

# Barriers to Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Agriculture and Nutrition Research

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CLAIRE FITCH

NOVEMBER 18

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# Background: Agriculture/nutrition research climate

## Agricultural Research

(Agricultural colleges, research institutes, NGOs)

## Human Nutrition Research

(Public health institutes, universities, NGOs)

## Agriculture to Nutrition Pathway



## Objectives:

- Identify the institutional factors inhibiting interdisciplinary collaboration in agriculture and nutrition research
- Compile recommendations to foster collaborative, multi-sector research

## Methods:

- Faculty from JHSPH and NARC identified 20 organizations involved in agriculture and/or nutrition research in Nepal
- Key informants were selected based on involvement with coordinating or conducting research within each organization
- Semi-structured interviews (lasting 30-60 minutes each) were conducted with key informants from 16 organizations in July or August, 2014
- Responses were transcribed, grouped by sector and analyzed for common themes (relating to barriers to collaboration and recommendations) using Atlas.ti Software and Microsoft Excel

## Interview Guide:

- Current research activities, organizational priorities
- Past collaborative efforts in the past
- Perceived constraints on multi-sector engagement in research
- Suggestions for fostering collaborative research

## Agriculture Sector

NGOs	Universities	Governmental Agencies
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS)	Department of Agriculture (DoA)
Nepal Development Research Institute (NDRI)	Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU)	National Animal Science Research Institute (NASRI)
Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research, and Development (LI-BIRD)	Himalayan College of Agriculture Science and Technology (HICAST)	National Agriculture Research Institute (NARI)
		Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC)

## Health/Nutrition Sector

NGOs	Universities	Governmental Agencies
Nepal Public Health Foundation (NPHF)	Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS)	Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC)
NEWAH Water for Health (NEWAH)	Institute of Medicine (IOM)	
Research Inputs for Development Action (RIDA)		
Helen Keller International (HKI)		

“Agriculture research in the past did not recognize that nutrition should be included in agriculture. **Generally food security was the major focus...**we were talking only 2,250 calories. That’s it. No Vitamin A or B, no measuring for this and that. So nutrition, we were thinking, is the health sector’s business. Gradually we are coming together.”

*--Agricultural Research Institute*

## Common Barriers: Implementation of Multi-Sector Research

*“Our institution cannot carry out multi-sector work or research. And the National Planning Commission is not built for implementation.”*

*--Agricultural NGO*

### Suggestions:

- Increase networking and communication among scientists of different sectors
- Increase funding → build capacity for research

## Common Barriers: Differing Priorities between Sectors

*“The agricultural sector always promotes production, not focusing on consumption.”*--Public Health NGO

*“We didn’t talk about food security much—a lot of emphasis was given to micronutrients.”* –Medical University

### Suggestions:

- Share human resources between sectors
- Government should coordinate collaborative research efforts
- Involve other sectors, like WASH and education

## Common Barriers: Limited Research Activities

*“We have a research department, but compared to the universities in the West and in the North, we do not have such priorities and we have not been able to tap the global resources for research.”*

*--Medical/Public Health University*

### Suggestions:

- Capacity building of organizations, universities
- Increase funding for research
- Involve international organizations for assistance

# Common Barriers: Donor Requests Divide Sectors

*“Money comes with ideas.”*

--Medical/Public Health University

- Externally funded research and programs may be designed for a single discipline
- Limited autonomy in research design

## Suggestions:

- Involve national-level interests and ideas in research design and conduct
- Government should coordinate collaborative efforts

# “What barriers?”

*“I don’t see any constraints. Our aim is to improve the productivity of the farm, which will lead indirectly to human nutrition, but we are not technically supposed to work with human nutrition.”*

*--Agricultural research governmental agency*

Perception that agricultural research indirectly, yet sufficiently, contributes to human nutrition

➤ Increased productivity = improved nutritional status?

Suggestions:

➤ Involve nutrition scientists and indicators in design and evaluation of agricultural interventions

# Recommendations

1. Establish a platform for regular **communication** among scientists of different sectors
2. Focus on capacity building, development of robust research programs
3. Incorporate nutritional assessments and indicators into household-level agricultural interventions
4. Share human resources between sectors to build technical expertise
5. Develop an agriculture-nutrition academic program within universities