



IMPACT ASSESSMENT BRIEF

## IFPRI 2020 CONFERENCE ON “LEVERAGING AGRICULTURE FOR IMPROVING NUTRITION AND HEALTH” *Delhi, India, February 10–12, 2011*

Robert Paarlberg, Wellesley College

Since 1995, the 2020 Vision Initiative within IFPRI has organized periodic international multistakeholder Conferences for dialogue, debate, information sharing, and consensus building. The IFPRI 2020 Conference on “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health” was held in New Delhi, India, from February 10–12, 2011, and attracted more than 900 attendees. The Conference objective was to examine linkages among three intimately connected policy sectors: agriculture, nutrition, and health. IFPRI is a member of the CGIAR Consortium, a research network that has historically focused on agriculture rather than nutrition or health. Meanwhile, many within the nutrition and health sectors routinely ignore agriculture. IFPRI wanted the 2020 Conference to show agriculture’s potential for improving nutrition and health, while encouraging leaders from all three sectors to reach across traditional boundaries. Conference activities included 12 plenary sessions, 15 parallel sessions, 14 side events, an ongoing knowledge fair with more than 25 exhibit booths and tables, six informal discussion groups, and roughly 30 “rapid fire” presentations during coffee breaks.

Assessing the impact of this Conference is a task complicated by multiple issues such as assessment coverage and impact attribution. The assessment methods used here include surveys of conferees, Internet searches, website and literature searches, and extensive personal interviews. Distinctions are drawn between short-term and medium-term impacts, and also among impacts on individuals, on institutions, and on professional discourse.

### **Impact on Individuals**

Impacts on individual conferees were measured through pre- and post-Conference surveys and telephone interviews. The impacts on the substantive views of those who attended the Conference were found to be small. Most conferees (75 percent) came to Delhi already convinced that a cross-sector approach to agriculture, nutrition, and health (ANH) was appropriate. At the individual level, the Conference

impacted motivation and empowerment more than beliefs. The Conference gave those who attended new information, new networking opportunities, and various “positioning advantages” that made them more effective within their own institutions back home. Such advantages were primarily important in the short term.

### **Impact on Institutions**

Regarding impacts on institutions, the 2020 Conference produced important but mixed results. Direct impacts on national governments were small, in part because ministerial structures and bureaucratic routines in governments are traditionally segregated by sector, and resistant to anything more than incremental change. Direct impacts from the 2020 Conference on private companies and NGOs were also modest, but for a different reason: these institutions are inherently comfortable working across sectors, so most of the private companies and NGOs participating in the Conference felt little need to change. The strongest institutional impacts from the Conference came within a category of organizations that wanted to integrate nutrition with agriculture, but were unsure of how, or how quickly, to move forward. These institutions included the CGIAR itself as it moved to create the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (CRP4); the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as it responded to an internal evaluation of its own work in nutrition; and a number of donor institutions including most prominently the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), which used the materials and policy energy generated by the 2020 Conference to help guide and push a major expansion of bilateral funding into the ANH arena. These DFID responses alone were a large enough payoff to mark the Conference a success.

### **Impact on Professional Discourse**

A third significant impact from the Conference was on professional discourse. The 2020 Conference helped change

the conversation about agriculture and food security by boosting the frequency of reference to cross-sector impacts on both nutrition and health. Impact measurement becomes difficult here, because the Conference was not the only initiative underway to highlight cross-sector linkages. Nonetheless, the average number of Google Internet hits per search for the phrase “linking agriculture, nutrition, and health” increased from 9,288 in the pre-Conference period to 13,508 in the immediate post-Conference period of March–May 2011. Searches of organization websites revealed that 18 of 21 of the sites had more links to agriculture, nutrition, and health issues immediately following the Conference compared to just before, and 20 of 21 had an even higher number of such links one year later in July 2012.

### Limitations

The most obvious limitation on impact has been at the level of national government policy (excluding donor policies). Partly this reflects attendance. Only 19 percent of those who attended the 2020 Conference were government officials, compared to 41 percent who came from research institutes or universities. Yet, even where Conference impacts on governments might have seemed probable, they have proved (so far) to be mostly tentative or modest.

- The government of Malawi co-hosted its own version of the 2020 Conference in Lilongwe in September 2011. While this was an important step, the Conference was donor-suggested and donor-funded, and senior officials from the Ministry of Health were unable to attend.
- In Uganda, the 2020 Conference helped sustain an effort to mainstream nutrition within the Ministry of Agriculture. However, this effort was underway before the Conference, and parallel efforts from USAID, WFP, and FAO did as much to sustain it.

- In China, the leadership of the State Food and Nutrition Consultation Committee was briefed on 2020 Conference materials, which may have helped to establish a new (but already approved) food safety and nutrition development institute at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS). Since Chinese leaders had been unable to attend the Conference itself, impacts in the country also depended heavily on a separate outreach effort by IFPRI leadership.
- In India, national officials and researchers—and IFPRI—made concerted efforts to use the Conference to shape language in the new 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2012–16). While some who were engaged in this effort claimed progress in that direction, nothing definitive has emerged and in India it appears that little has changed in the traditional separation between the agriculture ministry and the nutrition and health sectors. The Conference’s largest impacts within India were felt at the individual level, at the level of discourse, or within some state administrations, not within national governmental institutions.

### Concluding Remarks

What can one reasonably expect when looking for impacts from a single international Conference? In the case of the 2020 Conference in Delhi, where the goal was to change the way individuals and institutions were thinking about ANH issues and considering them in professional discourse, *measurable progress was made toward these goals in both the short term and the medium term*. IFPRI took a risk by designing the Delhi Conference to challenge traditional paradigms. This assessment shows that, in both the short term and medium term, the risk has been rewarded.

Robert Paarlberg, Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: This brief is based on the Impact Assessment Discussion Paper #34, Impact Assessment: IFPRI 2020 Conference on “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health” Delhi, India, February 10–12, 2011” by Robert Paarlberg, which has been externally peer reviewed. Any opinions stated herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or opinions of IFPRI.

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