; and (vi) agricultural extension and advisory services, finance and trade. The focus of this study is sub-Saharan Africa and excludes North Africa. Please see the announcement at www.aercafrica.org/index.php/about-aerc/announcements.

The Objectives

This is a call for expression of interest to participate in an AERC collaborative research project on evaluating the impact of agricultural and food policies on nutritional outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. The main objective of the research is to investigate the impact of agricultural, food and nutrition policies on nutrition outcomes, and thus human development and health. A better understanding of agricultural policy to nutrition pathways should help improve policy development and program design for improved nutrition outcomes in SSA.

The project aims to generate evidence on the effects of agricultural policies on nutrition outcomes whilst developing messages for consideration by policymakers and practitioners as well as strengthening African research capacity in this specialized field.

For the purpose of this call, agriculture and food systems include all aspects of food production, distribution, processing, marketing and utilisation, as well as the people, resources and institutions involved in these processes. Nutrition outcomes of interest include impacts on malnutrition in its broadest sense, including under-nutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and diet related overweight, obesity and other impacts of the food system on human health. 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).

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Indicative Research Topics for Competitive Grants

The project 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 the project will support, we present a list of indicative areas. These are only indicative, and we welcome other areas and topics that are consistent with the project objectives.

- Agriculture-Food-Nutrition Nexus: Causal mechanisms and types of impact
- Development of indicators or a composite indicator for measuring the impact of different (agricultural policy) interventions on agriculture and nutrition outcomes in a standardised way in different settings.
- Analysis of nutrition metrics (such as indicators for diet quality, dietary transition in rapidly changing contexts and field-based low-cost diagnostic tools to assess status of various micronutrients) in sub-Saharan Africa across a range of target groups.
- Methodologies for measuring the indirect effects of agriculture on health and nutrition outcomes, e.g. through effects on income, time allocation, environment.
- Analytical methods for measurement and comparisons of the contribution of different agriculture-to-nutrition pathways to health and nutrition outcomes in different settings.
- Market-based indicators for measuring and monitoring access to and affordability of a diverse, safe, and nutritious diet, taking into account seasonality.
- Review of innovative metrics and tools for measuring and monitoring food systems including metrics for long-value chains and development of market-based indicators to examine nutritional/health aspects of food systems in rapidly transitioning environments.
- Evaluation of methods for analysing the impact of agricultural programmes on nutrition 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.
- Private sector and women participation in agriculture for improved nutrition outcomes
- Methodologies to measure the contribution of agriculture policy interventions to nutrition outcomes.
- Science-Based Regulatory and Policy Considerations in Nutrition
- Agricultural systems (crop and livestock) and human nutrition
- Systematic reviews of agricultural interventions and nutritional outcomes

This call is for research proposals for framework papers (i.e., background papers as part of the AERC collaborative research project on Impact of Agricultural and Food Policies on Nutrition Outcomes in Africa). Submitted proposals will be reviewed by external experts, and acceptable proposals will be selected for grant awards. This will be followed by an inception workshop involving the selected researchers, resource persons, and others. The researchers will then carry out the research and present their findings in workshops organized by AERC. Project outputs are normally published in journal/book volumes by reputable publishers and other outlets and disseminated widely.

Requirements and Key Dates

- Proposals must consist of: (i) a maximum of 15 pages setting out the issues to be analysed together with the methods to be used (ii) a CV for each author (including in the CV: nationality, gender, research record/publications, and full contact details). Submission of proposals by March 12th, 2017 to:

  AERC
  at
  procurement@aercafrica.org with a copy to cresearch@aercafrica.org
  on or before March 12th, 2017

- Authors of proposals will be informed of the decision of the project by 31st May 2017.
Eligibility Requirements:
To qualify, the lead researcher should be a senior scholar/researcher who has worked and/or published extensively in the areas of Agricultural and Food Policies for Improved Nutritional Outcomes. 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.

Qualified women are especially encouraged to apply