

Shifting the policy limelight towards women agricultural workers in Pakistan



About LANSa research

Research on women's agricultural work and its implications for nutrition is a major stream of LANSa research in Pakistan. The Women's Work and Nutrition (WWN) survey conducted collaboratively by [Collective for Social Science Research \(CSSR\)](#) and [Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health's \(LCIRAH\)](#) aims to address evidence gaps on this understudied issue.

The WWN is based on a representative sample of recent births in irrigated rural areas of Sindh covering over 1,000 mother-child dyads across 13 districts. It is a unique sample survey in Pakistan which combines detailed information on women's work history and time use with data on their own health and the health of their young children. The research evaluates the impact of women's work in agriculture on their own nutrition and that of their young children and seeks to find ways to reduce the negative impacts and enhance the positive ones. It does this by determining the direction and magnitude of the impact, and analysing the pathways through which it occurs. Specifically, it examines and empirically establishes correlations and associations between women's work (paid and unpaid) in agriculture and the nutrition of children, through the intermediation of household resources and care provision.

Given the emerging importance of the provincial level of government in agricultural as well as nutritional policy and programming, the main focus of the study and its research uptake is on the province of Sindh which has the highest rates of undernutrition in Pakistan alongside a thriving agricultural economy. In the last few years the provincial government has become increasingly concerned about the nutrition deficit in rural areas of the province and is currently at the forefront of policy-making (for example, adopting an Inter-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy in 2014) and donor engagement among Pakistan's provinces and regions.

Introduction

This evolving impact story is about how evidence generated by [LANSA research in Pakistan](#) is trying to shift knowledge, attitudes, and practices among stakeholders at various levels – national/provincial, community and household – with respect to women's work in agriculture. For the period 2015 we reported on how our [preliminary research](#) had helped raise the profile of this issue among one set of stakeholders: civil society activists and sympathetic donor and government officials¹. The period January-December 2016 coincided with the completion of the two rounds of our Women's Work and Nutrition (WWN) survey in the Sindh province, as well as the initiation of an ambitious Research to Action strategy² at the community level. We expect a stream of research outputs based on the survey through most of 2017. In the same period, we plan to execute the second phase of our Research to Action strategy – developing capacity at the community level, culminating in an important stakeholder engagement event towards the end of the calendar year.

The present impact story builds on the [impact story](#) submitted for the period January-December 2015, and reports on work done in anticipation of the main research outputs and related uptake activities to be undertaken in 2017 and later.

Background

Women are responsible for much of the work done in Pakistan's large agricultural sector, but their economic contribution does not receive the recognition that it deserves.

Agricultural policies and programmes implicitly assume that the main stakeholders in the sector are landowning farmers who are almost invariably men. Patriarchal communities and families rely on women's work for the income it brings without recognizing their economic contribution. Nutrition, health and social protection policies and programmes are inattentive to the fact that rural women carry a double burden of care alongside agricultural work they must do. Most nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions themselves make demands on women's time and energy without properly acknowledging existing demands on their time and energy. This needs to change if agriculture, which remains the main source of rural livelihoods, is to play a more positive role for improving nutrition in Pakistan.

Research to Action

Having contributed to civil society led initiatives for bringing the issue of women agricultural workers into the public and policy limelight, CSSR has continued to broaden and deepen its engagement with stakeholders at various levels.

International donors and multi laterals are important policy stakeholders in Pakistan. CSSR has maintained close contact with a number of key players. The engagement began with discussions with the nutrition specialists for Pakistan and South Asia for major multi-laterals (UNICEF and the World Bank) in 2013 which was followed up with a detailed landscaping stakeholder interview with the Senior Agriculture Specialist (World Bank) later that same year. During the interview, he informed us that the [Pakistan Evidence Review Paper](#) had been “extremely helpful” in helping him formulate thinking around agriculture nutrition linkages in Pakistan. There was continuing engagement with the Senior Agriculture Specialist as well as other senior staff at the World Bank who are working with the Sindh provincial government in preparing a multi-million nutrition project with a specific agriculture-nutrition component. The most recent such engagement was a consultation meeting in December 2016 on the design of the project which was followed up with a written note based on preliminary results from the WWN survey.

At the same time, LANSAs researchers at the CSSR were able to initiate engagement with senior staff at the [Planning and Development Department of the Sindh Government](#) who are responsible for nutrition programming. We met with the Programme Coordinator Nutrition in early November 2015 to discuss LANSAs findings. Following these interactions we were invited to take part in the ‘Agriculture for Nutrition (A4N) Technical Workshop’ organized by World Bank to help design the agriculture-nutrition component of its project. The event brought together senior officials from the relevant departments of the provincial government including those working on agriculture, livestock, extension services, planning and development, nutrition and local government.

We delivered two presentations based on LANSAs research, including the keynote presentation at the start of the workshop. The presentations drew upon the Pakistan Evidence Review, and on our [LANSAs working paper on women’s work and nutrition](#).

The presentations generated rich discussions and requests for the research materials by a large number of participants. By the conclusion of the two-day workshop the stakeholders agreed with our recommendation that women and landless agricultural workers ought to be the primary target group of proposed project. This represented an important shift in the prevailing institutional bias of agricultural programmes in favour of landowning farmers who are almost invariably men.

In February 2016, LANSAs researchers at the CSSR submitted inputs for nutrition programming in Sindh on the request of Secretary for Development in the Planning and Development Department, Sindh, proposing recommendations in health, agriculture and [social protection](#) to focus on women. In March 2016, we participated in a provincial consultation to inform Department for International Development’s (DFID) nutrition

programming in Sindh convened by the Sindh Planning and Development Department and DFID UK. We used this opportunity to highlight the need for nutrition programmes to focus on women agricultural workers. The provincial consultation fed into the national consultation where women’s empowerment³ and mother’s care behaviour⁴ were among important areas of focus. In November 2016, we met again with officials at the Sindh provincial Planning and Development Department including the new lead person in the Nutrition Cell.

During this time engagement with the World Bank on their nutrition related programming continued with meetings with the Senior Nutrition Specialist in September 2016 and Senior Agriculture Specialist in December 2016. LANSAs researchers at the CSSR provided inputs from the baseline results of the Women, Work and Nutrition study.

In addition to our continuing contacts with stakeholders in government and donors, we initiated engagements with community-level stakeholders towards the end of 2016. The aim of these engagements was to take our preliminary findings from the WWN survey back to the communities where the survey was conducted, and to elicit interest and support from the communities for making a stronger and persistent pitch for our main messages (notably the recognition of the linkages between women’s agricultural work and nutrition) at all levels.

Challenges

Engaging in policy dialogue and working with stakeholders with competing interests can be unpredictable and time consuming. Even though an opening was created with the Inter-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, there was erratic progress due to uneven leadership in government. For example, the position of the Nutrition Coordinator at the Planning and Development Department has experienced turnover and remained vacant for many months, both in 2015 and 2016, before it was filled. We also see changes in donor priorities and institutional preferences. Fluctuating commitment within government and donors meant that promising initiatives sometimes lose steam and then some of their elements reappear under new nomenclature. The Inter-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy which defined the main framework of the agriculture-nutrition programming a few years ago has been replaced, for example, by a number of other projects and programmes.



Community level uptake event, Female group, Dec 2016

The work at the community level is one way of addressing fluctuating interest and commitment at the higher policy levels. This engagement, alongside engagement with civil society stakeholders, is expected to create more durable constituencies for the messages of LANSAs evidence. The continued presence of an evidence-based narrative on women's work and nutrition will mean that there are ideas on the table ready for the moment when government and donor interest picks up.



Community level uptake event, Male group, Dec 2016

Key Contacts

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Conclusion

The agriculture policy landscape in Pakistan had never recognized women workers as key stakeholders in the sector. However, in the backdrop of the Inter-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy the decision makers in the agricultural policy sphere have started to acknowledge the contribution of women agricultural workers and the nutritional impacts of their work and our findings are being endorsed by various actors. We expect to see more opportunities for engagement in 2017 when the flow of research outputs associated with the WVN survey begins. The year 2018 is also important because it is in the middle of this year that general elections are likely to take place in Pakistan. The year running up to the elections will provide strategic opportunities for stakeholder engagement. It is in this coming period leading up to the conclusion of LANSAs, therefore, that we aim to achieve specific results with respect to this impact story.

References

¹ Amongst others, these activities included [LANSAs Pakistan Stakeholder Mapping event](#) (November 2012) and [LANSAs Agriculture-Nutrition Workshop and Open Forum](#) (April 2014)

² Some background thinking on the Research to Action strategy is covered in the following CSSR blogs: 1) [Do we give back?](#) 2) [Making your work count: it's all about impact](#) and 3) [Research \(uptake\)-so what?](#)

³ More about measurement of women empowerment in nutrition is covered CSSR LANSAs blog titled ['My choice or not?'](#)

⁴ CSSR LANSAs blog on ['Shifting Norms'](#) highlights the differences in maternal and childcare norms in specific areas of Sindh