



India



↑ Farmers in Koraput, Odisha, ploughing their fields.

PHOTO: SANGEETHA RAJESH, LANSA

¹ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/agriculture-and-nutrition-india-mapping-evidence-pathways-0>

² <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/explaining-cross-state-disparities-child-nutrition-rural-india-0>

<http://lansasouthasia.org/content/dietary-diversity-and-women%E2%80%99s-bmi-among-farm-households-rural-india-1>

<http://lansasouthasia.org/content/child-underweight-land-productivity-and-public-services-district-level-analysis-india-1>

³ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/content/gendered-time-seasonality-and-nutrition-insights-two-indian-districts>

⁴ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/content/public-distribution-system-tamil-nadu-implications-household-consumption-0>

Agriculture policies, programmes and schemes are at both national and state level in India. There is much scope for governments to be proactive and take initiatives while responding to requirements within the state. The Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) research programme consortium aims to enhance the impact of agriculture on maternal and child nutrition in India. LANSA activities in the country have included: mapping of stakeholder perceptions of sectoral policies and programmes, primary research, secondary data analysis, policy dialogue, capacity strengthening, research uptake and dissemination.

M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) leads LANSA consortium and also the research in India, with partners – Leverhulme Centre for Integrated Agricultural Research (LCIRAH), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Research collaborations with Public Health Foundation of India, Universities of Southampton and East Anglia, OKAPI, Vaagdhara and Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR) aided in tackling research knowledge gaps identified during the course of the programme.

LANSA work

LANSA's foundational and landscaping work¹ showed there is potential to influence agriculture and nutrition policy and practice in India. A nutrition-sensitive research focus to link agriculture and nutrition coupled with proactive engagement of multi-sectoral stakeholders at all levels of governance, research and community, resulted in uptake of LANSA evidence at multiple levels.

Studies on enabling environment brought out the positive link between agricultural prosperity, and state capacity and willingness for better nutritional outcomes². A study of seasonal changes in work patterns, quantity

and quality of food intake, highlighted disadvantages for STs and SCs in Koraput, and some OBC groups in Wardha. Time for care work is squeezed in peak agricultural seasons affecting nutrition status of women and children³. Also noted was that higher level of women's education, sanitary conditions, dietary diversity, support services and recognition of women agricultural workers as farmers are important.

LANSA investigated the Public Distribution System (PDS) from the nutrition lens and found a significant, positive contribution to cereal/calorie consumption, also savings of particularly poor (rural/urban) households in TamilNadu⁴. Examination of the

Karnataka Millets in PDS initiative identified the need for sufficient millet production and adoption of a decentralised procurement and distribution mechanism as essential. Research on pulses indicated that states distributing pulses via PDS show higher consumption of proteins, suggesting the need for higher production and availability⁵. The targeted PDS study showed it was more inclusive, but could sustain only if supported by administrative reforms like improving grain delivery and control diversion to open markets⁶. LANSAs studies on agri-food value chains beyond the farmgate highlighted the scope for public private partnerships in state-led food distribution programmes, and the need for favorable regulatory environment and incentives for private business to have a nutrition focus⁷.

To demonstrate feasibility of community-led approaches, two LANSAs studies – educational videos to promote better nutrition⁸ and nutrition-sensitive farming systems approach⁹ – reached out to farmers. Improved agriculture practices and nutrition awareness¹⁰ as part of the Farming System for Nutrition (FSN) study received acceptance with uptake among farmers beyond the core study villages¹¹. Increased availability and consumption of millets, pulses and vegetables contributed to improved household dietary diversity as the first step to better nutrition outcomes. The importance of social protection measures to support women’s time for care work was also highlighted.

Policy challenges

Although agriculture has the potential to be a strong driver of undernutrition reduction in India, its potential to do so is currently not being realised. The focus of agriculture has largely been on increasing productivity and production of staples – wheat and rice. While there are agriculture policies, programmes and schemes at national level with budgetary allocations, agriculture being a state subject gives states a proactive role while responding to their requirements. It is only in recent years, however, that some strategies are emerging to address nutrition through agricultural routes.

A new government took up office in the country in May 2014, and there were several changes affecting agriculture and nutrition policy decision-making in the country. NITI Aayog (NA), a new body with an unclear portfolio was instituted in 2015 replacing the National Planning Commission and National Development Council; LANSAs closely monitored these developments. NA launched a National Nutrition Strategy to address malnutrition in September 2017, and this was followed up by the central government setting up a National Nutrition Mission in December 2017. Uptake with NA picked-up momentum from this point.

Stakeholder engagement

LANSAs in India strategically engaged with stakeholders through a variety of channels (consultations, one-on-one meetings, blogs, newsletter, research and policy briefs, films, social media channels) to bring a nutrition-sensitive agriculture linkage in Central and State government programmes and initiatives. Research Uptake strategies, outputs and activities were tailor-made to focus on bridging the science-to-policy and science-to-practice interfaces, and these were carried out at all levels of governance – national, state, district, village, and also with communities. There was proactive production and use of multimedia and social media products developed across study themes and policies for a wide range of audiences.

To engage multi-sectoral stakeholders with the research evidence, LANSAs hosted multiple events beginning in 2014. Several state and district-level consultations in Maharashtra and Odisha over the life of programme paved way for acceptance of LANSAs evidence among policy decision-makers and the policy-influencing community. High-level dialogues senior government functionaries in the capital, Delhi in 2016, and 2018 brought nation-wide attention to LANSAs work in India and planted the idea of ‘nutrition-sensitive agriculture’ approaches to tackling women, child and adolescent undernutrition. The LANSAs-NITI Aayog dialogue in 2018 brought policy action points to attention, to advance the nutrition-sensitive agriculture agenda¹². FSN models are being setup in Farm Science Centres (*Krishi Vigyan Kendras*) with technical support from MSSRF.

The School Nutrition Gardens initiative to sensitise village school children on nutrition demonstrated encouraging results. Farm men and women are now spokespersons, advocating for nutrition-sensitive approaches¹³, and a cadre of ‘Community Hunger Fighters’ are expected to sustain the momentum propelled by LANSAs in the village communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. Mainstreaming nutrition in agriculture policies and programmes with support for nutrient-dense crops and biofortified crop varieties
2. A farming system approach to nutrition with FSN models in KVKs across India
3. Better policy environment to steer private business with focus on pro-nutrition
4. Recognition of rights of women in agriculture and necessary policy support
5. Ensuring enabling environment of WASH and healthcare to facilitate nutrient absorption

⁵ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/analysis-protein-consumption-india-through-plant-and-animal-sources-2>

⁶ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/more-inclusive-more-effective-%E2%80%99Cnew-style%E2%80%9D-public-distribution-system-india>

⁷ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/ids-bulletin-value-chains-nutrition-south-asia-who-delivers-how-and-whom>

⁸ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/adapting-agriculture-platforms-nutrition-case-study-participatory-video-based-agricultural-0>

⁹ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/establishing-integrated-agriculture-nutrition-programmes-diversify-household-food-and-diet-0>

¹⁰ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/farming-system-nutrition>

¹¹ <http://lansasouthasia.org/voices-of-change>

¹² <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/article/niti-aayog-and-lansa-look-better-agriculture-nutrition-linkages-india>

¹³ <http://lansasouthasia.org/voices-of-change>

Credits

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LANSAs is an international research partnership, exploring how agriculture and agri-food systems can be better designed to advance nutrition in South Asia. Led by MS Swaminathan Foundation, members include BRAC, Collective for Social Science Research, Institute of Development Studies, International Food Policy Research Institute and Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research for Action on Health. LANSAs is funded by the UK Government. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the UK Government’s official policies.

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