DESIGNING AND MANAGING RESEARCH PROJECTS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR FIELD WORKERS

JANUARY 2016
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ACRONYMS

ACF Action Against Hunger | ACF International
CIOMS Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences
CEA Cost-effectiveness analysis
CMAM Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition
ComPAS Combined Protocol for Acute Malnutrition Study
CTP Cash transfer programme
DFID Department for International Development of the United Kingdom
DRC Democratic Republic of Congo
DRM Disaster risk management
ECHO Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission
FSL Food security & livelihoods
HQ Headquarters
HR Human Resources
IP Intellectual Property
ISC International Scientific Committee
ISP International Strategic Plan
MAM Moderate acute malnutrition
MANGO Modelling an Alternative Nutrition Protocol Generalizable to Outpatient
M&E Monitoring & Evaluation
MOU Memorandum of Understanding
MUAC Middle upper-arm circumference
PI Primary Investigator
REFANI Research on Food Assistance for Nutritional Impact
RUTF Ready to Use Therapeutic Food
RUSF Ready to Use Supplementary Food
RUS Research Uptake Strategy
SAM Severe acute malnutrition
SFP Supplementary Feeding Program
ToC Theory of Change
UCT Unconditional cash transfer
WASH Water, sanitation and hygiene
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research is our primary means of systematically assessing and increasing the impacts and effectiveness of Action Against Hunger’s projects and programs. While research is an essential foundation for our reputation, credibility and technical positioning, we recognize that many of our team members are unfamiliar with the wide variety of research methods and considerations that may be employed to enhance evidence-based programming. Therefore, these guidelines have been designed to be as practical as possible, with the aim of demystifying the research process by providing clear information on how to undertake a research project at Action Against Hunger.

Action Against Hunger’s research projects are structured and managed around a research project cycle comprised of four distinct phases – 1) conceptualization, 2) design, 3) implementation, and, 4) learning. The concept phase (Section 1 of these guidelines) considers how researchers identify what to research, why it is important, and the potential relevance of the research to the broader evidence base. The design phase (Section 2) considers the structure of a research protocol or proposal, highlighting those components which deserve appropriate attention to ensure the project’s eventual success. The implementation phase (Section 3) considers practical challenges around hiring research staff, managing resources and partnerships, and other contractual concerns such as intellectual property, data ownership, and confidentiality. Finally, the learning phase (Section 4) considers how to ensure that the evidence produced by the project is used to advance policy and practice.

Research at Action Against Hunger is a collaborative process and often involves partnership both internally (e.g. between headquarters and country program offices) and externally (e.g. universities, think tanks, or other scientific organizations). Given the many and diverse complexities involved with partnership in practice, this guideline will also assist our staff members in identifying and maintaining of sustainable, collaborative and beneficial research partnerships (Annex 1). Finally, research uptake is emphasized as an integrated component of each and every phase of the research project cycle. Therefore, relevant uptake considerations and activities are discussed within each phase of the cycle, as are the strategic concerns of research uptake strategy (RUS) design (Annex 2).

Looking ahead, Action Against Hunger anticipates increasing the volume and scope of research that we undertake; therefore, the use of this guideline is intended to support further integration of research into our projects and programs, as well as to further the design and implementation of high quality, ethically sound, and impact-driven interventions.
INTRODUCTION

In recent years at Action Against Hunger, we have focused increasingly on the integration of research into our projects and programs in order to achieve both operational and technical impacts and effectiveness. The majority of this research has centered on improving our effectiveness in preventing or reducing undernutrition and hunger. As a result, nutrition-sensitive research has accounted for approximately 60-70% of our research projects, followed by research aimed at humanitarian disaster response.

Research is considered an essential foundation for Action Against Hunger’s reputation, credibility and technical positioning within its core sectors of intervention, and thus, a critical tool in effectively tackling undernutrition and hunger globally. Looking ahead, **we anticipate increasing the volume and scope of research Action Against Hunger undertakes** – recognizing that as a strategic pillar of our organization, research will ensure the implementation of high quality, ethically sound, and impact-driven interventions.

We recognize that many of our team members are unfamiliar with the wide variety of research methods that may be employed to enhance evidence-based programming. These guidelines are meant to make research more accessible to our team and to support the development of research skills and confidence within our team, so that together, we can support each other in expanding the role of research within our projects and programs.

TARGET AUDIENCE

These guidelines are intended to prepare all technical and operational teams for the conceptualization, design, implementation, and/or evaluation of research projects. It is primarily aimed at country program staff (e.g. Program Managers, Coordinators, and Country Directors) that may not have prior research experience but have an interest in developing a research project. These guidelines are also a reference for other staff (e.g. at HQ and regional levels) that may be developing and implementing Action Against Hunger-led research, or engaging with external stakeholders (i.e. academics, research institutions) in other research projects.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE GUIDELINES

This document has been designed to be as practical as possible, with the aim of demystifying the research process by providing clear information on how to undertake a research project at Action Against Hunger. By using these guidelines, it is hoped that our staff will be better able to integrate

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1 As departmental structuring, job titles and designations can vary between different Action Against Hunger headquarters, some of the references in this document may not exactly reflect structures or roles in all cases. Readers should bear this in mind, along with the fact that there may also be some variations between headquarters in approaches to managing the research process. Please enquire with your Technical Director for relevant clarifications.
research within their own work and be increasingly confident to:

1. Understand how the overall research project cycle works;
2. Be inspired to identify and develop research ideas and concepts;
3. Follow internal validation processes to ensure proper approval and resourcing;
4. Identify strategic research partnerships (as appropriate) to complement the organization’s strengths;
5. Recognize and understand the basic tenets of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research approaches; and,
6. Identify which internal (team members) and external (partnership) resources they can consult for further guidance in developing a project.

These research guidelines are intended to be a first point of reference – encouraging and empowering Action Against Hunger staff to lead the design of a research project or, where external (‘scientific’) research partners are involved, to take ownership over their respective roles in the research process. Is the guidelines are not exhaustive and do not explore all of the issues that require consideration in the research process, but rather refers to them within the context of the overall Action Against Hunger project management procedures.

This document does, however, provide a framework for those interested in research to understand how to design and develop research projects, cultivate key research partnerships (Annex 1), and include research uptake (Annex 2) as an integral component of the research process. Key references are included to provide suggestions on where further information and advice can be found both internally within Action

CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTION AGAINST HUNGER RESEARCH

APPLIED
Research aims to meet the technical and operational needs of Action Against Hunger. It is directed toward a practical objective of improving the effectiveness or impact of projects and programs.

SCIENTIFIC
Research methods are designed using a scientific approach, which involves defining hypotheses, deriving predictions from them as logical consequences, and then carrying out studies based on those predictions to determine if the original hypothesis was correct.

COLLABORATIVE
All parts of the research project cycle involve cooperation and coordination internally within Action Against Hunger staff (between field and HQ) and, often, externally (with program beneficiaries, research partners, donors or other stakeholders).

ETHICAL
All research is subject to ethical review and informed consent is sought from beneficiaries participating in research. Ethical review may take place at the organizational level of the Action Against Hunger International Scientific Committee (ISC) and, as appropriate, at the national level of host-country ethical review boards, or other ethical review boards of research partners (such as universities or other academic institutions).

INSTRUMENTAL
Research maintains relevancy internally within Action Against Hunger, and with external groups in policy & practice. Additionally, research projects have an integrated research uptake strategy that will ensure that important stakeholders are aware of the research and likely to utilize the results within their own work.
Against Hunger and externally (Bibliography & Sources of Further Information, located in Section 6). Finally, this document is intended be used in tandem with ACF Ethics and Research: Principles and Guidelines (2012), as well as the 2020 Research Strategy.

**RESEARCH AT ACTION AGAINST HUNGER**

In broad terms, research is defined as creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to generate new knowledge and/or apply existing knowledge in a new and creative way; as such, research produces new concepts, methodologies, understandings and applications that add to the collective knowledge base of our society.

**Action Against Hunger’s vision for research is that it should be both operational and influential.** Not surprisingly, our research capitalizes upon our organization’s specific areas of expertise and aligns with the organization’s core principles, policies and practices. Ultimately, we believe that increasing our focus on research will allow us to:

- Assess program effectiveness;
- Stimulate innovation;
- Ensure program reliability and quality;
- Better anticipate and address field needs in both the short and long-term;
- Broaden and deepen our knowledge base;
- Enhance the visibility of our activities;
- Quantify the impact of our programming;
- Help develop the rationale and evidence base for the work we do;
- Highlight gaps in existing knowledge; and,
- Inform the strategic priorities of the organization.

As outlined in the ACF Research Policy (2008), the objective of research at Action Against Hunger is to **contribute to the advancement of scientifically accurate knowledge in order to improve the interventions of the organization.** This objective has both practice and policy implications.

First, Action Against Hunger research is designed in a way that leads to **scientifically accurate results,** meaning that results are empirically grounded and based on an approach that is subject to specific principles of scientific reasoning. It also contributes to the **advancement of knowledge by adding to existing evidence and encouraging evidence use and/or application in policy and practice.** Finally, it is intended to **improve the interventions** of Action Against Hunger, meaning that our research takes a practical approach, with specific operational applications at field-level.

**Ultimately, we believe that research will enable us to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our interventions.** Not only will Action Against Hunger deliver better quality services, but through better targeting and program design, we will maximize the number of vulnerable people we can reach with

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programs that better target and respond to their specific needs. Further, by increasing our impact, we simultaneously increase the visibility and credibility of Action Against Hunger as an organization.
RESEARCHERS AT ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

Research at Action Against Hunger is a collaborative process, as being part of a team has the added benefit of making the research more manageable and the research process more exciting and supportive. Any team member, whether in the field or headquarters, may identify an idea or need for research. Core research capacities internally within Action Against Hunger are then identified and analyzed. In some cases, we will have full capacity to implement the entire research project ourselves. However, where specific internal capacities do not exist or could be strengthened, we may seek engagement with external research partners such as universities or other research institutions. More information about how to identify and engage advantageous research partnerships is further explained in Annex 1.

While many research projects may involve such external partnership collaborations, Action Against Hunger staff must maintain their role as researchers in their own right. Regardless of partnerships that may emerge, we should take an active role in the research process, with ownership over the direction and integrity of our research projects. These guidelines have been designed to facilitate such active participation by creating a common understanding of what the research process entails and how to most effectively engage in research at Action Against Hunger.

RESEARCH PROJECT CYCLE

Action Against Hunger’s research projects are generally structured and managed around a research project cycle, comprised of the following four phases – 1) Conceptualization, 2) Design, 3) Implementation, and, 4) Learning. It is important to note that the research project cycle is not linear; rather, research is a continuous, iterative process that most closely resembles an infinity symbol (see Figure 1: The four phases of the Action Against Hunger research project cycle below).

Further, rather than simply communicating and/or disseminating results at the end of the project, the Action Against Hunger research project cycle places emphasis on research uptake as an integrated component of each and every phase of the project cycle in order to maximize the use of the evidence produced in policy and practice. Therefore, relevant uptake considerations and activities will be discussed within each phase of the cycle, while the details of an uptake strategy are outlined in greater detail within Annex 2 of this guideline.

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3 As an example, within Action Against Hunger USA’s research unit for cost-effectiveness, there are a number of staff that design and lead the implementation of cost-effectiveness analyses (CEAs) across a variety of different countries and interventions. These researchers have the capacity to conduct CEAs on behalf of Action Against Hunger, without requiring external partnerships to successfully attain rigor in results.
The phases of the research project cycle form a continuous “double” loop, with each phase progressing to the next after reaching key decision or validation points (noted in orange⁴) in the research project cycle. The first, the concept phase (detailed below in Section 1) considers how researchers identify what to research, why it is important, and its potential relevance not only to Action Against Hunger, but also the broader humanitarian and international development communities of policy and practice. Within this phase, it is also critical to identify current best practice and existing evidence on the research topic (e.g. a literature review) which will subsequent stages of the project, especially in terms of the research questions that are formed and the study design that is chosen.

⁴ If printing this document using only black and white ink, validation points A, B and C will appear in gray.
Second, the design phase (Section 2 below) considers the structure of a research protocol or proposal, identifying the components which deserve appropriate attention in planning for the project’s eventual success. Third, the implementation phase (Section 3 below) considers the practical challenges around hiring research staff, managing resources and partnerships, and other contractual concerns such as intellectual property, data ownership, and confidentiality. Fourth and finally, the learning phase (Section 4 below) considers how the results of research (including data, analysis, results, best practices and lessons learned) are further integrated into the research project cycle to ensure institutional learning and advancement.

The indicative activities, main inputs and outputs of each phase of the research project cycle are summarized below (Table 1), including key considerations related to the validation points (A, B, and C) required to progress onto each subsequent stage of the cycle. The remainder of this guidance document is structured around the four phases of the Action Against Hunger research project cycle, covering the critical processes, actions and considerations for each step as well as the criteria for each validation point.
Table 1: Indicative activities, Inputs and outputs, and validation points along the four phases of the Action Against Hunger research project cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT CYCLE PHASE</th>
<th>INPUTS</th>
<th>INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) CONCEPTUALIZATION</td>
<td>Creativity and brainstorming, collaboration</td>
<td>Identify draft research questions</td>
<td>Initial research questions and stakeholder analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of the research project cycle</td>
<td>Undertake literature review to identify what is already known and what methods were used</td>
<td>Exploration of strategic external partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify the purpose of the research and potential policy implications</td>
<td>Identification of “lead” responsible for developing the research design and funds available (if any)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with relevant stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Point A:</td>
<td>Agreement from the Director of Programs/Regional Directors, technical sectors and research team (as appropriate).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) DESIGN</td>
<td>Appropriate allocation of resources (staff time and/or funds)</td>
<td>Identify the core hypotheses, target population, specific method(s) to be used, and indicative work plan</td>
<td>Final primary and secondary research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration with research partners</td>
<td>Design instrument (if applicable) and test/pilot/refine instrument</td>
<td>Full research protocol or proposal, including appropriate methodology and research uptake strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of stakeholder survey and interviews</td>
<td>Identify research uptake objectives and key uptake activities</td>
<td>Formalized strategic partnerships (as relevant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial research question</td>
<td>Document process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Point B:</td>
<td>Approved &amp; ethically validated research protocol, with adequate human and financial resources for implementation.</td>
<td>Procure equipment and supplies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collect, enter and clean data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and trouble shoot any challenges or obstacles that may arise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze and interpret data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) IMPLEMENTATION</td>
<td>Full and adequate financial resourcing</td>
<td>Document process</td>
<td>Completed data collection, analysis and results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formalized contracts/agreements</td>
<td>Procure equipment and supplies</td>
<td>Draft research study report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final research protocol or proposal, including clearly outlined roles, responsibilities and timelines</td>
<td>Collect, enter and clean data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate and trouble shoot any challenges or obstacles that may arise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze and interpret data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation Point C:</td>
<td>Drafting of research results (minimum) or final research report (ideal) submitted to and validated by ACF HQ and donor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) LEARNING</td>
<td>Sharing results with stakeholders</td>
<td>Bring results back to the community to request their inputs</td>
<td>Final study report, final evaluation and relevant publications (e.g. peer-review journals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection on research and partnership experiences</td>
<td>Refine analysis and conclusions, identifying the limits of the research</td>
<td>Archiving of study documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lessons learned from research uptake</td>
<td>Publish, communicate and disseminate findings</td>
<td>Identification of methods to integrate results and lessons learned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) CONCEPT PHASE: FROM IDEAS TO ACTION

As illustrated in the Research Project Cycle, although linked and integrated within the overall process, the concept phase purposely sits apart from the design, implementation and evaluation phases. This phase is intended to be highly iterative and interactive. It is a continuous process of refinement in the transition from the research topic to the research question, which ultimately drives the eventual design of the research project itself.

One of the most difficult, yet often least discussed aspects of research is how to first identify and then develop an idea for a research project to begin with. This section describes how to identify and prioritize research topics, review the literature to evaluate what exists already, ensure that the research aligns with Action Against Hunger’s mission and core capacities, and formulate a good research question that will lead (in subsequent phases) to a manageable design and meaningful results.

1.1 IDENTIFYING RESEARCH NEEDS & INTERESTS

The Research Project Cycle begins with the identification of a research idea, topic, or problem. Research topics can be derived in many ways – from theories, observations, or intuition – individually or in combination. They can emerge at any time, as practical problems at the field-level, from published literature in a specific field or even from Requests for Proposals (RFPs) solicited from government agencies or companies. At Action Against Hunger, initial research ideas are often first sparked from observations of those practical problems met in the field, especially in cases where what is currently done in practice does not seem to achieve the desired outcomes. Therefore, research topics tend to emerge from problems encountered at field-level by field staff, given that they tend to be the first witnesses and are regularly engaged with the target communities.

Most fundamentally, it is the identification of the research topic which sparks the initiation of the research project cycle. Once identified, the problem circles within the concept stage as it is further evaluated, refined and revised. The first step in this process of refinement is ensuring that the research topic is in line with our mission, core capacities, strengths and research interest areas. Action Against Hunger encourages the technical and operational teams to develop research ideas together on an ongoing basis, as a matter of good practice, thereby avoiding the generation of research ideas that are only reactive and donor-driven, rather than corresponding to an issue of operational importance for Action Against Hunger (see section on 2.5 on Resourcing Strategy).

Further, in addition to jointly developing research ideas on an ongoing basis, Action Against Hunger staff (across country program, headquarters and regional levels) is encouraged to keep abreast of relevant research and research findings. To this end, a variety of databases and electronic resources have been listed on page 52 (“Further Information”), with an emphasis placed on both peer-reviewed and grey literature\(^5\). While there may be a wide variety of intellectually stimulating research topics, Action Against Hunger-led research should correspond to strategic operational

\(^5\) The Fourth International Conference of Grey Literature (1999) defines grey literature as “that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers.”
issues and focus on those core sectors and capacities from which the organization draws its reputation and strengths.

1.2 ALIGNMENT WITH OUR MISSION AND CORE STRENGTHS

Action Against Hunger places emphasis on applied and operational research. Research is applied in that it investigates real phenomena that are of direct relevance to practitioners and has an emphasis on solving practical problems. It is operational in that it aims to improve program interventions and/or related policy and practice. In other words, our research investigates what works in our interventions and what could be done to make our work more efficient or effective in achieving its intended outcomes. Given this emphasis on learning from practice, research topics emerge:

- During emergency situations where current systems or approaches are unable to meet the need;
- Through regular monitoring and evaluation of an intervention’s relevance, efficiency, successes and challenges; and
- During regular internal reflection and exchange between staff at field level and/or headquarters level, e.g. during monitoring and evaluation exercises, field visits, workshops or learning events.

Action Against Hunger research builds upon those sectors in which we have extensive experience – in Nutrition and Health; Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL); Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); and, Disaster Risk Management (DRM). Thus, our research is intended to augment and expand these capacities, rather than stray from the specific sectoral expertise of the organization. While some research areas may be cross-cutting, such as cost-effectiveness analysis, Action Against Hunger’s research remains true to the organization’s fundamental mission of saving the lives of undernourished children while identifying sustainable solutions to ending world hunger. Rather than exploring other (albeit valid) research topics, Action Against Hunger’s research supports learning around how we can improve our work so that we maximise our influence on policy and practice.

As previously mentioned, the success of any research process relies on how well the researchers are able to translate the research topic into a research question. This task is not so simple for anyone, especially novice researchers, so additional attention is dedicated here to making the transition from the topic to the research question.

1.3 FORMULATING A RESEARCH QUESTION

Clearly research questions are critical because they drive all subsequent components of project design – from the research objective, to methodological design, data collection and analysis, and even to the interpretation of final results and targets for publication. In other words, getting the question right ensures that the research will successfully lead to meaningful answers, ultimately increasing the likelihood of finding an actionable solution to the problem. Therefore, it is imperative that if any time, energy or resources are to be spent on doing research, they should be focused first on getting the question right.
Formulating a researchable question is one of the most challenging and difficult steps in the research process and it seldom happens that a researcher gets the question right the first time. Most research questions undergo a series of iterations before the researchers are certain that the question they have framed is appropriate. A large research topic is broken down into smaller, more manageable research topics and then into a specific research question that is framed in such a way that through the research project, investigators are able to answer the question. This process does not happen quickly; clarity in articulating the question takes time and effort – discussions are often frequent and lengthy before an important and answerable question is formulated.

A useful framework for developing a research question is the “PICOT” format (as described in Box 1, below). Although the PICOT framework has been developed to assist in the formulation of research questions for impact evaluations, many of the questions and concepts are applicable to other forms of research and therefore, may be of use in refining exactly “who” and “what” the research project will focus on. It is critical to realize that not all of these details are available at the beginning stages of the conceptualization process. While it may take some time, diligence and patience, clarifying these attributes in an iterative fashion serves three purposes:

1. It ensures that the research idea will lead successfully to an actionable research design;
2. It provides a tangible basis for discussion among researchers and their counterparts to further tailor the research; and,
3. It begins to reveal how the research relates to other problems, issues or themes.

Therefore, while the initial formulation of the research question may not be perfect or final, it’s importance as a vehicle for further discussion and elaboration cannot be underestimated, as it is directly linked to how the project will evolve over time (e.g. in the identification of research partners and even how the research is funded).
**BOX 1: THE PICOT CRITERIA FOR DEVELOPING A RESEARCH QUESTION**

First identified in 1995\(^1\), the PICOT format is a widely recommended strategy for framing research questions. The approach provides a framework for researchers to crystalize what they will actually be investigating. PICOT requires that the research question specify the target **population**, **intervention** of interest, **comparison** being made, relevant expected **outcomes**, and **time** over which these outcomes are assessed.

**Table 2: PICOT criteria for formulating a research question.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>What is the specific population or problem you are interested in?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTERVENTION</td>
<td>What is the specific intervention that you are investigating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>COMPARATOR / CONTROL</td>
<td>What is the main alternative to compare with the intervention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>OUTCOME</td>
<td>What do you intend to accomplish, measure, improve or affect with the research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>What is the appropriate follow-up time to assess outcome(s)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POPULATION** identifies the most important characteristics of the problem or population in question. The goal is to identify relevant demographic information (i.e. age, sex, history) that differentiates your interest group from the rest of the general population. For example, many Action Against Hunger studies have looked specifically at populations of children or other vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and lactating women (PLW); in this case, the population may be defined by its age (6-59 months) or status in regards to pregnancy. At the later stages of research question formulation, consideration of the population may also describe certain eligibility criteria (i.e. those in single parent households), a qualifying condition of interest (i.e. those with SAM), or geographic location (i.e. those located in Dadu district, Sindh province, Pakistan).

The **INTERVENTION** can be a program, treatment, procedure, test, or even a set of risk factors. Most often at Action Against Hunger, the intervention refers to the program intervention being implemented (i.e. a cash transfer programme (CTP), supplementary feeding or outpatient therapeutic programme (OTP), educational messaging or other program activity) to which the population of interest is exposed.

Next, the type of **COMPARISON** or relationship you will be researching must be identified. For example, you might consider investigating how children with SAM who receive a cash transfer compare to those with SAM who do not receive the cash transfer; in this case, you would be looking to see if the cash transfer had an effect on the nutritional **OUTCOME** of the child. The effects of the intervention are evaluated by comparing the outcomes observed. Thus, research could identify, for example, whether the cash transfer improved the nutritional status of the child so that he/she was no longer severely malnourished.

Finally, the assessment of outcomes is completed over a specified **TIMEFRAME** that is chosen to create the optimal difference between the intervention and comparator/control groups. Researchers often look at short, medium and long term outcomes – or a combination thereof. For example, you could assess whether the CTP improved the nutritional status of children 3-months after it was disbursed (short term), or whether there were still noticeable effects 1-year after the transfer (medium term).
1.4 CONSULTATION AND COLLABORATION

An integral part of crafting a research question is engagement with a vast array of interested stakeholders, including collaboration at local levels where the research project will be implemented. Given that, in practice, our research is often focused on describing the impact of our interventions on-the-ground, an assessment of local understandings of impact and effectiveness should be part and parcel of what the research project aims to achieve. Moreover, refinement of the research question should include feedback from local staff and local communities. Local consultation ideally begins early in the research project cycle, as early collaboration serves dual purposes: not only does it increase buy-in and local ownership over the research process, it increases the likelihood of generating a successful design and smooth implementation by ensuring that the project is adequately adapted to local customs, cultures and conditions, as well as able to capitalize on local opportunities whilst preparing for known risks to implementation.

In addition to local consultation and collaboration, Action Against Hunger also encourages all staff to consider research uptake at the earliest stages of project conceptualization in the form of stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement is a method of surveying or interviewing key stakeholders in policy and practice in order to gauge their knowledge of and fascination with the research topic. By communicating with the intended target audience before the research question has been finalized, the research team can identify the exact areas that interest key stakeholders (ensuring relevancy of findings) and have the opportunity to consider adapting their approach to solidify the buy-in and vested interest of certain actors throughout the life of the research project.

As previously mentioned, local communities should be considered as key stakeholders in the process, but national and global level stakeholders should be considered as well. The research team may want to explore how the research may impact national policies and practices, as well as those of the global communities of practice across relevant technical sectors and areas of expertise. For more information on stakeholder engagement as it pertains to the development of a research uptake strategy (RUS), please refer to Annex 2 of this guideline.

1.5 RESEARCH CAPACITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

At this stage in the research cycle, care must be taken in determining the value-added of each proposed research partner. Annex 1 outlines the key principles and considerations Action Against Hunger should take into account, specifically for external research partnerships. It is critical that, before embarking on any partnership, Action Against Hunger staff consider our ability to contribute to a project, as well as our expectations around what a research partner will contribute to partnership. During the concept stage, if a research partner is not already identified, key questions to consider are:

- Do we have sufficient internal capacity to design and implement this type of research?
- If yes, would external partnership bring any value-added (e.g. critiquing or advancing the design, raising the credibility of the results, ensuring uptake of the evidence generated, etc.)?
• Have we successfully worked with a research partner previously on this type of project?
• If we have no such previous partnerships, are we able to identify an individual or organization that has the specific skillset that will align with our core capacities and add strength to the research project overall?
• And finally, does a proposed partnership enhance the capacity of Action Against Hunger to undertake or lead this research in the future?

In some cases, Action Against Hunger may itself be approached by an organization seeking partnership or existing research partners may be involved from the very first stages of project development. In these circumstances, we still must review the questions outlined above, but also consider:

• Evaluating the specific value Action Against Hunger would bring to the partnership;
• Clarifying the specific role that the organization would be expected to fill; and,
• Ensuring that under the proposed partnership, we would build upon our core capacities (rather than over-stretching our expertise or resources).

These, and other considerations, are outlined in full in Annex 1 – “Principles for Forming and Maintaining Research Partnerships in Practice”.

1.6 RESOURCING STRATEGY

It is important to ensure that research ideas are developed on an on-going basis, rather than being developed and shaped primarily in response to funding calls. This is important for:

a) Ensuring that Action Against Hunger’s research projects evolve in-line with our own core capacities and research and operational objectives (not purely donor-driven);
b) Encouraging preparedness by having research topics that have already been elaborated (e.g. through background research or literature reviews);
c) Encouraging proactivity in approaching prospective donors beyond particular funding calls with the aim of engaging their interest and potentially securing additional funding; and,
d) Capitalizing on internal funding sources (where/when available) for research opportunities.

Discussions around research should be an integral part of country strategy processes and research topics should be prioritized and integrated as a component of forward strategic planning both at mission and HQ levels. However, even with the integration of Action Against Hunger-driven research topics into Action Against Hunger country-level plans, responding to donor calls for research proposals has been and is likely to remain a key source of funding. Donor-driven calls for proposal are usually directed towards particular research “themes” (e.g. cost-effectiveness, resilience, disaster risk, etc.) or particular priority countries or regions; they may be one-off or more regular in frequency, although the specific research topics may change over time. It is therefore recommended that missions consider consistent, on-going stakeholder engagement as a means to keep up-to-date on stakeholder interests and needs in research so as to better adapt project proposals and influence future funding opportunities.
Regardless of the specific funding source, Action Against Hunger must take care to ensure that adequate funding for all research components is secured – for the research itself and the interventions from which data will be collected during the study – over the duration of the entire project. While these financial resources may not be secured during the concept phase itself, there should be consideration of the variety possible funding sources and (at least initial) prioritization of which funding sources should be targeted. As the concept is further developed in the design phase, it can then be more easily detailed and elaborated in line with the specific requirements of the funding institution or call for proposals.

1.7 CONCEPT PHASE VALIDATION POINT

The outputs of the concept phase may vary widely – in some cases, clear research partnerships and a detailed research question (or even concept note) may already exist, while in other cases, partnerships may still be forming and a less detailed or refined research question may have been developed. However, before putting additional time or energy into the project, Action Against Hunger staff should seek internal validation of the research concept.

The objective of this step is to confirm whether or not the proposed research project has been approved internally (from headquarters to field level) to continue to the elaboration of the full design and research approach. Some of the main issues to confirm at this stage include:

- Is the proposed research aligned with Action Against Hunger’s strategy and research priorities?
- Has there been initial background research (or a literature review) conducted?
- Is there a need and a request for this type of research or research question within the community of practice and among key stakeholders?
- Will the research require association with a partner, and if so, has the partner been identified (or has a short-list of potential partners been prepared at minimum)?
- Are the staff resources available to coordinate and manage the research protocol development (from a technical and research perspective), or will it be necessary to hire additional support (e.g. consultant)? If additional/external support is required, is there a budget for this?
- What is the timeline for developing and implementing the project (acknowledging that this time frame may need to be adapted once more details are outlined in the design phase)?

Validation should be undertaken by obtaining approval from the relevant sector teams and senior staff. This may vary depending on headquarters and project, but is likely to include the following:

1. Agreement from the Director of Programs/Regional Directors;
2. Agreement from the technical sector(s) involved in the project; and,
3. Agreement from the research team (where appropriate).

Concept phase validation will clarify who (which Action Against Hunger staff member or representative) will be responsible and accountable for leading the design phase and over what
timeframe, as well as those financial resources (if any) which may be available to support the design (e.g. funds for travel or recruitment of a consultant). At this point, it may also be recommended to identify an appropriate member of the Action Against Hunger International Scientific Committee (ISC) who may have relevant expertise and be interested to become involved in the shaping of the research project in the design phase. Finally, in those cases where Action Against Hunger undertakes the research in partnership, it should also be made clear at the end of the concept phase who (which partner) will take the lead responsibility for driving efforts in the design phase.
(2) DESIGN PHASE: DEVELOPING THE APPROACH

Research design is the “blueprint” or roadmap that guides the research team through the various stages of the research process. This section outlines how to develop a good research question and design, as well as how to integrate the research design into a strong protocol (or proposal) that will lead to successful implementation of the research project.

2.1 IS THE RESEARCH QUESTION ‘GOOD ENOUGH’?

A “good” research question is, first and foremost, one that will lead to a meaningful answer. During the concept phase, focus was placed upon identifying certain components – such as the “what” and “who” – of the research question, as well as the type of relationship the research is attempting to investigate. During the design phase, however, the continuing process of research question refinement will by necessity also involve consideration of how, and also critically if, it can be answered in practice (e.g. the research design, methodology, and associated requirements in terms of resources and expertise).

A clear, focused research question is the primary driver of a successful research project; conversely, a poorly formulated question poses a number of threats and risks that cannot be underestimated. In particular, a poorly formulated research question is likely to:

- Lead to the adoption of an erroneous study design;
- Create confusion and hinder the design phase, impeding the development of a clear protocol;
- Inhibit the interpretation of study results and jeopardize publication efforts;
- Prevent the identification of follow-on steps or studies;
- Impede stakeholders understanding of how the results are relevant to their work; and,
- Ultimately, ensure that the research does not achieve “uptake” in that it is not cited or used by researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

These risks – while manageable with careful planning and design - are tangible and real. Further, in the long-term, a series of poorly designed research questions (and subsequently, research projects) have the ability to harm the credibility and reliability of Action Against Hunger in conducting research. For this reason, importance must be placed on adequately developing and refining the research question within Action Against Hunger so that the design, implementation and evaluation phases progress as smoothly as possible.

While there are many research questions that may be intriguing for Action Against Hunger to explore, in general, it is best to focus on one main research question whose answer will contribute to filling a gap in technical knowledge at the organization. The primary question serves as the main focus of a particular study, although it is rare that only one question is being answered. This achieves the required focus in order to design an investigation that will provide a definitive answer, given that the study design is centered on this question, as are any causal claims. Secondary questions are generally instrumental in defining future research projects, as they may be based on underpowered samples.
This process of narrowing to one specific, primary research question is critical because if a question is too broad, the methodological approach used to address it may lack rigour, be difficult to rerun or refine, and create inefficiencies once the research process is underway – thereby failing to ultimately answer the research question. Conversely, a question that is too narrow may generate more questions than answers, findings would be less generalizable and therefore not worth the time of the researchers or the money of the funders.

**EXAMPLE 1: REFANI PRIMARY & SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Research on Food Assistance for Nutritional Impact (REFANI) is a 3-year research project led by Action Against Hunger in consortium with Concern Worldwide, the Emergency Nutrition Network and University College London. The project, which began in 2014 and is expected to be completed in 2017, is funded by both DFID and ECHO. REFANI aims to strengthen the evidence base on the nutritional impact and cost-effectiveness of cash and voucher-based food assistance programmes, as well as identify the mechanisms through which this effectiveness is achieved.

During the project’s inception phase, a comprehensive literature review was elaborated within which specific evidence ‘gaps’ were outlined by the research team. Research questions were then designed to address some of these gaps. While there were many questions that were interesting to the research team, one question was prioritized as the primary research question and the remaining questions were consolidated into a short list of secondary research questions.

**Primary research question:**
Can cash transfer programmes (CTPs) protect nutritional status in children (aged 6-59 months) in a range of crisis contexts?

**Secondary research questions:**
1. How do complimentary interventions modify the effectiveness of the CTP?
2. How do CTP design features (timing, amount, frequency, duration, etc.) modify its effectiveness for reducing the risk of acute malnutrition in a range of crisis contexts?
3. Which behaviors or processes are important in modifying CTP impact on the risk of acute malnutrition and intermediate outcomes?
4. Do CTPs confer a sustained or long-term, post-crisis protective effect?
5. What factors influence policy and practice when designing and implementing CTPs and what are their implications for future programmes?
6. What are the costs of CTPs for delivering nutritional support?

As seen above, REFANI’s primary question serves as the core of the project. Each of REFANI’s three country studies (Pakistan, Niger and Somalia) have been designed to answer the primary research question, while each study also aims to answer some of the project’s secondary research questions.

The Niger study, for example, investigates whether an unconditional cash transfer (UCT) in Tahoua has a protective effect on nutritional status, exploring whether the UCT reduces the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children 6-59 months. Further, the study also looks at how the timing and duration of the UCT affect a household’s decision-making and expenditure patterns, intangible assets, health seeking behaviors, and mother’s well-being. These secondary questions allow the team to further explore how the transfer may produce a nutritional impact in children and even what other additional impacts the CTP may have at household-level.
2.2 ASSESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION AGAINST THE STUDY DESIGN

How and when, then, will we know if our research question is ‘good enough’? As outlined by Hulley et al\(^6\), a research question should be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical and relevant (according to the FINER criteria); furthermore, the answer to the question should fill gaps in the existing knowledge base. Each of the FINER criteria are described in Box 2 below and the assessment of how the question may address evidence ‘gaps’ is further described in Section 2.3a "Introduction”.

2.3 ANATOMY OF A RESEARCH PROTOCOL/PROPOSAL

The FINER criteria are useful not only for verifying if a research question is ‘good enough’ to proceed to full design, but also for elaborating some of the many details that must eventually be pieced into a successful research design. Design, for the purposes of these guidelines, is further described within the context of the development of a research protocol or proposal (for funding) in that each outlines:

- What the proposed study is about;
- What the research is trying to achieve;
- How it will go about realizing that objective;
- What we should expect to learn from the study;
- Who will benefit from the study;
- Why the study’s results will be worth learning; and,
- How they will make a change in policy and practice.

The following section provides a suggested set of guidelines for developing a research protocol/proposal that describe the whole project in detail including the theoretical, methodological, ethical, analytical, operational and budgetary aspects, as well as human and financial resources of the project. The protocol/proposal will act both as a guideline to conduct the project and as a tool to present the research project to different actors, including external donors. However, it is important to recognize specific requirements will vary for each research opportunity.

While some studies, especially larger research projects, will have each of these components (and possibly more), smaller projects may only have a few of these components. Not all would be required in any one proposal but all may be found in many proposals. There are no fixed formulas for writing a research proposal; there may be several different ways to present the material and different orders of the sections that follow, often depending on the institution where the proposal or protocol are to be submitted.

**BOX 2: THE FINER CRITERIA FOR A GOOD RESEARCH QUESTION**

When defining the research question(s), it can be useful to review it against the **FINER criteria for a good research question** to determine if it is something that should proceed to the elaboration of a full proposal or protocol:

**Table 3: FINER criteria for developing a good research question.**

| FEASIBLE | - Sufficient resources (time, staff, expertise, possible funding sources)  
|          | - Use of appropriate study design  
|          | - Adequate sample size and selection  
|          | - Manageable in size, scope, timeframe |
| INTERESTING | - Interesting as a researcher or collaborator  
|            | - Motivation to make the research interesting to various stakeholders |
| NOVEL | - Thorough literature review  
|        | - New findings or extension of previous findings  
|        | - Guidance from mentors and experts |
| ETHICAL | - Follows ethical guidelines  
|         | - Informed consent |
| RELEVANT | - Power to influence practice  
|          | - Further research and policy |

A good research question leads to a **FEASIBLE** study design and it is important to know the practical limits of a study question early-on, before wasting time or effort in elaborating the details. The question should be able to be answered with the provision of sufficient resources (time, staff, expertise, funding) and it should be manageable in terms of size, scope, and timeframe. Further, the study design should be a good fit for actually being able to fully answer the research question posed at the end of the study.

It is also important to ask: is the research question of sufficient **INTEREST** to the research team (including Action Against Hunger), to its stakeholders (including local research participants), and to the wider humanitarian/development community who may be influenced by it? If the research question does not engage or motivate, then it is unlikely to be funded. Further, interest provides the intensity of effort needed for overcoming the (many) frustrations and obstacles that may arise in implementing the research project. A usefully way of “tapping into” the interests of relevant stakeholders is through on-going stakeholder engagement, discussed in the concept phase (pg. 15).

Good research contributes new information, rather than reiterating what has already been established. In order to assess whether the research question is **NOVEL**, it is necessary to be familiar and up-to-date with related literature and on-going research on the proposed topic. Novelty doesn’t necessarily mean that similar research on the same topic hasn’t been done before. Indeed, most research builds on past studies, but a good research question must have the potential to fill a “gap” in the existing evidence base so that it is advancing knowledge on the subject.

A good research question must also be **ETHICAL**, complying with Action Against Hunger’s principles for ethical research (see Section 3.2.4 and the manual **ACF Ethics & Research – Principles and Guidelines** for further guidance). If the study poses unacceptable risks, the research team may choose an alternate study design; but if there is uncertainty about whether the study is ethical, it is important to discuss these concerns at an early stage with an ethical review board.

Finally, the research question must have **RELEVANCE**, especially operational relevance for Action Against Hunger. While undertaking a stakeholder analysis can be useful in determining relevance, it is often included as part of the full design (see Annex 2 on Research Uptake Strategy). However, at an early stage of developing the research question, it should be possible to identify how the proposed research would contribute to improving our interventions and/or influence more broadly.
2.3a INTRODUCTION

It is important to understand what has been studied about a topic to-date in order to further the knowledge that has been previously gathered. While interest in a topic usually begins the research process, it is familiarity with the subject that helps to define an appropriate research question and design for study. Questions often arise out of a perceived knowledge deficit ("evidence gap") within topics or fields of study. While background research was likely completed in the concept stage to help refine the research topic, within the design phase, it is important to identify and make explicit where the boundaries of current knowledge lie by drafting a comprehensive literature review.

*Figure 3: Linking the research question into the broader evidence and gaps, via the literature review.*

The introduction shows how the proposed study fits into what is already known and locates it in relation to present evidence and practice. Overall, while the length and location of the introduction may vary from proposal to proposal, at a minimum, the introduction should describe:

- **the study context**, which may refer to a description of specific geographical location (local/national) or contextual factors (e.g. sociocultural attitudes, practices, and behaviors that form part of the underlying causes of malnutrition.), or a combination of both;
- **the research topic**, which has led to the design of the current project and may include a review of the technical/scientific knowledge and practice (via the literature review), identifying evidence gaps that will be addressed; and,
- **the research needs**, identifying how the proposed research will contribute to the advancement of our knowledge base.

While the literature review may be a self-contained unit (within its own specific section of the proposal), it is more commonly found, as described here, within the introduction as a preface to the research framework (described below). The literature review critically analyzes a segment of a published body of knowledge through the summary, classification and comparison of prior (or in some cases on-going) research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles. As seen in Figure 3 (above), the review progressively narrows its focus from an analysis of studies that overlap with the research topic areas, to an in-depth discussion of studies that are directly related to the proposed research. In mapping this existing evidence, the review is able to highlight the “gaps”
where evidence is currently lacking, thereby making a strong case that the proposed research will contribute to “filling” at least one of those gaps. This is critical as the purpose of the introduction is to set the stage for a research study, making a strong and compelling case that rationalizes the study’s need for investigation.

**EXAMPLE 2: INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THE ComPAS RESEARCH PROJECT**

The Combined Protocol for Acute Malnutrition Study (ComPas) is a research project running from 2014-2016 that develops and tests a combined protocol for the treatment of severe and moderate acute malnutrition that improves the coverage, quality, cost-effectiveness and continuity of care. The project is partnership model is a research consortium led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Action Against Hunger. The ComPAS background statement provides an abbreviated example of how to make a strong case for a proposed research project:

“Currently there are no globally accepted standards for the management of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), and Supplementary Feeding Programs (SFP) to treat MAM have been shown to be ineffective at reducing the prevalence of MAM, or in preventing SAM. There are several dozen studies testing the efficacy or effectiveness of different products for the treatment of MAM, but the focus in MAM research has concentrated on the testing of different products, rather than different approaches, with MAM treated as a separate condition from SAM. Treating MAM with a ready-to-use supplementary food (RUSF) that contains whey has been shown to have better outcomes (sustained recovery) than soy-based RUSF or Corn Soya Blend ++ (CSB++). Ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) for the treatment of children with SAM includes whey. Treating MAM with RUTF would simplify the protocol if SAM and MAM were treated together and provide the MAM children with a high-quality nutritional supplement. It would also reduce the logistics of procuring a second product and managing a separate program for supplementary feeding.”

The above background statement nicely points to the broad challenges regarding globally accepted malnutrition management standards, identifying the limitations of current research and the evidence gaps that exist in current knowledge. It establishes the need for this type of research aligned with this evidence gap, thereby demonstrating how the proposed research will contribute to the advancement of the evidence base. While most introductions will have a sufficiently longer narrative to make this case, the above example concisely demonstrates the logical flow behind the introductory statement.

**2.3b RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

The research framework provides a broad outline of the conceptual underpinnings of the research project; it strengthens the study protocol or proposal by:

1. Providing an explicit statement of theoretical assumptions, thereby permitting the reader to evaluate them critically;
2. Connecting the research to existing evidence (identified in the literature review); and,
3. Articulating if and how the observed phenomena may connect to broad, generalizable conclusions.

This framework identifies the primary and secondary research questions, hypotheses, study objectives, and a theory of change. In the research protocol, after identifying the research
question(s), the research team proposes their research hypothesis. A hypothesis is a statement of prediction which asserts what you believe will happen in your study. The research hypothesis is developed directly from the research question in a summarized form that establishes a basis for testing. Hypothesis testing confirms or refutes the statement that the observed effect did not occur by chance alone, but rather, occurred because there was a true difference in outcomes between variables.

When formally testing for statistical significance using quantitative methods, the hypothesis should be stated as a “null” hypothesis, asserting that there is no difference in mean functional outcome between variables. After forming the null hypothesis, researchers would form an alternative hypothesis stating the nature of the expected difference, if it should appear. This expected difference can either be 2-sided (simply stating that there will be a difference between the experimental group and the control group) or 1-sided (stating a specific direction of the difference, e.g. an improvement in outcomes).

Linked directly to the alternative hypothesis is the theory of change (ToC), which is generally provided for large and/or complex research projects that are not only attempting to look at a specific outcome, but also the means and mechanisms through which that outcome is achieved. The ToC gives a comprehensive description (or visual illustration) of how and why the alternative hypothesis is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused primarily on mapping out the “missing middle” – the space between the intervention and the observed effect.

Finally, within the research framework, the objectives of the research project must be clarified; these objectives set the reader’s expectations of what the study will attain and should closely align with the research question and hypothesis. Objectives are an active statement about how the study is going to answer the specific research question, stating exactly which outcome measures are going to be used. Care should be taken to ensure that the objectives are framed against the SMART criteria:

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**CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

| CLEAR | The research team must define all of the variables conceptually and operationally. |
| SPECIFIC | The researcher points out the expected relationships among the variables in terms of direction (positive, negative, null) and the conditions under which this relationship will hold. |
| TESTABLE | Evaluation of the hypothesis requires the availability of the appropriate methods for testing it. |
| VALUE-FREE | The research team should be aware of any personal or organizational biases, making them as explicit as possible. |
Table 4: SMART criteria to guide the development of research objectives

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<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>SPECIFIC</th>
<th>The scope is well understood and details exactly what needs to be done.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>MEASURABLE</td>
<td>Achievement or progress can be measured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>ACHIEVABLE</td>
<td>The objective is accepted by those responsible for its delivery and the scope is within the means of control of the project team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>REALISTIC / RELEVANT</td>
<td>The objective can be reasonably achieved through the proposed study design and will lead to results that are relevant for the research team and stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>TIME-BOUND</td>
<td>The time period is clearly stated and realistic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXAMPLE 3: SMART OBJECTIVES OF THE MANGO RESEARCH PROJECT

Modelling an Alternative Nutrition Protocol Generalizable to Outpatient (MANGO) is a 4-year project implemented by Action Against Hunger in partnership with the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports within the University of Copenhagen and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States of America. While the project has a number of different objectives, MANGO’s primary objective is: to assess the effectiveness of an optimized RUTF dosage on the recovery of children (aged 6-59 months) with uncomplicated severe acute malnutrition.

MANGO’s primary objective has been carefully outlined against the SMART criteria. First, it narrowed the scope of the array of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) dosages it would consider – looking at only the specific effects of the standard dose against an optimised dosage, within a specific population. In order to identify the ‘optimum’, MANGO explored the velocity of weight and middle upper-arm circumference (MUAC) throughout the treatment to determine the dose of RUTF that is adapted to the nutritional recovery status of the child. Second, the objective is measurable; the study should be able to show whether the optimized dose is more effective or less effective (or the same) as the standard dosage. Third, given the scientific partnerships, the objective is also appears to be achievable.

Fourth, the objective is relevant for the partners involved and the community of practice. Despite improvements in the RUTF formulation and service delivery of treatment for severe acute malnutrition (SAM), the dose of has not been revised since the 1950s and today, RUTF is dosed according to body weight, not taking into account a possible reduction in needs as the child recovers. Therefore, MANGO’s research will lead to results that are relevant for not only the research team, but also stakeholders interested in the treatment of SAM and the field of nutrition more broadly. Finally, the time period has been clearly stated and realistic for the type of project design.
2.3c METHODOLOGY

The methods section of the research protocol/proposal should clearly outline the specific type of research design that will be employed to answer the research question. There are three main types of methodological designs that can be employed: quantitative, qualitative and mixed (both quantitative and qualitative, to varying degrees). Each design is associated with different approaches, procedures, tools and strategies. In general, quantitative research uses methods adopted from the physical sciences that are designed to ensure objectivity, reliability and generalizability; these methods produce numeric data and use statistical calculations to explore the relationships between specific variables. There are four main types of quantitative design:

- **Descriptive**: seeking to describe the current status of a variable or phenomena;
- **Correlational**: seeking to determine the extent of a relationship between two or more variables using a statistical calculation;
- **Quasi-experimental**: attempting to establish a cause-effect relationship among the variables but importantly, with subjects identified in naturally occurring, non-randomized groups; and,
- **Experimental**: using the scientific method to establish a cause-effect relationship and with the randomized assignment of subjects to treatment.

Meanwhile, qualitative research typically allows us to better understand the meanings, processes and context of observed social phenomena; measurement tends to be more subjective and often labor-intensive, with data collected in various forms (from interviews, direct observation, etc.). There are five main types of qualitative design:

- **Narrative**: exploring the lives/views of an individual through their speech and writing;
- **Phenomenology**: describing the essence of a lived experience;
- **Grounded theory**: developing a theory grounded from the views of participants;
- **Ethnography**: describing and interpreting the shared patterns of a group or culture; and,
- **Case study**: developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or cases.

While quantitative methods often require significant time and effort in the design phase (e.g. to set up the data collection instruments and pilot them), qualitative methods tend to be more time-intensive towards the end of the project (once the data has been collected and must be analyzed); however, depending on the way that the study design has been constructed, this observation may vary in practice. Finally, in many cases, quantitative and qualitative methods can complement each other, providing the researcher with information that they could not have gained using only one method alone. These ‘mixed method’ designs are best suited for situations in which we want to look at both the breadth and depth or at both causality and meaning. Mixed methods research is the most flexible in its approach; either quantitative or qualitative components can predominate, or, both can have equal status in the study design. Research is designed around what we want to find out, rather than being limited by the methods we intend to use.

At a minimum, the methods section of a research project or proposal will provide an overview of the study design, including a discussion of key variables, ensuring that there is congruence between both the conceptual and operational definitions of these variables. The variable the researcher wishes to
explain is the **dependent variable**, while the variable that the researcher thinks induces or explains the change is the **independent variable**.

**Control variables** are also used to test the possibility that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is spurious (that it can be explained only by the effect of another variable). The methods section will also include a detailed description of:

- the research ‘arms’ (in cases where different program intervention types are being compared);
- selection and recruitment criteria for research participants (inclusion/exclusion);
- assignment of participants to interventions (e.g. level and process of randomization); and
- sample size calculation.

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**EXAMPLE 4: MAIN VARIABLES OF THE PUR (DRC) RESEARCH PROJECT**

The PUR research project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was funded by Procter & Gamble and implemented by Action Against Hunger, in partnership with the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. The project ran from 2012-2013 and was entitled, “Comparative study of the effects of Plumpy’Nut® + P&G Purifier of Water versus Plumpy’Nut® in the treatment of children under 5 years suffering from severe acute undernutrition in the area of Popokabaka, DRC”.

- **Dependent variable**: Length of stay, average weight gain, cure rate
- **Independent variable**: Plumpy’Nut® + P&G Purifier of Water vs. Plumpy’Nut® only

The researchers also attempted to control for other possible variables (sex, age, socio-economic status, diet and/or food security, weight at inclusion, brachial perimeter at inclusion, systematic medical treatment) in order to compare the effects of the additional, complementary Purifier of Water. Additionally, intermediate variables included the quality of water consumed at home, the use of the P&G Purifier of Water, and diarrhea episodes.

Researchers proposed that the study would help to determine the importance of the use of Purifier of Water in nutritional recovery of malnourished children in areas where access to safe drinking water is precarious or nonexistent. The results were also intended to contribute to a better orientation of operational policies regarding nutritional recovery in similar contexts in the DRC and other countries.

End results showed that children receiving the P&G Purifier of Water had significantly shorter stays in clinics and a higher weight gain. The addition of the Purifier of Water also decreased the average SAM treatment time by four days.

Finally in addition to these results, a number of lessons were learned in the design and implementation of this study; these lessons were then eventually integrated into our organizational knowledge at Action Against Hunger and re-employed to improve the design of a follow-on study in Pakistan (see Example 5 on page 42 of these guidelines).
Data collection methods should also be described, including a consideration of the proposed timeframe, required training for data enumerators, data quality control, data safety management, and digitalization. Consideration should also be given to data analysis. Data analysis involves classifying, coding and tabulating information and the systematic application of statistical and/or logical methods (quantitative or qualitative analysis) to describe, illustrate, condense and evaluate data. The selection of data analysis techniques and software should be appropriate to the type of data and the research design. A clear plan for data entry, cleaning, and security should also be included as part of the analysis plan.

2.3d ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS & APPROVAL

Three basic ethical principles have been developed by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) for research involving human subjects – respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. It is generally agreed that these principles should guide the conscientious preparation of ethical proposals for research studies.

RESPECT FOR PERSONS

A requirement to respect the autonomy for decision-making and self-determination of those persons that are capable, and to protect from harm or abuse those persons with impaired or diminished autonomy, who are dependent or vulnerable.

BENEFICENCE

An ethical obligation to maximize benefit and to minimize harm. This principle gives rise to norms requiring that the risks be reasonable in the light of expected benefits, that the research design be sound, and that the researchers be competent to conduct the research and to safeguard the welfare of the research subjects.

JUSTICE

An ethical obligation to treat each person in accordance with what is morally right and proper. This principle refers primarily to distributive justice, which requires the equitable distribution of both the burdens and the benefits of participation in research.

In addition to these core principles, Action Against Hunger has a comprehensive guideline for research ethics (ACF Ethics and Research: Principles and Guidelines 2011). The table below summarizes the six ethical principles; however, staff members are encouraged to refer to the complete guidelines to understand the ethical requirements and their application in practice.
BOX 3: ACTION AGAINST HUNGER’S ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR RESEARCH

PRINCIPLE 1. Research is responsive to the needs of vulnerable people.
- Research should be responsive to vulnerable peoples’ needs, at the individual and community levels, and addresses the health and wellbeing of the communities in which Action Against Hunger operates.

PRINCIPLE 2. Research is ethically justified and scientifically valid.
- Research should comply with ethical rules and standards set at both national and international levels. In particular, Action Against Hunger recognizes the CIOMS principle that scientifically invalid research is unethical in that it exposes research subjects to risks without possible benefit. Action Against Hunger conducts a risk analysis before the implementation of research in the field. Our research also conforms to and follows general valid scientific principles. It is designed according to established scientific methodologies and based on adequate knowledge of the relevant literature. Finally, Action Against Hunger recognizes the authority of any locally established ethics/research body and follows the laws and regulations of the host country where these do not appear to contradict the International Ethics Guidelines upon which this document is based.

PRINCIPLE 3. Research is culturally-sensitive in its undertakings.
- Action Against Hunger takes into consideration cultural differences and respects cultural sensitivities in its research. We are aware of and recognize that there might be cultural differences between research implementers, workers and participants in the host country.

PRINCIPLE 4. Research promotes the strengthening of national and local organizations responsible for research in target communities
- By nature, Action Against Hunger research is applied and operational, meaning that it aims to produce knowledge that will improve its programs in practice, therefore having an improved impact in meeting the needs of vulnerable people. We make all necessary efforts to strengthen national and local capacity to both benefit from research results and to design and conduct research. In particular, we recognize the importance of partnerships with national and scientific organisations and promote the development of local expertise so that knowledge and material obtained for the purposes of a research project can continue to be used and maintained locally.

PRINCIPLE 5. Research makes an effort to ensure the availability of any knowledge generated and product developed locally and promotes a wide sharing of research results
- Before undertaking research, Action Against Hunger makes every effort to ensure that any intervention, product developed, or knowledge generated, will be made reasonably available for the benefit of that population or community. In particular, we inform local authorities and communities and participants about the research results at the end of a study. We also recognize the principle of sharing and publication of data. Research results are accurately reported and published in the public domain.

PRINCIPLE 6. Action Against Hunger ensures, by all means possible, avoidance of research bias due to conflict of interest with other stakeholders, and that research is not profit-driven.
- Action Against Hunger will not make a profit out of products or processes deriving from its research. Income generation, products and patents are shared by mutual agreement. Action Against Hunger has an umbrella charter of principles that apply to all its activities, including the ethics of collaboration.
Finally, Action Against Hunger and other international guidelines stipulate that research involving human beings as subjects must be ethically reviewed and approved. Annex 2 in the ACF Ethics and Research guidelines contains a checklist to determine whether the research protocol will need to be submitted for ethical review. Given the nature of the research Action Against Hunger conducts, ethical review is likely to be a requirement in the vast majority of cases. Review is often conducted at two levels, with submission of the research protocol to:

a) national ethics review committee (within the country where the research will be conducted); and,

b) international ethics review committee (through the ethics review board of the research partner of the study, if they are an academic organization, or through another ethical review service).

Depending on the topic and scope of the research project being proposed, it may also be beneficial to consult with one or more members of the Action Against Hunger International Scientific Committee, who may be able to identify any potential complications either earlier in the design process or before the final protocol has been submitted to an ethical committee for review. If there is any doubt about the requirement for ethical review, staff should consult the ACF Ethics and Research Guidelines and discuss with technical staff at the headquarters level.

Every research proposal or protocol must include appropriate plans for ethical approval, citing which institutional bodies will provide final approval and the timeline over which the review will take place. Additional considerations around ethical research practices may also be integrated within various parts of the protocol (e.g. culturally-sensitive or capacity-building trainings within the methods section or the local availability of research results discussed within the uptake section). Final ethical approval is necessary before research project implementation can begin.

2.3e RISK MANAGEMENT & MITIGATION

Research in development and humanitarian contexts often affords a number of interesting opportunities, as well as challenges. Operating in such settings carries a high and diverse level of risk that must be appropriately and adequately managed in order to ensure staff safety, as well as project success and accountability. Risk management is understood as the “identification, assessment, and prioritization of risks followed by coordinated and economical application of resources to minimize, monitor, and control the probability and/or impact of unfortunate events or to maximize the realization of opportunities”

Risk management should be seen as an integrated part of any research project – not only as a way to minimize the risk of harm, but also to discover opportunities to perform activities in new or improved ways, in response to changes in the level of assessed risk. Risks can be assessed at local or global levels and are highly dependent on the type of research project, level of partnership, location

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7 Such as the Western Institutional Review Board: https://www.wirb.com/Pages/default.aspx
of research implementation, and the research subject that is being evaluated. Some risks that may be identified include:

- **Risks to the research partnership** (e.g. inadequate communication or disagreement between partners, inadequacy in managing changes to project staff or staff turnover);
- **Internal risks to implementation** (e.g. corruption or fraud in financial management, inadequate project management that results in delays, data and information security incidents);
- **External risks to implementation** (e.g. deteriorating security conditions, natural hazards, loss of funding, exchange rate variability, risks to research participants);
- **Risks to analysis and results** (e.g. low quality data collection); and
- **Risks to research uptake** (e.g. lack of engagement with stakeholders, failure to publish).

Every effort should be made at the design stage to identify potential risks and, especially for those risks that have a high level of potential severity or intensity of impact, build risk mitigation plans into the overall research project design.

### 2.3f RESEARCH UPTAKE STRATEGY

The process whereby research findings are communicated to and utilized by a target audience is **research uptake**. While it is critical to emphasize research uptake is an integrated component of each research project cycle phase (for example, uptake was previously discussed within the concept phase related to stakeholder engagement, pg. 15), considerations of uptake in the design phase lay a solid foundation its eventual success. Research uptake strategies (RUS) have been defined as “all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policy-makers, practitioners and other development (and humanitarian) actors”9. While a finalized strategy will not be expected at the design stage, relevant stakeholders who will be interested and engaged in the research project should be outlined broadly (and likely already engaged as part of the concept stage), as well as key products that the research will produce (such as peer-review journal articles, summary reports, conference presentations, etc.).

Further, it is critical to also consider how uptake activities will be integrated within the other research and data collection activities during implementation. All too often, too little consideration is given at the design stage for how the research can and should be effectively communicated over the life of the project and how stakeholders can be actively engaged to achieve maximum impact. Therefore, it must be a priority to ensure that, relative to the size of the proposed project, Action Against Hunger identifies at the design stage:

- If there should be a specific staff member dedicated (and budgeted for) to lead RUS activities;
- If not, which other existing research team members will drive the RUS;
- What type of change the team hopes the research uptake will generate; and,

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9 Research Uptake: A guide for DFID funded research programmes, DFID, 2013
• What type of activities should be expected (and budgeted for).

Additional considerations around RUS design, implementation and evaluation are available in Annex 2 – *Creating and Integrating a Successful Research Uptake Strategy*. In particular, the annex highlights the variety of potential activities that could be used to generate uptake; how to go about leading a comprehensive stakeholder mapping, analysis and engagement process; and, sample indicators that can be used to track and evaluate research uptake progress.

2.3g PLANNING, RESOURCING & MANAGEMENT

**WORKPLAN:** The protocol/proposal should provide a clear indication of the timing and schedule for completion of all stages of the study. Often, the work plan is described using a Gantt chart, as this visual demonstration of the plan allows for a clear description of the start date, duration and end date of each activity. In many ways, the work plan is similar to any that you would find for a program intervention; it will identify the key activities, outputs and deliverables of the project, including monitoring and evaluation activities (such as donor reporting requirements), research team meetings, and uptake activities (e.g. stakeholder mapping and analysis, dissemination events, etc.). Importantly however, given that the work plan is specific to the implementation of a research study, it should indicate the timeframes over which:

• study staff will be recruited and trained;
• a full research protocol will be developed (as applicable);
• ethical applications will be submitted and approved;
• procurement and other logistical items will take place;
• communities and participants will be sensitized;
• research data collection tools will be designed and piloted;
• the programme intervention being evaluated (as appropriate) will be implemented;
• primary and secondary data collection will occur;
• data will be entered, cleaned and analyzed;
• final reports and papers will be prepared;
• presentations made to stakeholders; and,
• expected results will be published.

**BUDGET & RESOURCING:** A provisional budget for the research project should also be set-forth during the design stage within the proposal. This budget should include the details of any existing funding (or co-funding), especially in those cases where the program intervention itself is funded separately from the research.

The provisional budget should identify and allocate resources for all staffing needs – including all costs associated with the research team and importantly, those costs that may be required for coordination of the project by Action Against Hunger at country-level (e.g. percentage of time allocation for the Country Director, Field Coordinator, Logistical Coordinator, HR Administrator, etc.)
which may be required for management, recruitment and logistics at mission and field levels). In addition, the budget should account for domestic and international travel costs, study equipment and materials, uptake and publication costs, etc. Finally, given that the research design and work plan may need to be modified in implementation, it is often helpful to financially plan for contingency options, should they be necessary to provide flexibility once the project is up and running.

**MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE:** Especially in cases where the research will be performed in partnership, the management and governance structure of the research team should be defined explicitly. While the details of exact structure will be constituted and mobilized on a project-specific basis, based on factors including project size (e.g. number of countries and partners) and research theme (e.g. sectors and technical expertise involved), consideration should be given to identifying:

- **Principal Investigator (PI):** This individual is the lead researcher for the project, who takes direct responsibility for directing the design and implementation of the research protocol, as well as ensuring its ethical approval. In some cases, the PI may be a member of a partner organization, whereas in other cases, the PI may be an Action Against Hunger staff member.

- **Research Coordinator or Lead Responsible:** There should be one individual responsible for the overall management and coordination of the research project and partnerships. Large research projects (e.g. multi-country, multi-year, several partners) may have a dedicated Research Coordinator employed wholly or primarily for this purpose. In other cases and depending on the time and work requirements of the research, the role may be taken on by an existing staff member as part of the regular workload.

- **Project Management Group or Steering Committee:** This group is comprised of identified staff at headquarters level (at Action Against Hunger and partner organizations) who will be engaged with project decision-making and risk management, as required. While this group validates the research protocol/proposal, the final research report and its recommendations, and is regularly updated on the project’s progress during implementation, it is usually only mobilized on an as-needed basis.

- **Project Implementation Group:** This group often functions primarily at the country/field level, providing direct day-to-day support to the development and progress of the project. It can be mobilized as frequently as is necessary and should be in regular contact with the relevant management group at headquarters for updates and coordination. Composition would reflect the key roles engaged with project implementation and management on the ground e.g. Study Coordinator, and all Action Against Hunger coordinating staff such as the Country Director, Program Manager, Technical Sector Coordinators, etc.

- **Scientific Peer-Review Group:** This group is solicited for technical research advice, particularly for issues around study design, consideration of ethical issues and amplification of opportunities for research uptake. It is constituted of recognized experts in the respective research area(s) who will review and provide advice on the scientific methodology, process and results. This group is likely to include participants from Action Against Hunger’s International Scientific Committee.
Each Action Against Hunger headquarters office may have slightly different ways in which they organize research project governance and management, as well as the titles that are applied to the various management and coordination roles. Bearing in mind these potential differences, and depending on the research project and requirements, the project governance and management structure can vary widely but may be found in a similar form to the indicative structure demonstrated below in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Indicative research project governance and management structure**

![Diagram of research project governance and management structure](image)

### 2.3h QUALIFICATIONS, CAPACITY & VALUE ADDED OF PARTNERSHIP

As mentioned in Section 1 (‘Alignment with Our Mission and Core Strengths’ and ‘Determining Research Capacities and Partnership’), this section of the protocol/proposal should clearly outline the individual capacities of each proposed research partner. While general organizational capacity statements are a useful start for elaborating this narrative, it is important to outline any previous research that has been done by each partner, especially those studies closest in thematic or design similarity. It is crucial to establish both scientific and operational credibility – either within a specific organization or jointly across the research partnership – in terms of geographic location, technical expertise, and relevance. The proposed roles and responsibilities of each partner should be clarified and an explanation should be provided as to the evolution or history of the partnership. All partners should also be expected to support research uptake activities, as their contacts and professional networks may complement those of Action Against Hunger. Joint and complementary support for

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10 Please note that this structure is only an example; the study coordinator or the PI, for example, may be based within Action Against Hunger (instead of the partner organization), whilst research team members (especially technical advisers in statistics, anthropology, etc.) may be based within the partner organization.
uptake activities will maximize the exposure of the project among various networks, increasing the opportunity for evidence uptake.

A summary of the suggested structure (including all components herein described) for a research protocol/proposal is outlined in Box 4 below. It should be noted that this structure is a suggestion only; actual components will depend on the nature of the research project and partnership, as well as any specific requirements that are required by the donor/funding institution.

**BOX 4: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTED PROTOCOL/PROPOSAL STRUCTURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Description of the problem and context</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Current knowledge on the research topic (e.g. literature review)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Identification of evidence gaps and how/where the proposed research may contribute</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH (CONCEPTUAL) FRAMEWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Research objectives, question(s) and hypotheses</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Theory of Change</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHODS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Type of study design and detailed description of methodology, including (as relevant):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Inclusion/exclusion recruitment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sample size and calculations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Study area(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Description of interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Assignment to study arms</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Staff recruitment and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Data quality control</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Plan for data collection and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Data analysis plan and research outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Ethical considerations, planning and provisions (review and approval process)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION &amp; MANAGEMENT PLAN</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Work plan (Gantt chart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Project management and governance structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Risk identification and management plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Monitoring and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Human resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Capacity, value-added partnership</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>RESEARCH UPTAKE STRATEGY (RUS)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Uptake objectives and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Stakeholder mapping and analysis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2.4 DESIGN PHASE VALIDATION POINT

The outputs of the design phase are clear – a detailed, tangible research design and plan for research implementation should be in place, either via a full research protocol or through the framework of a funding proposal. The objective of this validation point is to confirm whether the proposed research design is fit for implementation. Some of the main issues to confirm at this stage include:

- Is the research design aligned with Action Against Hunger’s capacity and research priorities?
- Does the design meet the FINER criteria?
- Is there a clear, detailed plan for how the project will be implemented?
- Is there sufficient flexibility for modification or contingency, should it be required?
- Has a preliminary research uptake been thoughtfully considered and resourced?

Once a final draft of the research protocol or proposal has been developed and agreed by all the partners involved, it will be necessary to secure both internal and external approval.

- **Internal validation** may be taken at various levels, depending on the proposed research project. For example, for a protocol that had already received funding, validation may be by the Scientific Peer-Review Group or Steering Committee, which would give final approval for the project to proceed into the implementation phase. Meanwhile, for a funding proposal, validation may occur within Action Against Hunger itself through a final review of the proposal by the Head of Programmes or Technical Director, prior to submission to the donor.

- **External validation** applies in cases where the research protocol needs ethical review and approval. While review duration varies, depending on whether it is international or national, the research team should allow 4 to 6 weeks (or more) for a final review, after having submitted the research protocol; however, it may also take significantly longer than this to secure approval from the relevant ethics committee(s), depending on the intended country/countries involved in the research or the type of research design proposed.

Design phase validation will also clarify who (which Action Against Hunger staff member or representative) will be responsible and accountable for leading the implementation phase, over what timeframe, as well as the detail of those financial resources that have been allocated.
(3) IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Reaching the implementation phase is a true achievement as research design is no small task; however, the real “work” required for the project has only just begun. While the first two phases of the research cycle provide a detailed research design and action plan that should (once elaborated and validated) set the stage for a strong implementation phase, “success” in implementation can be defined in many ways, according to:

- Time – the research is implemented according to schedule;
- Budget – the project is implemented within the financial resources that have been allocated;
- Accomplishment – the project achieves all of those objectives originally outlined in the design; and,
- Uptake – the project actively engages stakeholders, who have (or will become) research users.

While the design phase of the research cycle provides the “blueprint” of the research project, the implementation phase entails the actual “construction” – study preparations at field level, data collection, analysis, and other considerations. Research teams should anticipate a number of challenges to arise in implementation – both predictable and unforeseen; as a result, vigilance, flexibility and adaptation are often useful traits in practice. The following information highlights those key issues that should be considered in order to achieve successful implementation phase.

3.1 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Once funds have been secured and protocol validation achieved, formalization of the research partnership (if a partner has been sought) should be made through a contract, research agreement or an external consultancy contract, as appropriate. All contractual agreements should clearly lay out the terms, expected roles, outputs, principles and parameters of the partnership. While contracts cover a variety of requirements, there are a few specific considerations that Action Against Hunger must take into account when either creating or signing any contractual agreement around research; these include:

- intellectual property rights;
- data ownership, storage, confidentiality;
- budget control, management, and decision-making;
- specific deliverables and criteria for payment;
- quality control and oversight; and,
- operational ways of working (as appropriate).

As further described in Annex 1, it is critical to clarify who will obtain the intellectual property rights to the information (including the research design) produced as a product of the research. Intellectual property (commonly referred to as IP) is the general term given to the right of the author/creator of certain types of intellectual or creative activities to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from its production. Contracts should clearly indicate who will own and who will
have usage rights to the intellectual research property. Additionally, contracts should spell out who will own any data produced as a consequence of the research and who will have the responsibility for storing the data and ensuring confidentiality through anonymization (as appropriate).

A number of obstacles and frustrations arise in implementation around the financial resources available to the project; it should be clear from the start (and formalized via the contract) which organization has the overall control of the budget and financial reporting responsibility. Further, in order to facilitate the building of partner trust through transparency and accountability, it is suggested to identify partner-specific deliverables within the contract that will be required as criteria for payment. Finally, one senior staff member – either within Action Against Hunger or the partner organization (according to who holds the primary contract) – must be identified as responsible for quality control and oversight of project implementation. For larger projects, this will likely be the full-time Research Coordinator, but for research that is smaller in scope, an existing staff member may be tasked with this responsibility as part of their overall portfolio of tasks.

Finally, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are often used between research partners to detail ways of working at various levels (e.g. between headquarters and the field, between each partner headquarters organization, or between partners at field level). The MOU may be included within a partnership agreement (contract) or may be created as a separate, working document for reference during implementation. While it may be possible to modify MOUs over the course of a research project, these changes become increasingly difficult once implementation has begun. Therefore, it is important to set forth a clear but flexible framework for the operational ways of working of each partner organization before the start of a research project in order to avoid any misunderstandings or obstacles later in implementation.

### 3.2 RECRUITMENT & TURNOVER

A time-sensitive issue that the research team will encounter early in implementation is recruitment - ensuring that the research staff that will coordinate, manage and implement the study are in place with sufficient time for training prior to the start of data collection. All too often, delays in contract or sub-contract execution have knock-on effects for the recruitment of staff; thereby squeezing the amount of time realistically available for proper training once the candidates are finally hired.

Staffing requirements will vary from the project to project. However, a human resources plan, outlining the roles and positions (including coordination support efforts) required for implementation, should have been completed in the design phase and aligned with the financial resources that have been provided. A key role is that of the Study Coordinator, who will lead the research on the ground. Within Action Against Hunger, focal points should have been identified for the research at field-level, such as Program Managers or Coordinators responsible for the implementation of the intervention(s) on which the research is based. Other essential roles are for the field staff who will undertake the data collection and data entry, and those engaged in research uptake activities. For large studies, particularly those which are multi-country and multi-partner, a

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11 This type of agreement between partners may have a different name at each Action Against Hunger HQ. Please verify with your Technical Director if you have any questions regarding the structure or format of this agreement.
dedicated Research Coordinator and a Research Uptake Officer will likely be required, possibly based at Action Against Hunger headquarters or with a partner organization. All study staff (either full-time or part-time allocation) should be recruited in a timely manner, well in advance of data collection.

Any job descriptions or terms of reference should be clear in outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of each staff member, as well as their expected contributions to the project. Staff must be hired in accordance with local labor laws and Action Against Hunger human resources policies and regulations. The table below provides an example of the delineation of research team roles and responsibilities from a research project undertaken by Action Against Hunger in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As you will see, the Study Coordinator had a dedicated assistant for the project and also received additional guidance and inputs from a consultant working on a part-time, remote basis: This is just one example from one research study. There is no set standard staff structure for research projects. Those who are new to research projects and unsure of how to proceed should refer to their headquarters operational and technical teams for further guidance.

Table 5: Example research team composition the PUR® DRC Research Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coordinate and ensure smooth roll-out of the study; ensure data quality; analyze data; draft study report and article for publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Supervise field supervisors; oversee data collection and entry, data quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Supervisors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supervise survey agents, ensure data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Agents</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Implement the protocol in each of OTP; collect data in OTP and at households; ensure data quality and completeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health Workers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Gather data in OTP and households; data quality and completeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coach the Study Coordinator and assist in data analysis, as well as report and article drafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biostatistician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Support data analysis and reading of results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 PROJECT LAUNCH AND SENSITIZATION

All research projects should begin with a face-to-face project launch meeting with the research partners and key stakeholders, as appropriate. An initial meeting among partners will aim to revisit the study protocol or project proposal, reviewing objectives, research questions and hypotheses, the methods to be used, expected results, and importantly, the timetable for implementation and roles and responsibilities. This partnership “launch” can be held when partnerships are established, but they are particularly useful when the partnership is newer or involves new partner staff. This face-to-face interaction at the onset of implementation often brings up a variety of operationally-specific issues that may have escaped the details of the design phase but are useful to discuss and clarify prior to data collection. In addition, given that partnerships are driven on an individual basis, through on-going interaction among research team members and management of diverse personalities, face-to-face relationship building at an early stage facilitates stronger partnerships in practice.

Within Action Against Hunger, depending on the size and location(s) of the research, an additional (internal) project launch may be undertaken at field and/or headquarters level. Further, it is
suggested for a project launch meeting to be held in each of the target sites where the research will be conducted. As with any project, meetings to sensitize the local communities to the research (objectives, what it means for them, who data will be collected from and why etc.) are also essential to the greatest extent possible, where these conversations will not bias the research results.

The research protocol may also be shared with relevant local, national or global stakeholders either during the project launch or in advance of it so that they are able to gain a better understanding of the project overall, and their role within it, if relevant. The meeting will likely be organized by the Research Coordinator, Principal Investigator and/or the Study Coordinator. An early stakeholder event may also serve to launch the stakeholder mapping, analysis and engagement phase of the RUS.

3.4 TRAINING

It is essential that prior to the start of data collection, all study staff (but especially those that will be collecting, entering and cleaning data) be appropriately trained. Timely, dedicated and in-depth training will ensure that:

a) the team has a general understanding of the research objectives and methodology;
b) they understand their roles and responsibilities within the wider context of the study;
c) they clearly understand the data collection tools; and,
d) they are able to use the data collection tools to accurately collect quality data.

Training also serves a dual purpose in bringing together the staff participating in the research, contributing to relationship and team-building. Piloting of research data collection tools can be integrated into the training process so that enumerators are able field-test the tools and potentially revise them if problems are encountered. It is also useful allocate some time during the training towards the translation of research tools (as appropriate) into the local vernacular; subsequent piloting then helps to ensure that questions are clearly understood by research participants and that the answers they provide will be in line with the information needed by the project.

3.5 PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT

While it is understandable that in implementation, the priority focus is on mobilizing, monitoring and managing the research study, it is important to also remember that attention must also be paid to maintaining a successful research partnership in practice. At the project launch, it is often useful to agree a schedule for face-to-face meetings for the full research team, as well as members of the various project groups (such as the Project Management Group, etc.). Out of respect for staff schedules and the complexity of scheduling across teams, these meetings should be planned as early as possible, with agreed/fixed timeslots as far as possible, and at reasonable intervals calibrated to the size of the project and managerial and decision-making requirements. For larger research studies, the Research Coordinator or equivalent is generally responsible for managing this schedule, keeping members informed, sending reminders, and arranging venues etc.
Key members of the research team should be kept up-to-date about project progress developments throughout implementation; this is especially important for technical and operational staffs who are not directly engaged with the research project. In addition to face-to-face meetings and meetings held via Skype, it is often useful for the Research or Study Coordinator to send monthly or bi-monthly notification emails. These emails will provide highlights of activities over a specific timeframe (including any key deliverables achieved or challenges encountered in implementation), a forecast of upcoming activities, and a reminder about any relevant, upcoming deadlines.

3.6 PROJECT MONITORING

As with any project, monitoring of the progress of a research project is essential. A monitoring plan should have been developed as part of the research protocol and it should be reviewed and updated before implementation begins. Monitoring in the implementation phase aims to assess if resources (both financial and human) are being used at the planned rate, and activities are happening in line with work plans to deliver outputs. Monitoring should also assess if there have been any changes in the project assumptions and risks identified during the protocol development, or any additions to the research literature that may impact upon the study or its research uptake.

Monitoring, particularly at the level of the study site, is also essential for ensuring data quality. For example, if data collection errors or anomalies are detected during data entry and verification, it makes sense to monitor the data collection process to identify any problems and apply corrective action. This should not imply however that monitoring should only be conducted in response to problems – it should be continuous and systematic.

The Study Coordinator and others supervising the data collection should conduct regular onsite checks on data collection and management, including:

- checking that questionnaires and other tools are being filled properly;
- ensuring that research subjects/respondents are treated with due dignity and respect and that informed consent and other relevant procedures are being followed; and,
- ensuring that completed questionnaires and other research data is properly managed in line with data security procedures.

At the start of the project the Study Coordinator and others managing the intervention and research on the ground should agree a schedule for progress monitoring reports. For more information on the monitoring and evaluation of projects in general, please reference the ACF Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines (2015).

3.7 DATA SAFETY, STORAGE AND MANAGEMENT

In order to ensure the consistency and quality of data entry (and to reduce delays), it may be appropriate to select a specific type of software for digital data capture. Selection of the appropriate software for data entry should be done on a project specific basis, based on the type of data being collected. Some research projects may require more than one type of software to be used for
Different types of data. Examples of software that might be used include Microsoft Excel, Sphinx, SPSS, ENA software, EpiData, Epilinfo, etc.

Additionally, a number of general rules should be applied during the data entry process. Data should be checked for inconsistencies, anomalies or unlikely patterns that might indicate issues or errors in data collection. These data checks should be performed before entry in a computer (if using paper data collection methods) or soon after collection (if using electronic forms of data collection). The following steps should be followed when conducting data entry:

- **Timely Data Entry:** Data should be entered as soon as possible after it has been collected (i.e. when a batch of completed questionnaires or surveys is available). This helps reduce delays in producing results and increase the opportunities for checking and validating data.

- **Double Data Entry:** A second data entry is required to minimize data entry errors. This means a second member of the team re-enters, in parallel, exactly the same data a second time. The two batches of entered data are then cross-checked and compared in order to detect and correct errors.

- **Data Back-up:** Data should be backed up on a daily basis (when the data-set is being updated through data entry).

It is also important to respect the confidential nature of the data and information collected; research subjects will have agreed to provide data on the basis that the research team will do everything they can to ensure that their personal data remains confidential. This can be particularly important when collecting health data that is individually identified. Respecting confidentiality includes anonymizing datasets, keeping participant names with corresponding ID codes on separate sheets (stored under lock and key in an ACF office), to be destroyed after a certain time as per archiving procedures. All questionnaires should be anonymous, identified with only the ID code. It also means not leaving data files where people from outside the team can see them, and not discussing specific participants of the research with others (unless this is required in order to process the data).

Hard copies of completed questionnaires and other data collection tools or materials should be stored in locked area (e.g. lockable files, locked cupboard or filing cabinet, locked room) to keep them secure and help avoid breaches of confidentiality. Where data is collected electronically (e.g. using mobile data collection software on smartphones or tablets), data protection procedures should be put in place for data storage and access; for example, identifying information should be kept in a separate location from completed questionnaires. Similarly the computers and networks used for data entry and storage of the compiled data-sets should also be protected. Study staff should be trained to know not to share databases by email (or other online tool such as Drobox) to avoid their acquisition and/or misuse by other parties; instead, data should be shared between study staff only through protected, secure portals. You can consult with appropriate Action Against Hunger Information Technology (IT) staff on how best to ensure that electronic data is collected, stored and communicated safely. Academic partners

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12 If you have any questions regarding data protection or sharing techniques, please consult with your Technical Director or HQ IT staff.
may also have specific policies on electronic data security which can be referenced and utilized. Examples of electronic data security procedures include the following:

- Use password protection for access to devices, documents and files, and limit access to essential personnel only (i.e. those collecting, entering or analysing the data);
- Use only secure servers with firewall protection;
- Encryption software can be used when dealing with sensitive and personal-identifying data;
- Stand-alone PCs can be used for data entry and storage;
- Avoid storing personal identifying data on external drives or discs that could be misplaced or stolen; and,
- Format data in such a way that sensitive personal and identifying data are in separate files or tables from research information about the persons.

Policies regarding data security and the level of security that needs to be applied tend to depend on the type of data (e.g. health information, personal information), and whether it identifies individual subjects or is anonymous. Different countries have legislation with regards to data protection that should also be checked for compliance where necessary.

3.8 SECURITY CONDITIONS & RISK MANAGEMENT

It is of course difficult to predict what will happen in regards to the very specific security situation on-the-ground in each study site. However, relevant security threats and their subsequent implications for operations should be identified and elaborated as part of the risk management strategy of the protocol/proposal. In implementation, it is important to ensure that all research study staff that will be operating at field or mission levels receive a security briefing. In addition, when in partnership, Action Against Hunger’s partner staff should fall (except for a rare number of cases) under the mission’s standard operating procedures in regards to security management. In the event of a security incident, research partners should jointly assess the situation in regards to:

- The expected duration of the incident;
- The level of potential impact on research implementation; and,
- Contingency plans that would modify the research approach.

Finally, in the event that the research project is externally funded (e.g. by a donor institution), Action Against Hunger and its partners ensure that the donor is aware of any disruption to implementation, negative impact on the research study, or change to the study design or work plan.

3.9 RESEARCH UPTAKE [PROCESS]

As discussed in Section 1, research uptake is comprised of multi-directional engagement (accepting feedback from audiences, revising messages, making new contacts, etc.) with stakeholders from the very beginning of a research project, and ideally from its concept phase. This engagement is strategic – based off of stakeholder mapping and analysis that outlines the most interested and influential audiences. Continued, on-going feedback from stakeholders throughout the life of the project
ensures their continued interest in project findings, which in turn, increases the probability that they will use the results in their own work, once available. Thus, research uptake is thus simultaneously a process and an outcome.

In implementation, uptake should be seen as a participatory process in which the target audience becomes an active participant in the project and is able to give feedback on its interests, as well as how the project can supply this information from within its findings. It is a process structured around the active engagement with stakeholders that began during the concept phase. Stakeholder engagement during implementation may take many forms, but is most likely driven by conducting individual discussions (interviews) with prioritized stakeholders. Feedback from these interviews ensures that the activities and outputs produced in implementation will be tailored and targeted to those who need the information most. The interviews also allow the research team to explore possible medium-term outputs that may increase the visibility of the project before the results of the research are available.

At the same time, uptake is also an outcome. When stakeholders utilise the information communicated to make changes in policy and/or practice, then research uptake as an outcome can be said to be achieved. For this reason, monitoring of uptake is critical in the implementation stage; the research team is encouraged to identify instances of research uptake as well as the pathways through which it occurred. Many uptake outcome indicators can only be measured well after the end of the project, as changes to policy and practice are rarely introduced quickly. These challenges, as well as means to overcome them, are further discussed within Annex 2 – Creating and Integrating a Successful RUS.

3.10 REPORTING STRUCTURE

The final report should be drafted at the end of the project once all data collection and analysis has been completed, although there are some sections of the report that can be worked in advance (e.g. context, hypotheses, methodology etc.). The drafting of the final study report will generally be led by the Study Coordinator or equivalent, in collaboration with others from Action Against Hunger and partners organizations, as required and based on their expertise and potential to contribute. As with any type of report, it’s important to consider the intended audience - for example, will they be specialists or non-specialists? For donor-funded projects, it is advised to confirm if there are any specific reporting requirements that need to be incorporated into the report.
### BOX 5: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTED FINAL REPORT STRUCTURE

1. **Executive Summary**
2. **Context** (includes summary information on the study context e.g. geographical, demographic, relevant socio-economic, food security, livelihoods, nutrition, WASH etc. contextual information depending on the subject of the study)
3. **Study Model & Hypotheses** (to include the theoretical model, study hypotheses and objectives)
4. **Study Methodology** (e.g. type of study, sampling/sample size, inclusion/exclusion criteria, variables, and measurements)
5. **Study Implementation** (e.g. timeframe, ethical considerations, team composition, training, activities undertaken)
6. **Data Management** (to include data collection, validation, data entry and verification, data analysis plan, statistical methods, software version used)
7. **Limitations & Bias** (e.g. challenges, limitations, bias, any deviations from the initial/planned methodology)
8. **Results** (presentation, analysis and discussion of the results, including based on the initial literature review)
9. **Conclusions & Recommendations** (operational and scientific conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice based on the results)

#### 3.11 IMPLEMENTATION PHASE VALIDATION POINT

The outputs of the implementation phase will include, at the very least, a drafting of research results and conclusions, although a final report is required for final project validation. Once the report has been reviewed and feedback incorporated, a finalized draft should be submitted for validation by the Project Management Group. The objective of this validation point is to confirm the data collection quality and soundness of interpretation, review the conclusions drawn, as well as to jointly agree upon and approve publication opportunities. In addition to review by the Project Management Group, staff is also encouraged to consult with relevant International Scientific Committee (ISC) members, as relevant, who may be able to provide additional support in reviewing final analyses and conclusions.

As part of the research uptake strategy (RUS), it may also be necessary to arrange for the report to be translated into any key languages required for dissemination and donor reporting. Finally, implementation phase validation will clarify who (which Action Against Hunger staff member or partner representative) will be responsible for organizing a final evaluation (as appropriate) and final research uptake activities, including dissemination events at local, national or global levels.
(4) LEARNING PHASE: LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS

Learning is a fundamental dimension of the research cycle as many of our future research concepts are derived from our experience with past research projects, and identifying how to successfully implement research projects (especially in partnership) strengthens our research capacity as an organization. Further, it provides an opportunity to think critically about our current policies and practices, and identify how we can improve the impact of our program interventions.

4.1 POST-PROJECT PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Often, in the final stages of implementation, much of the research team’s energy is drained and a well-deserved rest is needed. However, a few months after the final report is submitted, it is incredibly useful to organize a post-project meeting between the research partners (either internal partners within Action Against Hunger or with the external research partner organization members). This meeting will serve as an opportunity to review the concept, design and implementation phases. This should include a review of problems encountered in terms of data collection and management, highlight successes, and review relationships with the communities, between partners, and with other stakeholders.

In the event that external partnership was pursued for the purpose of the research study, it is also important to examine the evolution of collaboration over the course of the research. Did each organization meet its responsibilities and fulfil its expectations? Did each partner contribute the anticipated value-added to the project or was their overlap between capacities? Is this a partnership that would be useful to continue? If so, are there any emerging ideas resulting from the research that could lead to a new research concept or design? If not, has this been clearly communicated across Action Against Hunger so that others (who may be considering this partner for another research collaboration) are aware of your unique research partnership experience? These are all important questions that can be effectively answered during and after the post-project partnership meeting.\(^{13}\)

4.2 REPORT & DATA ARCHIVING

The following documents and tools should be compiled and archived in electronic and hard-copy versions in an appropriate location so that they are accessible for future reference, and organized in way that they can be easily searched:

- Project executive summary (if available);
- Research protocol (final, approved version);
- Database(s) and analysis;
- Final research report; and,

\(^{13}\) The post-project meeting can be accompanied (or replaced) through a process evaluation of the research project after implementation, based on interviews with a sample of research staff, partners, beneficiaries, to assess what went well, what will need improvement in a future project, and what the main lessons are.
• Research uptake and dissemination materials and tools (e.g. publications, articles, case studies, training materials, reports etc. – see the following section).

Completed hard copy data collection tools (e.g. questionnaires) are conserved in the relevant department, in a locked area, at least until the end of the project and up to one year after the end of the project, depending on donor requirements. Any identifying information included within the data is then destroyed with the agreement of the Action Against Hunger headquarter office. Where data has been collected electronically (i.e. no hard copies), equivalent procedures to ensure the security of the data should be applied. Finally, if funding has been received from a donor, it may be required to submit final project outputs to an institutional database (such as DFID’s Research for Development14 (R4D) Database or USAID’s Development Experience Clearinghouse15). Although many of the research team staff may have already transitioned on to future endeavors, it is important that Action Against Hunger fulfil any and all of these final archiving responsibilities as part of the project close-out process.

4.3 FINAL EVALUATION

Research evaluations can be used for multiple purposes: for accountability; analysis and learning; in order to facilitate funding allocations; and for communications, advocacy and uptake purposes. There is a growing interest in clearly showing the impact of research and proving that evidence (especially donor-funded research) presents a good return on investment.

A post-project, external evaluation of the research is often most effective if conducted six months to one year after the project has been completed (if not even longer in order to observe research uptake outcomes). These types of research evaluations are possible:

• Verify the achievements of the research project;
• Evaluate the relevance of the research design and methods;
• Gauge the research partnership in terms of collaboration and joint implementation;
• Evaluate whether the project met the needs and expectations of stakeholders (uptake);
• Identify any relevant implications for policy and practice; and,
• Draw lessons for future projects and their funding.

While often not an obligatory step of every research project (unless donor funded), the final evaluation can offer interesting insight into the research and partnership process.

4.4 RESEARCH UPTAKE [OUTCOME]

As described in the implementation phase (Section 3), research uptake is both a process and an outcome. While research uptake has been described mostly as activity process up until now in the research project cycle, it is worth it to noting that, especially towards the end of a project, chances are that research uptake can increasingly be observed as an outcome. Stakeholder engagement

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14 Research for Development Database: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/
carried out throughout the course of the project will (hopefully, should uptake be successful) lead to the incorporation of the evidence produced into the on-going work of the stakeholders who were engaged throughout the earlier phases of the project.

Many uptake outcome indicators can only be measured well after the end of the project, as changes to policy and practice are rarely introduced quickly. Thus, ACF staff are encouraged to consider how existing full-time staff may be able to continue to track the uptake of a project’s evidence after the official close of project implementation. In some cases, technical advisers may be best placed to monitor continued uptake at global levels, whereas country program staff may be better suited to track developments in uptake at national and local levels.

4.5 INTEGRATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS & LESSONS LEARNED

Finally, it is critical to contextualize the learning phase within the overall research project cycle. The learning phase shows how the results of research (including data, analysis, results, best practices and lessons learned) are further integrated into the research project cycle to ensure institutional learning and advancement. It is critical that tangible channels for integrating lessons learned from the research are included in the policies and practices of Action Against Hunger both at field and headquarters levels. In addition, the results should readily inform not only future research, but where possible, program interventions. In this way, research is not only able to advance the existing knowledge base, but actively inform current policy and practice in a concerted way, so as to create evidence-based change for improved interventions.

*Figure 5: Review of research project cycle, highlighting loop between evaluation and concept phases.*
### EXAMPLE 5: LEARNING FROM PUR (DRC) TO IMPROVE PUR (PAKISTAN)

As previously discussed in Example 4 (page 29), the PUR research project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was implemented from 2012-2013 by Action Against Hunger, in partnership with the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Following onto the results obtained in the DRC, Action Against Hunger continued its partnership with JHU and used the lessons learned in the design and implementation of the research project as a foundation for a similar study in Pakistan entitled, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Safe Drinking Water in SAM treatment in the District of Dadu in Sindh Province”. The Pakistan study aimed to determine the impact of diarrhea prevention – including point-of-use water treatment technologies and hygiene education – in parallel with SAM treatment in areas with limited access to safe drinking water.

The DRC study results identified a few valuable lessons, namely that future studies should: have larger samples sizes; be conducted in areas with high levels of untreated drinking water; be applied in contexts with longer average nutrition treatment time; reduce data collection to avoid data-overload; and, include additional alternative intervention options to improve water quality and household water chain management.

Based on these lessons from DRC, a number of improvements were made in the Pakistan study. For example, the standard deviation was increased for sample size calculation purposes to ensure adequate power and calculations were informed by both Action Against Hunger’s Dadu program data and UNHCR feeding programme standards. Further, Dadu District had been previously identified by an Action Against Hunger SMART survey (November 2013) as an area with poor access to safe drinking water (78.8% of children under 5 years of age suffered from watery diarrhea in the two weeks preceding the survey, indicating a high burden of waterborne diseases). The Pakistan study was also integrated into a Community Managed Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) program and efforts were made to increase the efficiency of data collection. Finally, the Pakistan study was able to look at a number of additional intervention options, expanding its research arms to include: the conventional CMAM program (control), CMAM plus P&G Purifier of Water, CMAM plus Aquatabs, and CMAM plus a water filter.
FURTHER INFORMATION

The following documents or sources of information have been referenced either directly or indirectly in the development of these guidelines, or can be referenced for further information and guidance on various topics relating to research:

ONLINE, OPEN ACCESS RESOURCES FOR AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

Open access databases with rigorous humanitarian and development evidence

- International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
- Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture
- Cochrane Library
- Campbell Library
- Conflict and Health
- British Library for Development Studies (BLDS)
- BRIDGE
- ELDIS
- ELLA
- Evidence Aid
- Journals Online
- HINARI Access to Research Initiative
- McMaster University Health Evidence Service
- SciDev.Net
- R4D
- Research 4 Life
- IDRC
- Innovations for Poverty Action
- JPAL
- MamaYe
- Oxfam
- World Bank
- Online Access to Research in the Environment

Journals\(^{16}\) with free open access

- Global Health: Science and Practice Journal – aims to improve health practice in low and middle-income countries by disseminating research. It focuses on lessons learned and how global health programmes work
- Social Science and Medicine – publishes articles, reviews and commentary on health issues in order to inform policy and practice
- The ENN’s Field Exchange* - an online and print publication on nutrition and food security in emergency contexts
- The ENN’s Nutrition Exchange* - a publication containing short articles on nutrition programmes implemented in countries with a high burden of malnutrition

\(^{16}\) An asterisk denotes journals which are not peer-reviewed.
Journals with access for a fee

- **Biomedical Central (BMC)** is the publisher that accepts the applications for publishing in one of the journals listed below. There is a fee for open access, unless the author is based in a low income country, see this list.
- **Agriculture and Food Security Journal** – addresses issues of global food security and focuses research that would better address nutritional insecurities at local, regional and national levels.
- **Archives of Public Health** – contributes to public health knowledge, aiming to strengthening the ties between research, policy and practice
- **BMC Nutrition** – interested in all aspect of national sciences, global interventions
- **Cost Effectiveness and Resource Allocation** – focuses on all aspects of CEA and policy analysis related to resource allocation at a national and international level
- **Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition** - publishes articles on health and nutrition with a focus on research relevant to developing countries
- **Health Policy and Planning** – publishes articles that try and inform policy and practice in low/middle income countries
- **Public Health Nutrition** – publishes research aimed at understanding the causes of and the approaches/solutions to nutrition-related public health problems
- **Global Health Action** – looks to foster a more hands-on approach to global health challenges by publishing research that address a global agenda and includes a strong implementation or policy component
- **Global Public Health** – an international journal for research, policy and practice. This journal engages with key public health issues in a global and multidisciplinary scope
- **World Development** – seeks to improve standards of living by examining potential solutions such as poverty and malnutrition
- **World Bank Economic Review** – this journal supports and encourages research in the field of development economics. They publish articles which provide the knowledge necessary to implementing development policies in low/middle income countries
- **Disasters** – this journal publishes articles that deal with protracted crises and disaster prevention. It promotes exchange between academia and policy-makers
- **Journal on Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management** – journal focuses on problems between humanitarian logistics and supply chain management. The journal promotes knowledge exchange to resolve problems in disaster management, development aid, public policy and more

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### RESEARCH - GENERAL


‘Choosing Your Research Topic’ (online tutorial – aimed at research students - from Southampton University) http://www.erm.ecs.soton.ac.uk/theme4/index.html

ETHICS & RESEARCH


FUNDING FOR RESEARCH

Funds for NGOs: Grants & Resources for Sustainability (regularly updated listing of research funding opportunities, including links) http://www.fundsforngos.org/tag/research/

DFID – Funding for Development Research https://www.gov.uk/funding-for-development-research
Grand Challenges in Global Health/Grand Challenges Explorations (Gates Foundation)
http://gcgh.grandchallenges.org/about/Pages/Overview.aspx

USAID – Funding Portal http://www.usaid.gov/work/usaid/get-grant-or-contract/opportunities-funding

ACADEMIC-NGO PARTNERSHIPS

Thorburn, T. Learning & Development Note: Research Partnerships in Practice, ACFID University Network, 2015

Interaction - Tips for Selecting & Working with Impact Evaluation Research Partners


INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS
What is Intellectual Property? World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)


IP Handbook of Best Practices
http://www.iphandbook.org/

DFID Research Open & Enhanced Access Policy V1.1, (January 2013)

USAID, ADS Chapter 318 Intellectual Property Rights

Statement of Policy in Regard to Intellectual Property – Harvard University (2013)
http://otd.harvard.edu/upload/files/IP_Policy_12-12-13_FINAL.pdf

Intellectual Property: Regulations – Lancaster University
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/sbs/registry/docs/IP_Regs_prereg.pdf

DATA ANALYSIS

Hyperstat (online textbook for statistical analysis and testing, including case studies), The Rice Virtual Lab in Statistics http://davidmlane.com/hyperstat/index.html
http://www.statsoft.com/textbook/


Analyze This! (Online tutorial from Manchester Metropolitan University providing an introduction to quantitative and qualitative data analysis) http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/analysethis/index.html

RESEARCH UPTAKE

Research Uptake: A Guide for DFID-Funded Programs, DFID (2013) (see Annex 2 of this Guideline for an extensive list of further resources and links on research uptake)

Research to Action (website dedicated to research uptake including resources and links)
http://www.researchtoaction.org/about-us/

Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (website dedicated to research uptake in Africa with resources, blogs and links) https://www.acu.ac.uk/focus-areas/research-management-uptake/drussa
Think Tank Initiative’s Policy Engagement and Communications Program — Anglophone Africa: A toolkit for researchers and communications officers
http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/content/pec-toolkit

http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/2870/ER16%20Final%20Online.pdf?sequence=1

3ie resource sheet for policy engagement, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
http://www.3ieimpact.org/media/filer_public/2015/02/17/3ie_resource_sheet-policy_influence.pdf

IDS Bulletin, Special Issue: New Roles for Communication in Development? IDS, (September 2012)
Research Impact: Guidance on developing research summaries
http://researchimpact.ca/resources/tools-for-knowledge-mobilization/

MONITORING & EVALUATION

ANNEX 1. PRINCIPLES FOR FORMING AND MAINTAINING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

I. INTRODUCTION

Action Against Hunger takes a collaborative approach to research, as being part of a team has a number of added benefits, including making research more manageable, and the research process more exciting and supportive. Collaboration takes many forms, including cooperation between headquarters/field levels and technical/operational staff, as well as external partnerships with one or more stakeholder organizations (e.g. academic institutions).

Research partnerships may arise as a result of both opportunity and necessity, either in relation to a specific project, or more generally based on shared interests for research. However, given the many and diverse complexities involved with partnership in practice, this annex is intended to assist staff in identifying and maintaining of sustainable, collaborative and beneficial research partnerships. By highlighting the advantages, limitations and other considerations around external research partnerships, Action Against Hunger will be prepared to:

(a) identify which partners have the potential to add the most value to a research project;
(b) manage and monitor partnerships effectively over time; and,
(c) ensure that even when partnerships are established, Action Against Hunger is able to take an active role in the research process, with ownership over the direction and integrity of its research projects.

These principles are intended to be read in tandem to “Designing and Managing Research at Action Against Hunger: Practical Guidelines for Staff” and as a complement to “ACF Ethics and Research: Principles and Guidelines”.

II. DETERMINING THE VALUE-ADDED

While in some cases, Action Against Hunger may be willing and capable to independently undertake a research project, it is often most efficient and effective to work with partners that complement our core expertise. This requires us to be reflexive – identifying and understanding our capacities and limitations, so that we find partners that complement our strengths and/or fill gaps in our expertise.

Research partnerships mobilize resources and perspectives across organizations in such a way that each is able to add unique, tangible value to a project and contribute to achieving an overarching goal that they would otherwise be unable to obtain alone. Therefore, any partnership formed should advance the expected goals, outcomes and potential impact of a research project. This added value may refer to:
• technologies and methodologies;
• sectoral findings, results and perspectives;
• approach (e.g. scientific, social, economic);
• capacities and funding opportunities;
• presence (e.g. local, regional or global’)
• exposure (i.e. to broader research, policy or practice communities); and,
• contextual and institutional access.

It is critical that, before embarking on any partnership, we consider our ability to contribute to a project, as well as our expectations around what a research partner will contribute to partnership. Although it may be more common to have only one partner per research project, depending on the size and requirements of the project, more than one can be engaged (e.g. consortia). A flexible and creative partnership approach, which considers a variety of partner options according to their value-added to the research, is often advantageous in not only securing funding for a research project but in outlining roles and responsibilities in such a way that facilitates the management of the partnership in implementation.

III. TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

Partnership makes sense for a broad range of research projects – from disciplinary to interdisciplinary, short to long-term, and basic to applied research. The type of partnership Action Against Hunger seeks in research may vary widely, depending on the nature of the research investigation itself. Potential partners include a variety of individuals and organizations – from operational counterparts at other NGOs, to the private sector, government ministries, and donor institutions. Most commonly, however, we seek partnership with “scientific” partners for our research projects.

For Action Against Hunger, a ‘scientific’ partner is an institution, organization or individual with the requisite expertise and experience in conducting a specific type of research, such as:

• Universities;
• Research Institutions;
• Policy Institutions;
• Think Tanks; and,
• Individuals (with required qualifications and experience, e.g. PhD students, other academics and researchers etc.).

Scientific partners may be based at local, national or global levels, although in practice they are often either situated in proximity to headquarters offices or country missions, as this facilitates the establishment and maintenance of the partnerships over time.
IV. PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP 17

Research in partnership is a continuous process of knowledge generation, shared ownership, and trust building. All research partnerships have different requirements in terms of interaction, communication and mutuality; however, a common set of principles underscore the diversity of partnerships encountered in practice. These include:

SHARING

The hallmark of a research partnership is the sharing of research goals, benefits and decision-making. Joint research is only possible if all parties work together towards a shared goal from the very beginning of the project – ensuring early and equal cooperation in research design and resourcing. Determining the research questions, approaches, and methods together is an important first step to solidifying shared ownership, trust, and proactivity. Sharing also extends to project management, where critical research decisions must be taken jointly through discussion and collaboration between partners.

CLARITY OF ROLES

Collaboration towards a shared goal does not mean that each and every step of the journey must be taken together; partnership also depends upon individual (or organizational) contributions of complementary skills and expertise. Dividing the work, therefore, makes it necessary to clarify and assign responsibilities to each partner, as well as their rights and obligations. To this end, clear, written agreements regarding activities, deliverables, management and communication lines are critical. Not all aspects of research responsibility can be sub-divided, however; some will be joint responsibilities (e.g. research questions), whereas others will be independent (e.g. data collection in a specific province). The key to a successful partnership is ensuring each party is comfortable with and empowered to fulfill its individual responsibilities, whilst also guaranteeing committed effort to joint responsibilities.

TRANSPARENCY

Clear, proactive and open communication between partners is necessary to foster a collaborative working environment and ensure productive dialogue, even in challenging circumstances.

FLEXIBILITY

Research partnerships are often a negotiation of distinct organization cultures; therefore, the research design should work into the typical practices of each organization as much as possible, whilst still balancing the individual requirements of each partner. Diplomacy, flexibility, patience and diligence are critical in keeping a research project on track and preserving everyone’s hard work.

17 These principles have been adapted from the 1998 Swiss Principles (“Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries”) and those advanced by in the British Medical Journal by Costello and Zumla (2000) “Moving to Research Partnerships in Developing Countries”.

DESIGNING & MANAGING A RESEARCH PROJECT AT ACTION AGAINST HUNGER  
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CAPACITY BUILDING  
Partnership cannot be seen as a vehicle for a one-way transfer of knowledge and technology. It is essential that each partner recognizes and values the knowledge and expertise of the other, contributing jointly (albeit in different ways) to fostering the capacity of all parties involved. While scientific partners often bring specific research tools (equipment, methods, etc.) which can be used to build Action Against Hunger’s capacities to conduct research, we must remember that we also have unique value (e.g. ability to understand intimately the local context or to communicate effectively and engage with various groups of stakeholders) that can also build the capacity of our scientific counterparts. Capacity building can and must be a reciprocal process.

MUTUAL LEARNING  
Willingness to engage in dialogue and learning process is a critical precondition for generating added value at an institutional level. At an early stage of any partnership, structures must be formed that encourage periodic evaluation of the relationship using agreed upon criteria. For all partnerships – both short and longer term – it is useful to take jointly stock consistently (What have we achieved together? What progress has been made? How can our work together improve?) in order to navigate the partnership and troubleshoot any obstacles that arise throughout implementation.

These broad principles outline the primary obligations and expectations of any partnership that Action Against Hunger may pursue. Adherence to the principles will ensure that the many benefits of partnership are maximized, while inherent risks are mitigated.

V. BENEFITS & DRIVERS OF SCIENTIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Scientific research partnerships have a variety of benefits, including enhancement in the quality of research, exchange of knowledge between counterparts, and the development of sustainable research capacity within and between partner organizations. Mutual knowledge sharing often leads to broadened perspectives among staff members and, potentially, to the identification of new solutions to key challenges or the application of existing knowledge to local situations. Partnerships are also able to leverage a variety of resources – human, financial and scientific – across organizations. Specific benefits and drivers of partnership between Action Against Hunger and scientific partners are summarized in the table below.18

Table 1: Key benefits and drivers of partnership with scientific partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENEFITS &amp; DRIVERS OF RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS</th>
<th>Action Against Hunger seeks...</th>
<th>Scientific partners seek...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS</td>
<td>Access to technical expertise (in specific methodologies or ethical practices), resources (scientific literature, laboratories, equipment, etc.) and theoretical perspectives.</td>
<td>Access to local communities and community members (particularly trusted intermediaries and mobilizers), which Action Against Hunger maintains through strong relationships with local stakeholders, government officials and wider practitioner networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY BUILDING</td>
<td>Capacity building to strengthen specific staff capacities (e.g. in research design, methods, or data collection) or, more broadly, to strengthen the organization’s research experience and expertise.</td>
<td>Capacity building related to the practicalities of research implementation in the field (such as procurement and logistical considerations, security management, and community relations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPLEMENTARITY</td>
<td>Complementary skills, such as a theoretical approach that complements our often practical approach; these skills offer a value-added to the research, which allows for greater exploration of research topics and focused work on evidence gaps.</td>
<td>Complementary skills that ensure the relevancy of research to current issues and practical humanitarian and development needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGITIMACY</td>
<td>Increased legitimacy to participate in rigorous research, which may strengthen the potential for research uptake in policy and practice, as well as the acquisition of funding resources.</td>
<td>Increased operational and practical legitimacy, especially at national and field levels; partnership also may help to maximise opportunities for additional funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite their many benefits, partnerships frequently involve collaborations between organizations with varied (often unequal) resources. Thus, it is important to also consider the value not only of financial and scientific resources, but also of local and indigenous knowledge, on-site [field] resources, personnel time and skills – all of which should be recognized for their true worth in contributing to the goals of the partnership. This is especially important for Action Against Hunger staff – to realize the value of their own contributions to the research process and to use research projects as an opportunity for growing their individual and institutional capacity as researchers in their own right.

Where an imbalance of capacity exists within a partnership, efforts should be made to include appropriate capacity strengthening mechanisms as an integral part of the partnership agreement, in line with the priorities of each partner. It is essential to train partners so that each develops an understanding and appreciation of the requirements of designing and conducting research, as well
as the contributions of each partner to the endeavor. This should be a joint process that is periodically evaluated to review its effectiveness in building capacity.

VI. RISKS & LIMITATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC PARTNERSHIP

In an extensive review of the literature on international development research partnerships, Bradley\textsuperscript{19} finds that “asymmetry between partners remains the principal obstacle to productive research collaboration”. Asymmetry arises in variety of ways – there may be an imbalance of research capacity, unequal access to resources, or inequity of power in terms of project management or administration. Often, there is simply asymmetry in the expectations of each partner regarding the research (both perceived and real). Specific risks and limitations of partnership between Action Against Hunger and scientific partners are outlined in the table below.

While there are a plethora of incentives to partnership, as demonstrated above, there are oftentimes a number of transaction costs for both parties. These push and pull factors permeate all working relationships within research partnerships. In other words, in those areas in which potential benefits of research partnerships exist, risks are also present if partnerships are not properly identified, formulated and maintained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POTENTIAL RISKS &amp; LIMITATIONS REGARDING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS</th>
<th>Action Against Hunger may be challenged by...</th>
<th>Scientific partners may face challenges due to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADMINISTRATION &amp; MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Administration in terms of justifying and integrating high institutional overheads of their scientific counterparts into research budgets. Project management may also be challenging in that the focus on implementing the research (e.g. recruitment, training, mobilization, etc.) may prevent engagement in the research itself (e.g. design and analysis) due to time and capacity constraints. High staff turnover can also have a negative impact, resulting in inconsistent and evolving engagement over time.</td>
<td>Large, administrative and bureaucratic university “machines” that place constraints on facilitating a rapid review and signature of contracts. Academic institutions also may not always appreciate the time and work required to manage partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE &amp; PRIORITIES</strong></td>
<td>A pervasive, generally team-based operational culture that is orientated towards achieving practical goals and objectives. Short-term practical priorities may overtake the longer term research process. NGOs are experienced in understanding and working with local communities, often valuing local stakeholder participation and empowerment – a value that may not be shared with scientific partners to the same extent.</td>
<td>An institutional culture that often incentivizes individual research interests. Tensions may arise between the pursuit of practical research, with the potential to improve policy and practice, and research that will advance either the status of the researcher or research institution (e.g. the pressure to publish) or the existing evidence in the field (even if not directly urgent or relevant for practice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RIGHTS &amp; OWNERSHIP</strong></td>
<td>Intellectual property rights negotiations can be time consuming and the sharing of authorship opportunities may not be valued by scientific partners, especially for peer-review publications.</td>
<td>Inflexibility around intellectual property rights, which may be pre-determined by the overarching donor contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERCEPTION OF PARTNERSHIP</strong></td>
<td>The perception that they are largely direct access points to communities, rather than valuable, experienced and active partners in the research itself.</td>
<td>The perception that the research is an “add-on” to a program intervention, which resembles a work-for-hire (consultant) relationship rather than a collaborative partnership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE – ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the aforementioned partnership principles (Section IV), which are critical in creating successful research partnerships, Action Against Hunger must review a number of additional considerations that arise, particularly with scientific partners, in practice.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom means that academics can engage in intellectual debate without fear of retaliation, that they have the right to express their views without fear of sanction, and they have the right to choose which topics they will study and to draw conclusions they find consistent with their research. Though academic freedom does not prevent others from judging whether their work is valuable or their conclusions sound, particularly when an Action Against Hunger program is being researched, we must ensure that we will be comfortable with the discussion and publishing of results – whether they show a positive impact (or not). It is important to acknowledge jointly, at the inception of any research project, whether any limitations should be placed on publication, if any. In some cases, due to political or security considerations, Action Against Hunger may find the need to negotiate the language in which critiques of current policies and programs are articulated, even when they strongly agree with them.

AUTHORSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many research projects (especially those funded by donor institutions) produce research as a public good. Scientific partners may get tangible benefits from publishing in peer-review journals and the recognition that their designation as experts earns them. These benefits should be distributed equally, however, when the research produced is in partnership with another organization, particularly an operational organization like Action Against Hunger. Those in Action Against Hunger who have contributed intellectually to the research process (without whom the outcomes would be different) should be acknowledged as authors, according to their contributions.

Authorship and order of authors should be decided before the submission of an abstract to a publication. The order of names should be agreed jointly by the authors, or by the specific guidelines of the journal. General conditions for authorship include:

(a) involvement in either the design of the project, collecting data or analyzing or interpreting data;
(b) participation in the drafting or editing of the article or paper; and,
(c) approval of the final article or paper for submission.

In addition to the primary authors, additional contributors to the research should be considered for mention in the acknowledgements section of each publication. Given the highly collaborative working environment of a research partnership, each research team should consider acknowledging those staff and participants who have made the research possible. This may include a variety of mission and field staff, for example, who have facilitated the research, or technical staff at headquarters, who have overseen and managed the project.
As a general guideline (although individual cases may vary), if Action Against Hunger has implemented a research project in partnership with a scientific organization, at least one staff member within Action Against Hunger should be listed as an author on any article or paper published, with additional staff contributions acknowledged at the end of the paper.

PUBLICATION

Communication, dissemination, and uptake (see Annex 2) of results are critical components of any research project. However, when research has been produced in partnership, there are two main challenges which may be encountered – (1) there may be disagreements around which publication opportunities should be prioritized; and, (2) there may be limitations on what information can be shared at various stages of the project (especially if peer-review publication is being pursued).

Publication channels should be targeted in such a way that they cater to each partners interests; clear and differentiated dissemination goals should be outlined from the early stages of project design, with appropriate financial resources budgeted to cover these obligations at the end of the project, once results are available. There should be early agreement on scientific and contextual (user-specific) dissemination roadmaps and, likely, a mix of publication materials ranging from detailed scholarly publications (e.g. peer review journals), to practitioner oriented publications (e.g. the Field Exchange) and publications for a general public audience (e.g. research summaries or briefs available on partner websites).

CONTRACTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The formalization of a partnership may be made through a contract, research agreement or an external consultancy contract, as appropriate, all of which should clearly lay out the terms, expected roles, outputs, principles and parameters of the partnership. While contracts cover a variety of requirements, there are a few specific considerations that Action Against Hunger must take into account when either creating or signing any contractual agreement around research.

 Intellectual Property Rights

Intellectual property (commonly referred to as IP) is the general term given to the output of certain types of intellectual or creative activities. An idea alone is not intellectual property: However, the written expression of that idea in any fixed or material form would, for example, constitute intellectual property. Intellectual property rights are summarized within Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating the right of the author/creator to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production.

When undertaking a research project it will be necessary to consider intellectual property and associated rights on several levels with regards to the various stakeholders, policies and legal frameworks that may influence and shape the approach:

- **Donors** will have different policies and objectives with regards to IP in projects they fund which can have significant implications in terms of IP and ownership;
- **Action Against Hunger** should consider what we want to achieve in terms of access and ownership of intellectual property generated through research projects, including in terms of
strategic interests, partnerships, and overall objectives and specific, project-level objectives; and,

- **Scientific partners**, such as universities and research institutions, are likely to have their own policies and guidelines on IP which will need to be factored into agreements and contracts.

Given that the majority of research Action Against Hunger engages in is donor funded, donor stipulations around intellectual property often override any other policies, agreements or considerations. Each donor has different policies and approaches to the management of intellectual property rights, which reflect their own objectives and goals in funding research (for examples, see box below).

### Intellectual Property Considerations of Major Donors

#### Department for International Development (DFID)

Standard contracts allow researchers to retain all IP rights over the outputs of their research, whilst at the same time granting DFID “a perpetual, worldwide, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free licence to use all the Material”, meaning, “the reproduction, publication and sub-licence of all the Material and the intellectual property rights therein”.

#### U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Guidelines on intellectual property contains the following with regards to copyright of technical and scientific research they have funded: “**in general, contractors are authorized….to assert a claim to a copyright in technical or scientific articles based on or containing data generated under a contract….The USG may reserve unlimited rights in such copyrighted scientific and technical data…(to) a paid-up, nonexclusive, irrevocable, worldwide license in the copyrighted work to reproduce, prepare derivative works, distribute copies to the public, and display it publicly**”.

#### Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust does not usually seek to own the IP arising from research it funds, but does require that the IP is vested within a host institution, as opposed to with the individuals involved. The Trust may also reserve the right to exercise IP rights in certain circumstances. Similarly grant conditions will usually require the host institution to manage IP to ensure the research achieves public benefit and contributes to future research, as per the Trust’s objectives.

Universities, research institutions and other bodies engaged in research will generally have extensive experience in dealing with intellectual property rights, and will usually have developed IP policies and regulations. As such, it is important to ensure that if an intellectual property clause is not contractually mandated from a specific funding institution, that any agreement between Action Against Hunger and its scientific partner clearly outlines who will own the intellectual property produced in the partnership, and possibly, how it may be sub-divided. As a general rule, Action
Against Hunger should maintain intellectual property rights for the information we produce and in instances where we may not maintain full contractual rights, the implications should be assessed and discussed both at mission and headquarters levels before any contracts or agreements are signed.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

MOUs are often used between research partners to detail ways of working at various levels (e.g. between headquarters and the field, between each partner headquarters organization, or between partners at field level). MOUs for research projects should clearly delineate reporting and communications lines, as well as a variety of other administrative and logistical challenges, such as which partner will be responsible for:

- fundraising (should the full resources not yet be obtained for implementation);
- recruiting, contracting and paying study staff;
- managing the study staff (either technical or line management);
- procurement of study equipment;
- approving changes to the study design or financial resourcing plan;
- contributing to research uptake activities;
- seeking ethical approval;
- ensuring that appropriate data collection and protection procedures are followed;
- ensuring that responsible security procedures are followed; and,
- reporting to the donor (as appropriate).

While MOUs can be modified over the course of a research project, it is important to set forth a clear framework for the operational ways of working of each partner organization before the start of a research project to avoid any misunderstandings or obstacles later in implementation.

Key differences between MOUs, operational agreements and consultancy contracts are further delineated below in Table 3 and an example MOU elaborated as part of a previous Action Against Hunger research project with a scientific partner is included within Annex 4 of these guidelines.

Maturity of the Partnership

While all research partnerships have the potential for success, there are inherent differences between newly formed partnerships and longer-term, more mature research partnerships. In general, Action Against Hunger seeks to facilitate long-term relationships with organizations that have a track-record of high performance and fruitful collaboration. After years of experience in facilitating research projects, we have a wide variety of positive (and negative) interactions, including a substantial portfolio of lessons learned. When considering a partnership, it may be useful to investigate if Action Against Hunger has already participated in research with the identified partner in another country or with another headquarters office. For updated information on partnerships, check in with the research lead in your respective headquarters or your Technical Director.
New and diverse partnerships are always welcome, but recently formed partnerships often require higher administrative and management inputs in the early days to align ways-of-working and ensure staff familiarity and buy-in. Especially for these new partnerships, a phased approach is recommended, which would integrate an initial relationship-building phase into the project, incorporating partnership-building sessions to establish common understanding and expectations; this phase may be done before a partnership is formalized to allow space for opt-out if it’s determined that it’s not a good fit on one or both sides.

20 Thorburn, T. ibid.
Table 3: Key differences between a MOU, operational agreement and consultancy contract.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Memorandum of Understanding</th>
<th>Operational Agreement</th>
<th>Consultancy contract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>To formalize the will of partners to work together and establish the basis of the relationship</td>
<td>To clarify the commitments and obligations of partners in the frame of a specific action/project</td>
<td>One party delivers a service to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Strategic oriented</td>
<td>Project oriented/focus</td>
<td>Service provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>Mid to long term agreement but the duration can also be unspecified</td>
<td>Agreement with a set time limit / specified set period linked to the specific action/project</td>
<td>Set time limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal standing</strong></td>
<td>Does not intend to be a legally enforceable document but can be if it is deemed advisable to do so</td>
<td>Legally binding contract that enable in particular to protect its interests in view of a financial commitment with a donor</td>
<td>Legally binding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finance</strong></td>
<td>No transfer of funds from one partner to the other, but it can be discussed what each partner contributes (in kind), in terms of staff resources etc.</td>
<td>Transfer of funds is possible, but the method of payment, conditions for eligibility (to ensure donor compliance), accountability &amp; reporting etc. are clearly stated</td>
<td>Transfer of funds: payment based upon satisfactory delivery of the results in term of quality, quantity and timing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Presentation of partners Main principles on which the relationship is based Reasons of the decision to work together History of the relationship Vision of the partnership Scope of collaboration etc.</td>
<td>Same as MoU + Objectives of the action/project Expected deliverables and results Activities, method and standards Respective roles and responsibilities Resourcing arrangements Financial and non-financial means Timeframes Rules of functioning etc.</td>
<td>Presentation of parties, Background &amp; purpose Obligations of ACF Obligations of contractor Deadline for delivery of results Prices and Payments ToR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIII. MINIMUM PARTNERSHIP CRITERIA

It is important to consider each potential research partnership in light of the evidence Action Against Hunger would like to attain, as well as the values and skills we expect a partner to bring into the partnership. Each partnership opportunity should be reviewed according to suggested minimum research partner criteria, detailed here below.
**MINIMUM RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP CRITERIA**

1. **Does the partner understand and recognize the value of Action Against Hunger's contribution to research?**
   Action Against Hunger must ensure that the potential partner’s values are aligned with and supportive of our own core values. Whilst technical expertise is essential, it isn’t necessarily a sufficient condition on which to base a research partnership. It’s also important that the partner understands Action Against Hunger’s core values and approach in terms of research, programming and relationships with other stakeholders, and vice versa. Ultimately, a research partner must recognize the tangible value of Action Against Hunger’s contributions to a research partnership (on an equal footing to their own contributions, as scientific partners).

2. **Are they willing to leverage resources to achieve a common goal?**
   Research partnerships should be established as early as possible in the research process, with time invested in building the relationship from the outset. Ideally, there should also be the opportunity for joint and participatory design and shaping of the research to ensure it is properly aligned with the objectives and interests of all partners. This alignment will ensure that partners take ownership over the joint goals and objectives of the research, as well as draw appropriately from their own resources in their contributions to the research collaboration.

3. **Do they have a clear idea of the roles and responsibilities needed to contribute to the project?**
   Clearly outlined roles and responsibilities are critical in setting realistic expectations for partnership. As noted in Section V and VI, partners have a variety of different motivations for engaging in a research partnership; assumptions about the objectives and visions of each partner’s respective role will not inherently match. Taking time at the start to clarify expectations and delineate responsibilities is important. Similarly, work should be done to develop a shared understanding of the expected research outputs, especially those that must be jointly completed, and of the communication of results, especially if parties intend for the evidence to be used (as in research uptake, Annex 2). These aspects can and should be incorporated into the formalized partnership agreement for each research project.

4. **Do they have the appropriate expertise and resources required to meet their responsibilities?**
   Action Against Hunger should always consider the specific value a partner will bring to a partnership (see Section II – Determination of Value-Added), as it relates to our strengths and/or gaps in conducting research. However, beyond an assessment of the potential contribution of a partner, we must also assess if they currently have the capacity to engage in a partnership with us on a specific project. Do they have enough time and resources to dedicate to the partnership? Or, will it be low on their list of priorities? Have they identified strong contact points for the partnership who have decision-making authority within their organization? Do they have a track-recording of delivering on-time, and according to expectations? All of these considerations are important, including technical abilities, when determining if a partnership is able to be successful in practice.

5. **Are they willing to abide by a partnership project agreement?**
   Formalized partnership agreements on specific projects are key, even if the interest is in building longer-term relationships. Longer-term partnerships are more likely to be mutually institutionalized beyond specific personal relationships and thus also beyond the susceptibility of staff turnover to undermine or break those relationships. However, regardless of the length or extent of partnership, each specific research project should have its own partnership agreement which clearly outlines expectations, responsibilities and resources – which may change from project to project, or evolve over time.

6. **Is there agreement on critical issues (intellectual property, data ownership, authorship on publications)?**
   Within the confines of the partnership agreement, to the greatest extent possible, there should also be agreement on issues such as intellectual property rights, data ownership and management, authorship, and publication priorities. Partners may not have the same policies, approaches or interests on these issues, so it is crucial to discuss and create agreement in advance to avoid running into significant issues later in implementation or even at the close of the research project.

7. **Is there a commitment to proactive, open communication during all phases of the partnership?**
   Poor communication is often the crux of many problems encountered in partnerships, as it has the potential to create misunderstandings and prohibit the building of trust. Methods for countering this can include scheduling regular meetings between partners and identifying focal points for communication between partners. The personalities of the individuals involved, and how they communicate with others, inevitably plays a significant role in how relationships between partners’ progress. As such, the selection of focal points for communication and coordination with partners should be given due consideration; they should bring a positive and constructive influence to relationship-building.
IX. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


ANNEX 2. CREATING AND INTEGRATING A SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH UPTAKE STRATEGY (RUS)

I. INTRODUCTION

Research evidence often only makes an impact when it is used to inform policy, practice and future research endeavors. This process whereby research findings are communicated to and utilized by a target audience is research uptake. Research uptake strategies (RUS) have been defined as “all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policy-makers, practitioners and other development (and humanitarian) actors”\(^{21}\). In short, no matter how interesting and applicable your research findings are, if no-one knows about them or utilizes them, you’re unlikely to achieve your intended impact; therefore, developing an effective RUS is a critical part of each and every research project at Action Against Hunger.

A RUS often comprises four main strands\(^{22}\) of work: a) Stakeholder Engagement; b) Capacity Building; c) Communicating; and d) Monitoring and Evaluation. It should be noted that there are areas of overlap between these strands; whilst any RUS should consider all of the strands, in practice different projects may place more emphasis on some strands, rather than others, depending on the nature of the research and the objectives of the project overall. For example, capacity building may form a central part of the RUS for some projects, but may play a relatively minor role in others.

Developing a RUS involves both internal and external dimensions. Internally, a clear and effective strategy for research uptake enhances the knowledge of Action Against Hunger and its employees, reinforces skills and creates efficiency by saving time and resources. Externally, as noted above, it can influence policy and practice and reinforce the capacities of a wide variety of stakeholders themselves. Importantly, one of the major benefits of an effective RUS blurs this internal/external division, as consistent and proactive engagement with external stakeholders serves internal purposes as well – increasing the visibility and awareness of Action Against Hunger within key networks and among key decision-makers (especially donors).

This annex is intended to assist staff in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating a RUS and should be read in tandem to “Designing and Managing Research at Action Against Hunger: Practical Guidelines for Staff”.

II. DIFFERENTIATING COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION & UPTAKE

What makes research uptake unique is its level of engagement with the target audience. As seen in Table 1 below, research dissemination entails the distribution of information to a target audience based on assumed interests and needs; there is often no engagement with the audience to ensure that the results are actually interesting and relevant to its members. The exchange is one-way

\(^{21}\) Research Uptake: A guide for DFID funded research programmes, DFID, 2013
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
(project to audience) and conducted at the project’s end, once the final analysis and results are available. In dissemination, the overall goal is simply to publicize research findings and make them available to an intended audience.

Meanwhile, research **communication** incorporates a more detailed investigation of the target audience, with information regarding interested stakeholders compiled over the life of the project. While there is two-way engagement with the audience, it most often occurs towards the end of the project, rather than consistently throughout. Similarly to dissemination, the goal of communication is also to publicize project results and ensure they are available to the intended audience.

Finally, research **uptake** is comprised of multi-directional engagement (accepting feedback from audiences, revising messages, making new contacts, etc.) with stakeholders from the very beginning of a research project, and ideally from its concept phase. This engagement is strategic – based off of a detailed stakeholder mapping and analysis that outlines the most interested and influential audiences. Feedback from stakeholders consistently throughout the life of the project ensures their continued interest in project findings, which in turn, increases the probability that they will use the results in their own work, once available.

Table 1: Differentiation between dissemination, communication and research uptake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISSEMINATION</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>UPTAKE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXCHANGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-way</td>
<td>Two-way</td>
<td>Multi-directional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUDELINE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted based on assumed interests</td>
<td>Targeted based on interests gained through stakeholder investigation, which are compiled during the project</td>
<td>Targeted and engaged (via relationship building)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Often only at the end of the project</td>
<td>Throughout the project; from beginning to end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTENDED OUTCOME</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share results</td>
<td>To share results</td>
<td>To ensure that stakeholders will use the results to inform policy and practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

23 **REFANI**’s distinction between research dissemination, research communication and research uptake centres around DFID’s documents: [Research Strategy 2008-2013](#), [Working Paper Series: Research Communication](#) and [Research Communication: Insights from Practice (page 7)](#).
Research uptake is thus simultaneously a process and an outcome. It is a participatory process in which the target audience becomes an active participant in the project and is able to give feedback on its interests, as well as how the project can supply this information from within its findings. It is a process structured around active, continual engagement with stakeholders. At the same time, it is also an outcome. When stakeholders utilise the information communicated to make changes in policy and/or practice, then research uptake as an outcome can be said to be achieved. Many uptake outcome indicators can only be measured well after the end of the project, as changes to policy and practice are rarely introduced quickly. However, as will be discussed (Section V), there are a number of ways in which Action Against Hunger can create medium-term outputs, before final results are available, which will increase the likelihood of achieving uptake as an outcome in practice.

III. RESEARCH STAKEHOLDERS VS. USERS

A research stakeholder is any group or individual who has the potential to affect or is affected by the achievement of the project’s objectives. Action Against Hunger’s stakeholders exist at many levels (local, national, global), occur across varied sectors (nutrition, food security, WASH, social protection, etc.), and comprise a diverse array of forms (i.e. private sector, fellow NGOs, governments, program beneficiaries, etc.).

The aim of any RUS is to make research users out of stakeholders, especially those most influential stakeholders. Research users are able to utilize the evidence generated by research in their daily lives. For example, research may inform the way a stakeholder thinks about a particular practice and thus, they may change the policies that they support or projects they choose to fund. In this way, a RUS is an iterative exploration of the best ways to make direct links between those who have information (researchers) and those who need to use the information (stakeholders), in such a way that facilitates is use most effectively.

IV. RESEARCH UPTAKE CYCLE

Research uptake will only be successful if there is an adequate supply of and demand for research, as well as a willingness to explore our current notions of what should be pursued in terms of policy and practice. Ongoing engagement is critical in ensuring that stakeholders become users. If a survey or interviews were held during the concept/design phase of the project, these stakeholders are even more likely to be users from the onset. Nevertheless, RUS requires a cyclical process of analysis and engagement – progressing along four distinct phases, as outlined below.
**Table 2: Activities within each phase of the research uptake process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1&lt;br&gt;Identify and Analyze Stakeholders</td>
<td>Although engagement is a cyclical activity, the composition of the target audience (i.e. its “stakeholders”) must first be identified, mapped and analyzed. Stakeholder analyses are the backbone of a RUS, encompassing the accumulated knowledge and connections of Action Against Hunger headquarters, missions, or field offices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2&lt;br&gt;Engagement with Stakeholders</td>
<td>Initial engagement with stakeholders will clarify the specific areas or themes of the research in which they show most (or least) interest. This information will help to tailor more targeted messages and materials for future distribution to the stakeholder, in an effort to pique their interest and facilitate their reciprocal engagement. Some stakeholders may become users immediately, while for others, it may take time and persistence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3&lt;br&gt;Feedback and Evaluation</td>
<td>After initial engagement, feedback is collected and analyzed. For those that do not immediately become users, messages will be further tailored and revised. It is important at this stage to evaluate which messages and methods have produced the most success of generating users and defining their level of interest in the project. The RUS is continually revised as information is collected from engagement with stakeholders and users. Based on feedback, messages and outputs will be further refined, tailored and adapted. As seen in the figure below, this phase then loops back into Phase 1, leading to the reprioritization of certain stakeholders, identification of new stakeholders, and possibly, the elimination of certain organizations from the list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4&lt;br&gt;Monitoring and Revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 (below) depicts how a RUS incorporates the various phases of research uptake. The cycle may continue as often as needed in order to achieve and maintain user participation for the uptake of research evidence.

As seen in the Figure 1, stakeholders may become interested users at the inception of engagement (immediately after Phase 2); or, it may take more time and persistence to tailor messages. For example, if we were to look at engagement from the REFANI project, some initial feedback received from stakeholders showed that certain organizations were interested in specific parts of the project and wanted to hear more about only those project components. Some organizations also said they do not have a precise interest in the results since they do not work in humanitarian contexts, but would nevertheless be interested in receiving general updates. Therefore, engagement with stakeholders has indicated what type of information to send to each stakeholder, and frequency of messaging.

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26 REFANI’s distinction between research dissemination, research communication and research uptake centres around DFID’s documents: [Research Strategy 2008-2013](#), [Working Paper Series: Research Communication](#) and [Research Communication: Insights from Practice (page 7)](#).
V. DESIGNING A RESEARCH UPTAKE STRATEGY

When designing a RUS, there are a number of key elements that should be considered. The following questions are useful in guiding and shaping your strategy from the start:

- What do you want to accomplish through the RUS?
- Who is your audience (stakeholders or users)?
- What do you want your stakeholders to understand?
- How do you envision stakeholders using your research?
- How will you measure the progress of your RUS and against what timeline?
- What resources do you have, and what resources will you need to achieve your objectives?27

The process of elaborating a RUS may take some time; it is useful to consider it a working document that is flexible to be modified and improved as you add more stakeholders to your portfolio and

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27 Questions on key considerations for the RUS design process adapted from http://www.researchtoaction.org/howto/uptake-strategy/
Once the goals, interests and influence of each stakeholder are determined, they are plotted along an interest and power spectrum (as demonstrated in Figure 2 below). This graphic allows those on the research team leading stakeholder engagement to be as pragmatic as possible in their approach – prioritizing those that they should manage and monitor closely, while also indicating which they should keep satisfied, keep informed, and monitor.
**Figure 2: Stakeholder prioritization framework**

![Stakeholder Prioritization Framework](image)

**High power, high interest**: These stakeholders might have a lot of influence over the research project (e.g. donor institutions) and also be very interested in the project. It is critical to understand the viewpoints of these groups, especially in terms of any questions they raise or the potential for future funding opportunities. Most of your time should be spent on engaging with these stakeholders.

**Low power, high interest**: A variety of stakeholders may have a lot of interest, but little real influence. If this group is in favor of your project, they can be valuable resources for information – getting access to other information relevant to your research project (e.g. similar studies or interventions) or may be able to help you identify potential challenges to designing or implementing the project. These are helpful stakeholders to meet with at the early phases of project design, given that each interaction is relatively low in potential risks and high in terms of the potential for gaining information that could positively shape the project.

**High power, low interest**: Stakeholders in this group should be broadly satisfied – they won’t necessarily pay attention to the details of the research, since they may perceive the project as not affecting them. However, they may still have influence over whether research uptake will be a success. For example, they may have a large audience or network of practitioners that they are able to reach and influence. The goal of interactions with this type of stakeholder will be to give them enough information about the project that they will maintain general awareness over the life of the project and be open to discussing the results once they are available.

**Low power, low interest**: These stakeholders are not interested in the research and are not in a position of influence; you should spend the least time with these stakeholders, whilst still monitoring them for changes in their status and providing them with the most general messaging of the project.

The usability of the stakeholder analysis is critical, as this is the core document that will also demonstrate the particular roles and responsibilities of the research team in facilitating research uptake. It is therefore advisable to keep a separate record of data (dates of contact with each stakeholder, types of information shared and gained) that will emerge in engagement. Templates of these suggested stakeholder analysis and tracking tools are available in Section VII. (Additional Resources) and are further discussed in below in monitoring and evaluation.

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28 Chart is taken from Transformed, a training platform for project management.
MECHANISMS OF ENGAGEMENT

Interviews. An effective way to understand stakeholders is to conduct semi-structured interviews with them at the early stages of engagement, if they weren’t already involved in the project’s concept or design phase. A variety of broad, open-ended questions is a good way of starting a conversation and provides the opportunity to ask about:

- the ways that the research project may go right or wrong (i.e. lessons they may have learned in similar projects);
- what other sources of data or information are available in line with the research; and,
- which other stakeholders they envision as being interested in the project.

These conversations are a good way, if the stakeholder shows a high interest, of directing the conversation towards collaborative problem solving or plans for future collaboration. If the stakeholder has any strong opinions or objections to the research, it will also come through during the conversation. Follow-up questions are helpful for exploring what type of research outputs or products your stakeholder would be interested in receiving and in determining the frequency with which you should re-engage them.

Products. As previously noted, the products and materials developed to capture, synthesize, package and repackage research findings and information should be tailored to the type of audience (e.g. specialist, non-specialist, peers, policy-makers etc.) and what you want them to know or to do as a result. The type, range and number of products and materials generated will depend on the objectives and context of the research. Selecting the most appropriate products and developing the content should involve consideration of what is most likely to achieve the intended impact, both in terms of the information itself, and how it is presented (e.g. written, visual, both) and structured (e.g. prioritizing and highlighting key findings). Also consider where it will be necessary to translate materials into relevant working languages for the target audience, at country and global level.

Securing publication of research findings in at least one open access, peer-reviewed publication is an essential part of research uptake. Peer reviewed articles are a permanent public record for original research and there are numerous journals in existence covering topics relevant to Action Against Hunger’s areas of research interest and expertise.
MONITORING & EVALUATING THE RUS

Monitoring and evaluation of the RUS should be integrated as part of the project’s overall M&E system. Research uptake indicators should as far as possible be embedded within the overall research project log frame and be monitored throughout the project cycle. These would usually refer to key objectives of the research uptake strategy including influence on policy and practice, and dissemination and publication of results. At the output level, monitoring may be relatively easy, for example in terms of tracking and counting the number of peer-reviewed publications, reports, training sessions, mentions on social media, presentations made at workshops and conferences etc. The following are characteristic output indicators of a RUS:

- Number of articles submitted to peer-reviewed publications;
- Number of peer-reviewed articles published in open-access format;
- Number of items produced on the research that are made available on a website;
- Number of items produced on the research available on the research partner(s) websites;
- Number of policy-makers, practitioners, academics, etc. within the stakeholder engagement strategy;
- Number of research products and documents downloaded from the website;
- Number of events convened to share research results and learning;
- Number of regional and global networks that share research news or updates to their stakeholders;
- Number of seminars or presentations involving a panel of research and/or technical experts discussing the research findings;
- Number of tweets mentioning the research project or research findings; and,
- Number of influential websites or blogs that mention the research.

While monitoring at the output level may be straightforward, monitoring at the outcome level, particularly in terms of the research’s influence on, or changes in, policy and practice, may be difficult to observe within the lifespan of the project. For example, a long-term outcome indicator for a research project’s uptake may postulate that the research evidence produced by the project informs policy and decision-making at national and international levels; given that results are often available only at the end of a research project, monitoring this type of outcome indicator may prove challenging within the overall life of the project. Nevertheless, indicative short-term outcome indicators which may more readily be monitored include:

- Key stakeholders are aware of and supportive of the research project and evidence produced;
- The research team is viewed as a trusted and high-quality source of evidence on the research topic by practitioners and/or policy makers;
- New or strengthened relationships with policymakers and other key stakeholders at local, national and international levels; and,
- Research users are able to understand and analyze the evidence produced by the project.

As with any complex process, determining direct attribution, or the extent of influence, may also pose some challenges. Therefore, when designing the outcome indicators, care should be taken to
ensure they are feasible within the timeframe of the project’s duration. Finally, it is also important to document the successes or limitations of the research uptake strategy itself in maximizing uptake to relevant people, institutions and organisations as part of the M&E process. For example, the RUS could be reviewed and evaluated as part of any overall evaluations planned for the research to identify lessons learned and recommendations based on feedback from stakeholders.

VI. ADDITIONAL UPTAKE CONSIDERATIONS

STAFF

Designing, leading and implementing an effective RUS can be done by any member, at any level of Action Against Hunger; however, it is often most easily facilitated by someone with a related skill-set, notably in communications. Large research projects or programs generally require the time of a dedicated communications professional to develop the strategy, and plan and coordinate the RUS activities; this should be taken into account and budgeted for at the beginning of the project.

Meanwhile, for smaller projects it may not be financially possible to include specific communications staff throughout the project; in these cases it is at least worth considering hiring someone in the short-term (e.g. consultant) to assist with either developing the RUS or implementing strategic, high-visibility RUS activities. Where resources are stretched, those staff tasked with working on the RUS can also do the following:

a) consult existing internal and external research uptake strategy documentation, materials and tools (drawing on lessons learned and best practice); and,
b) seek out other research projects within relevant networks (including internally within Action Against Hunger, e.g. other headquarter offices) to see if they have communications staff who may be able to provide additional guidance.

All members of the research team play important roles in research uptake; relevant roles and responsibilities should be differentiated between partner organizations and, internally, included within the job descriptions of research study and related staff members.

BUDGET

Another key factor in developing and implementing the RUS will be the resources available to you, both in terms of financial resources and staff time. It is critical to ensure that the activities outlined in the strategy are achievable and feasible with the resources available, so as to not over-promise activities, outputs or outcomes to the donor, or conversely, to overstretch study staff in such a way that it could compromise implementation of the research itself. Emphasis should be placed on high-visibility, low-cost activities as well as on the provision for appropriate staff time (either a dedication of study staff time for smaller projects or for the recruitment of a RUS lead for larger projects). The RUS budget should clearly delineate the resources available for each type of RUS activity so that there is no question as to the allocation of resources in implementation.
COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL

Whilst external communication may be the primary focus of the research uptake strategy, it’s important to ensure that internal communication, including that between different headquarters and country programs, and between different research partner organizations, is also an integral part of a strategy. In large, geographically and technically diverse organizations or consortiums, it is not unusual to find that this doesn’t always happen, with staff in different sectors and departments inadequately informed of what others are doing, even where it has relevance for their own work.

Larger projects in particular, which are likely to have multiple people from different partners engaged in communications activities, should consider developing a communications protocol outlining key procedures and guidelines for all outward-facing communications. This is to ensure agreement, standardization and clarity in the communications process and activities. A harmonized approach to communications should also ensure consistency in terms of presentation – this may for example include standardized templates for different types of core communication material, and the use of branding where appropriate.

Consideration should also be given to the political, cultural and security context in the target countries, and any potentially sensitive or controversial aspects of the research which need to be factored into the communications strategy. In this regard, a communications protocol could identify these aspects as far as possible, and should include a sign-off procedure (e.g. by country and headquarters management as appropriate to the context and the research) to clear content for public dissemination.

OPEN ACCESS

Finally, especially for plans to publish in academic-type publications, consideration should be given to whether publications are open-access, meaning that they provide unrestricted online access to the research. Open access can be applied to all forms of published research outputs – including both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed products (articles, conference papers, book chapters, monographs).

Open access can either be gratis (available online free of charge) or libre (which is accessible free of charge, with some additional usage rights29). It is also differentiated by the ways in which authors can provide for open access – in terms of either ‘green’ or ‘gold’ access. With green open access, authors may publish in any journal and then self-archive a version of the article (usually an earlier, non-peer review version) for gratis public use in an institutional or central repository, or another open access website. Meanwhile, with gold open access, researchers publish in specific open-access journals, which provide access to all of their articles, usually on the publisher’s own website. Especially for gold open access, there may be specific charges and fees involved; these should be planned for when the RUS budget is constructed.

29 Such as specific Creative Commons licenses.
VII. FURTHER RESOURCES

Example stakeholder analysis spreadsheet (with detail provided on the identified stakeholders for the REFANI project):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Interest to the project</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Material to share</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Achieving food security, eradicating hunger, eliminating poverty, economic and social progress for all</td>
<td>Sharing critical information about food and agriculture, providing relief in emergency situations, help member countries build resilience by implementing programmes</td>
<td>Findings can impact FAO’s policies on food assistance, aid in crises, and capacity building in countries - High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Research models, synthesis report, final report, links to journal publications, general nutrition news</td>
<td>Office of Corporate Communications, Economic and Social Development Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example stakeholder tracking tool:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact/focal point(s)</th>
<th>Feedback received via email</th>
<th>Social media connections/links</th>
<th>Website links</th>
<th>Future items to share (with estimated dates)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Annex 3. Research Implementation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist of Key Issues to Confirm Before Implementation of the Research Study Begins</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| All sections of the research protocol have been completed and approved, and in particular the plan for the following has been confirmed:  
- A multi-year financial and HR plan, if necessary  
- A work plan or Gantt chart indicating the main activities and milestones  
- Resources on the ground for implementation  
- Research uptake strategy, including how the results and associated benefits will be returned to the communities in which the research will be conducted | Yes/No |
| The research protocol includes roles for local and national expertise and capacity building as far as possible | Yes/No |
| The research protocol has been approved by the Project Management Group, the country program(s) and the respective pools | Yes/No |
| The research protocol has been approved by the ethics review committee(s) – scientific partner and in the target country/countries | Yes/No |
| Partnership and other contracted service provision (e.g. consultant) arrangements have been finalized i.e. contracts and/or agreements signed, including provisions regarding intellectual property and taking into account donor conditions, if applicable | Yes/No |
| Where necessary written agreements have also been put in place with stakeholders involved in the research e.g. local authorities or managers in research sites (for example if collecting data from patients at health centres) | Yes/No |
| The research protocol is/will be incorporated into the country activity plan and strategy of the relevant country programs | Yes/No |
| Funding for all research and related activities has been secured for the full time frame of the research | Yes/No |
| The resources (financial, logistical, administrative, human resources) allocated to the research project, from its kickoff until the results are distributed, are known and clearly defined | Yes/No |
| All stakeholders who will work on or have an engagement with the project have been informed and received a copy of the research protocol where necessary | Yes/No |
| A monitoring plan for the project and the associated tools have been developed | Yes/No |
| A detailed work plan and schedule of activities has been drawn up and shared with the stakeholders involved in the research project | Yes/No |
| All staff roles (ACF and partners) required for the implementation of the project on the ground and at headquarters level have been recruited or duties otherwise assigned | Yes/No |
| Training has been provided where necessary for staff and others who will take part in data collection etc. | Yes/No |
| A data protection plan including security procedures for safeguarding confidential data has been developed | Yes/No |
| Software and hardware required for data entry and analysis has been purchased where necessary | Yes/No |
ANNEX 4. Example Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

PROJECT X TITLE:
Memorandum of Understanding
For study activities undertaken in COUNTRY X
Between ACTION AGAINST HUNGER MISSION X and SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X

PROJECT DURATION (START/END DATES):

TOTAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR STUDY IMPLEMENTATION:

Together, the partners will undertake a study to examine [INSERT PROJECT OBJECTIVE]. The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to outline the roles and responsibilities of SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X (research partner) and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER (operational partner) at country level, in COUNTRY X. This MOU should be read in conjunction with any overarching contracts, grants, or agreements with the donor or other partners. For COUNTRY X this MOU takes precedence over any general consortium MOU for all matters as they relate specifically to carrying out the research in COUNTRY X, and in this way ensures the integrity of both partners with regards to roles and functions in country.

[INSERT ORGANOGRAM WITH CRITICAL REPORTING LINES OF MISSION & STUDY STAFF]

Key Points

- Whilst ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will be responsible for contracting and paying all national study staff, the line management of the Study Manager (SM) and the Deputy Study Manager (DSM) will be shared by ACTION AGAINST HUNGER and SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X. The ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X Field Coordinator will be responsible for the day-to-day management, and the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER’S Principal Investigator (PI) will be responsible for all technical management.

- Whilst ACTION AGAINST HUNGER holds the study budget, the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI retains the right to move money between budget lines, up to a maximum change of 9% per cost chapter (specifically: Long Term Personnel, Short Term Personnel, Total Project Expenses), in order to meet study needs and ensure the research outcomes meet global study design standards. Any such change will be made with approval of ACTION AGAINST HUNGER Finance Coordinator in COUNTRY X. Any alterations above 9%, and any proposed changes to the overall budget, will be submitted by the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER to ACTION AGAINST HUNGER (both Finance Coordinator and Head of Programs) in writing.

- A Steering Committee will convene once a month to discuss progress and any key issues, including spending updates, in order to ensure all parties remain informed and updated.
• Both SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will actively pursue any avenues that may contribute towards the Research Uptake Strategy (RUS). When possible, both SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will provide any RUS-related information, as and when required.

• SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will work closely on the above points to ensure that there is consensus from both partners on key decisions. Both partners will demonstrate commitment to the partnership and will actively foster a harmonious working relationship. In the unlikely event that SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER disagree on a particular issue and cannot reach a consensus, the matter will be escalated to the Steering Committee.

• This MOU may be amended over the course of the project, if agreed in writing by both ACTION AGAINST HUNGER and SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X.

Specific roles and responsibilities of SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X

General

• Lead the design of the study, working closely with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER to ensure relevance, feasibility and acceptability.

• Keep ACTION AGAINST HUNGER-HQ updated on any changes to the study, and consult ACTION AGAINST HUNGER-HQ as and when necessary prior to changes being made.

• Oversee submission of finalised study protocol to the National Ethics Board.

• Visit study site for ‘key’ events, and keep ACTION AGAINST HUNGER updated as to when these trips will be, how long for, and what is required from ACTION AGAINST HUNGER to facilitate.

• Ensure that appropriate data protection and security procedures are followed, including anonymising data in publicly available databases and reports.

• Adhere to all relevant ACTION AGAINST HUNGER policies and procedures.

• The SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PM will lead on obtaining necessary inputs from ACTION AGAINST HUNGER for the quarterly and annual narrative reporting using the provided templates. SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X will submit a final draft to ACTION AGAINST HUNGER-HQ for validation and further inputs if necessary, before submitting to lead agency of the consortium or the donor.

• ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will lead on financial reporting for the study budget, and will share a validated financial report with the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PM in case any expenditure needs to be referenced in the narrative.

Recruitment of staff

• In close collaboration with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X, SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X will lead the recruitment of all study staff per ACTION AGAINST HUNGER policy. This includes:
  o determining the profile and number of personnel required;
  o the staffing organogram required to deliver on the study activities;
  o the design and wording of all job descriptions and adverts;
- liaising with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X regarding where to place job adverts and lead on placement;
- being the primary contact for all interested candidates;
- short-listing of candidates, which may or may not include telephone interviews (to be conducted jointly with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X)
- scheduling and conducting face-to-face interviews, (to be conducted jointly with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X)
- taking the final decision on who to hire and at what level of seniority. Contract specifics will be determined by ACTION AGAINST HUNGER.

Management of study staff

- The SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI will be responsible for the technical line management of the SM and the DSM. Specific management areas include: realising any training needs and gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed at the start of the study; safeguarding the questionnaire content during the piloting process (in case of any changes identified); sensitisation of the study process and trouble-shooting technical problems that may arise during data collection, such as equipment faults and attrition of the sample; ensuring the correct procedures are carried out to support quality control of data collection (quantitative and qualitative); supporting reporting and paper writing.
- Ensure all study staff are clear as to their roles, as well as their reporting lines and communications responsibilities, and reinforce this as and when necessary.
- Design and agree a communication strategy with SM and ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X Field Coordinator in advance of the study starting in order to ensure clear communication lines between all parties. This will be in addition to the monthly meeting of the steering committee.
- Ensure all program-documentation is archived at the completion of the project per ACTION AGAINST HUNGER programme management procedures.

Financial Management

- Actively keep up to date with spending on the study budget.
- If the study requires it, flag and discuss any budgetary issues, such as the need to move money between budget lines, in a timely manner.
- Adhere to ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X financial policies and procedures for the management of study budget.

Equipment

- SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X will clearly detail what equipment is necessary for the study, how many units are required, and at what level of quality. ACTION AGAINST HUNGER will then procure the equipment per ACTION AGAINST HUNGER procedures using the technical specifications as agreed with the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER.
- The SM will keep abreast of equipment maintenance and request replacements as and when necessary.
Specific roles and responsibilities of ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

General

- Lead on the implementation of the study interventions and ensure appropriate timeliness to coincide with the study data collection.
- Support the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER to submit protocols to National Ethics Board.
- Partake in any discussions concerning the study and changes to the study.
- Keep SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI informed and up to date on all matters related to the intervention, particularly those issues that directly or significantly affect the study, as will be specified in the communication strategy.
- Support SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X with visits to COUNTRY X for the PI and PM, specifically through providing accommodation at the ACTION AGAINST HUNGER guesthouse, transportation in the form of ACTION AGAINST HUNGER cars (when available), and briefing on security procedures.
- Support SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X with visa applications through timely provision of invitation letters.
- Arrange for the translation of any documents.
- Ensure SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X has been fully briefed on ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X policies and procedures relevant to the study including security, and ensure that all necessary documents are supplied.

Recruitment of staff

- Process job descriptions and provide SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI with a list of places to advertise study jobs.
- Place adverts as and when agreed with the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI.
- Sit in on telephone interviews in order to shortlist potential candidates, as well as attending face-to-face interviews.
- Draw up contracts in line with ACTION AGAINST HUNGER policies and procedures.
- Ensure all new recruits are fully briefed on all relevant ACTION AGAINST HUNGER policies and procedures.

Management of staff

- The ACTION AGAINST HUNGER COUNTRY X Field Coordinator will provide day-to-day management of the SM and the DSM. Specific management responsibilities include ensuring that they follow ACTION AGAINST HUNGER office policies including finance, HR and logistics, communicate actively within the team, oversee their day-to-day management of ACTION AGAINST HUNGER staff, and maintain coordination with support departments. Any serious disciplinary issues or concerns, requiring discipline or dismissal, will be flagged to the steering committee for follow-up.
- Support the SM and DSM with the necessary training requirements to carry out the research e.g. anthropometric training, electronic data collection
• Work closely with SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X to design and implement a communications strategy to ensure clear communication lines regarding the study.

Financial Management

• Ensure SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X is kept informed on spending, highlighting potential issues and consulting with PI and PM regarding any change from planned expenditure above 9% per cost chapter.
• Work closely with SCIENTIFIC PARTNER PI to enable movement of money between budget lines, up to 9% per cost chapter, if requested by the PI.
• Provide quarterly reports per the provided quarterly reporting template.
• Alert SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X of any changes that may impact the fiscal needs of the programme.
• Ensure expenditures made under the activity are maintained according to ACTION AGAINST HUNGER Accountancy practices and follow all in-country financial procedures.
• Ensure the any in-country costs incurred by ACTION AGAINST HUNGER on behalf of SCIENTIFIC PARTNER X are invoiced to the SCIENTIFIC PARTNER’S office in a timely manner.
• Ensure financial documentation is archived at project completion per ACTION AGAINST HUNGER financial procedures.

Equipment

• Assist the PI to source required equipment, and procure all necessary units as per the PI’s directives, prior to the study start.
• Track procurement of equipment, and alert PI and PM to any delays or issues.
• Alert SM and PI to any issues or problems with study-related equipment, and support the sourcing of replacements as required.
• Ensure study staff have all necessary IT equipment needed to run the study, within budget (computers, software etc.), and that they have access to IT services to resolve any issues, such as de-bugging a computer.