Flagship 3: Food Safety

Highlight 1: Supporting International Developments in Food Safety with Quality Research, Engagement

Ensuring access to safe food is one of the most vexing development challenges low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) face, as food systems grow increasingly complex, demand for a greater variety of food grows alongside incomes, and rising levels of urbanization widen the distance between where food is grown and where it is consumed. The burden of foodborne disease falls disproportionately on LMIC: the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 98 percent of health impacts from these diseases are shouldered by developing countries. The issue is not just a health concern, however, as food systems are an enormous source of jobs throughout the value chain: food safety risks carry economic threats, as well.

To help countries address food safety and increase their resilience to foodborne disease, A4NH researchers work at the international, regional, national, and local levels, providing high-quality, relevant research, necessary trainings, and thoughtful comments. Their efforts to build food safety capacity and enhance knowledge support policymakers, partner organizations, the private sector, donors, and other stakeholders.

In 2019, their work was profiled in a photo story produced by CGIAR, which drew attention to how A4NH researchers from the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) are working with Vietnamese smallholder farmers and traders to better understand Viet Nam’s rapidly changing food system and the tradeoffs and synergies occurring between health, inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The story followed Ly Thi Nguyen, a trader in Hanoi, and ILRI scientist Hung Nguyen, who is working with Ly and others like her who sell food in informal markets, where the majority of Vietnamese people purchase their food.

Working to understand the actors and issues at different stages along the value chain has been a hallmark of A4NH research on food safety. In 2019, Vivian Hoffman, research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, published a paper in World Development detailing these issues in LMIC, in order to highlight economic questions, practical challenges, and knowledge gaps that must be addressed.

A4NH is also focused on filling these knowledge gaps, working closely with countries to address their particular contexts. ILRI led an A4NH-supported workshop on system effects modeling for food safety researchers from Viet Nam and Cambodia, to help them better understand and design interventions for complex systems. The session, delivered to researchers from national ministries and local universities, among others, including theoretical discussion as well as technical training on practical tools for designing food safety interventions.

A strength of A4NH’s food safety research team is its commitment to working across sectors and at multiple levels—bringing a balanced, informed perspective to food safety conversations. For example, Silvia Alonso, senior scientist–epidemiologist at ILRI, was invited to speak at the African Union Special Event on Trade of Safe Food in Free Trade Areas at the first FAO/WHO/AU International Food Safety conference in Addis Ababa in February 2019. In her remarks, she stressed the importance of addressing the health consequences as well as the economic costs of foodborne disease in Africa, while offering concrete suggestions that reached across sectors and policy levels. She highlighted the collaborative efforts and shared learning that are central to A4NH’s research strategy, in food safety and across the portfolio, and that will be critical to solving our global food safety problems moving forward.

We would like to thank all funders who supported this research through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund. Specific contributions to A4NH come from: Australia, Ireland, The Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.