



ENHANCING EVIDENCE INFORMED DECISION MAKING IN NUTRITION



The **Knowledge and Research for Nutrition project** of the European Commission aims to provide improved knowledge and evidence for policy and programme design, management and monitoring & evaluation in order to reach better nutrition outcomes.

The project is implemented by Agrinatura - the European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development - which has established a **Nutrition Research Facility**, pooling expertise from European academia and having the ability to mobilise internationally renowned scientific networks and research organisations from partner countries.

The Nutrition Research Facility provides expert advice to the European Commission and to the European Union (EU) Member States and Partner Countries.

It operates in a flexible and timely manner, informing and responding to requests from the European Commission, by:

- 1 Stimulating the demand for scientific input from decision makers
- 2 Bringing evidence through research and analyses
- 3 Providing expertise for the M&E of policies and programmes
- 4 Sharing knowledge with decision makers and building their capacity

Ultimately, this contributes to improving the connection, collaboration, communication and coordination between researchers and decision makers and to strengthening monitoring & evaluation systems for tracking the nutrition benefits of policies and programmes.

Amidst the many initiatives aiming at enhancing science-policy dialogue, the specificities of this project are:

- (i) A nutrition focus
- (ii) A support targeted to EU development policies
- (iii) An ability to mobilise scientific networks to conduct research



The Nutrition Research Facility operates in a way to improve the connection between researchers and decision makers

1. The NRF stimulates demand for scientific input from decision makers

The NRF conducts a range of activities (online consultations, meetings, participatory workshops, etc.) to reach out to targeted decision makers to capture their demand for scientific input. These are the stakeholders involved in the design of nutrition policies, programmes and interventions in low- and middle-income countries, from the European Commission, EU Member States and EU Partner Countries. Translating this demand into policy relevant research questions and M&E support requires an iterative dialogue, based on impact pathways and theories of change. Any research question useful to enhance evidence-informed decisions in nutrition can be considered, such as:

- Benefits, side effects, and cost-effectiveness of interventions or programmes
- Impact of economic, environmental or societal factors
- Validity of screening and diagnosis tools or indicators
- Organisation and financing of programmes and policies

A set of transparent criteria are applied to prioritise the questions that the NRF can address, including: the political or societal relevance of the question, the magnitude of the problem under consideration, the potential for improvement, the feasibility and timeliness of the study, and the possibility to provide actionable recommendations for which impact on practice and outcomes can be evaluated.

2. The NRF provides evidence through research and analyses

To address this wide range of evidence needs, the NRF uses various approaches, which often combine mixed-methods to allow a holistic understanding of the problem, including:

- Systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses are key to critically appraise evidence at hand and identify knowledge gaps.
- Evaluative research permits sound causal inference between an intervention or programme and key outcomes. This involves epidemiological studies (either experimental, quasi-experimental or observational) and other components such as process analysis and realist evaluation.
- Economic studies (cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, cost-utility) integrate cost and outcome data into a decision analysis model and are useful to prioritise interventions and resource use.
- Implementation research is crucial for translating scientific knowledge into actionable context-specific recommendations. This contextualisation includes organisational analysis, stakeholder analysis, analysis of routine data, evaluation of costs and resource implications, analysis of food system components and consumers' behaviours and other qualitative studies.

Such analyses are always carried out with oversight from the NRF, relying either on internal resources or through the mobilisation of external expertise whenever necessary, including in collaboration with research organisations in Europe, in low- and middle-income countries and worldwide.

3. The NRF provides expertise to monitor and evaluate programmes

The NRF delivers technical and statistical assistance to the M&E of EU nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes. It is set up to offer flexible and demand-oriented support in the areas of M&E planning, implementation and learning.

Planning

- Development of impact pathways and theories of change
- Design of M&E frameworks, plans and systems to track programme impacts on nutrition
- Support to M&E planning and budgeting
- Assessment of the 'evaluability' of programmes and development of evaluation designs and baseline assessments

Implementation

- Performance analysis and process evaluation of programmes
- Exploration of nutrition impacts of programmes
- Capacity building of programme teams on measurement tools, results-based management, etc.
- Statistical/analytical support of data collected
- On-going technical assistance to M&E systems

Learning

- Collation of M&E evidence
- Production of best practice compendiums on M&E evidence, tools and methods
- Promotion of M&E related learning across stakeholders through knowledge exchange, peer learning, etc.

4. The NRF shares knowledge with decision makers and builds capacity

All the outputs from the NRF are publicly available and open access. Results and resources produced by the NRF are framed in a way to generate actionable context-sensitive recommendations, and in a language and format that are adapted to the way decision makers source their information.

This comprises writing policy briefs, sharing key messages through different channels (events, meetings, social networks, etc.) and through individual meetings with high-level decision makers as well as personalised training and mentoring sessions.

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