

Terms of reference for a PhD in political science

Evidence-informed public policies to prevent multiple forms of malnutrition in a sub-Saharan African context

European Commission “Nutrition Research Facility” Project - 2020-2024

Context and scientific problematic

Over two billion people do not have access to healthy diets and are faced with a form of malnutrition (FAO et al., 2020), with life-long and generations-long consequences on their health and socioeconomic development (Fan et al., 2019). Despite significant progress over the past decades, improving the effectiveness of nutrition policies, programmes and interventions is critically needed to accelerate efforts to prevent malnutrition and to achieve the related SDGs by 2030.

The concept of evidence-informed (or evidence-based) policies has been increasingly put forward as a way to improve the design of nutrition policies, programmes and projects. A number of projects and initiatives have been launched recently to increase the use of research inputs into policy-making and project-design processes in the fields of nutrition and health¹. However, some of these initiatives may strongly focus on evidence-informed decision-making in a wide range of health-related topics rather than specifically in nutrition; or others may be specialised in nutrition but less engaged in fostering the dialogue between research and policymakers. More generally, although governance and public policy have emerged as critical issues to be addressed in nutrition research (Gillespie et al., 2013; Nisbett et al., 2014), the use of analytical frameworks and skills in policy science remains quite limited (Harris, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2018; Walls et al., 2019).

The Nutrition Research Facility (NRF) project² aims to improve research and evidence for better policy development and project/ programme design and monitoring & evaluation for nutrition, to be able to increase the effectiveness of policies and programmes in this crucial development area. The purpose is to address the demand for nutrition-related research that comes from decision makers in European Commission (EC) partner countries and more generally to better connect research and decision-making. The rationale of the NRF is that research based on decision-makers' demands should ensure the research undertaken is useful for them, answer their concerns and is therefore more easily and rapidly taken up in more relevant nutrition-related policies, projects and programmes ('policy-driven research for evidence-informed decision-making').

Drawing on the cognitive analysis of public policy (Jobert & Muller, 1987) and especially work on the institutional configurations of spaces for policy debates (Fouilleux, 2000; 2004; Fouilleux et Jobert, 2017), the research will explore the relationships between research and decision-making related to nutrition and analyse how such relations influence the content of policy debates and policy decisions. The overall aim will be to explore the institutional conditions under which policy-making processes

¹ See for example AFIDEP (The African Institute for Development Policy, <https://www.afidep.org/>); AEN (The Africa Evidence Network, <https://www.africaevidencenetwork.org/en/>); EVIPNet (The Evidence-Informed Policy Network, <https://www.who.int/evidence/en>).

² The Nutrition Research Facility (NRF) is funded by DEVCO and implemented by Agrinatura (2020-2024), a grouping of European universities and research organizations with a large network of partners worldwide.

could be better informed by research and evidence. More specifically, the research objectives are: i) to question the concept of evidence-informed policy (who is producing evidence, how research controversies are addressed); ii) to map/investigate who the actors using evidence are and to serve what kind of interests, etc. including tensions with agri-food industry and the implementation of certain policies that could have an economic impact for them; and iii) to explore ways to facilitate the dialogue between researchers and decision-makers on research agenda setting in a sub-Saharan African country (to be determined).

The collection of empirical data will be facilitated by the research –action work that will be conducted in Work Package 1 (led by Arlène Alpha), based on a series of consultations (workshop, interviews, on-line consultation, etc.) with the stakeholders involved in the design of nutrition policies, programmes and interventions. These stakeholders are (i) the Commission and EU Delegations (i.e. programme officers on agriculture, food security and nutrition), (ii) EU Member States (bilateral cooperation agencies), and (iii) partner countries (decision makers - e.g. high-level managers in ministries - and other stakeholders, including civil society, farmer organisations, food retailers or the private sector).

Steps during the PhD

The research will be structured in four steps:

1. A systematic literature review on the concept of evidence-informed/ based policy and tangible experiences of such policies (e.g. Sanderson, 2002), in particular in the domain of nutrition (e.g. Holdsworth et al., 2016), will be conducted. The objective is to understand the genealogy of this concept (why and in what fields it emerges), what is heard by evidence, what are the institutional conditions for its application, its advantages and limitations, etc. A scoping review on the existing national fora where policy debate in nutrition take place will help to identify the relevant locus for improving research-policy dialogue.
2. Based on one case study in a sub-Saharan African country (to be determined³), this second step will consist of analysing and mapping actors positioning regarding the role research should play in decision-making processes (representations, discourses, interests, logics, etc.), power relations and institutional configurations of decision-making processes in nutrition. This step will be based on semi-structured interviews (individual and collective), observant participation and textual analyses.
3. This third step will be to facilitate the consultation processes⁴ with decision-makers and especially the dialogue and collaboration between researchers (national and international/ NRF) and decision-makers in the relevant identified policy debate fora. The PhD student will contribute to the elaboration of an iterative methodology that helps decision-makers to express their demand for research, translate decision-makers' concerns into research questions and prioritize these questions (e.g. list of criteria developed with stakeholders to rank questions) in order to build a demand-driven research agenda. This methodology will possibly make use of innovative participatory methods (e.g. impact pathways).
4. The final step will be to analyse to what extent research findings coming from jointly defined research questions between researchers and decisions-makers are truly taken into consideration by decision-makers in the design of their policies or interventions in nutrition comparably to past experience.

³ The NRF project has a global scope with a specific interest in the 42 EU Partner Countries that prioritise nutrition (Project NRF, Annex III, p. 4). The selection of the case study will consider the possibility to work closely with a MOISA partner and to rely on existing knowledge of the institutional landscape.

⁴ The NRF project has planned three rounds of consultation, one per year, with different decision-makers.

Collaborations

The PhD student will be hosted in the UMR MOISA (CIRAD Montpellier, France) and will be part of the research team involved in the NRF project. She/he will therefore have the opportunity to fully participate to the activities of the UMR and of the project, in particular:

- Attend research theme meetings within UMR MOISA (SAND/REGULATIONS axes), NRF project meetings in Montpellier and overseas, as required, either independently or to support the project team.
- Work in collaboration with the other Work Package leaders and other members of the Nutrition Research Facility.

In addition, the PhD student will have the responsibility (in consultation with the supervisory team) to ensure that the research is conducted in accordance with relevant legislation and within the requirements of research ethics and governance, including recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent.

Supervision

The PhD will be under the supervision of Eve Fouilleux, Michelle Holdsworth and Arlène Alpha.

Eve Fouilleux is a political scientist at CNRS – LISIS (Interdisciplinary Laboratory in Sciences Innovations Societies –Gustave Eiffel University, Paris, France) and associate researcher at the research unit MOISA, CIRAD, Montpellier, France.

Michelle Holdsworth is a public health nutritionist based in the UMR NUTRIPASS (Joint Research Unit on Food & Nutrition Research in the Global South), at the IRD (French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development), in Montpellier and is Team leader of NRF WP3.

Arlène Alpha is political scientist at the research unit MOISA, CIRAD, Montpellier, France and Team leader of NRF WP1.

The student will be registered at the Ecole Doctorale OMI, at the Gustave Eiffel University, Paris, France.

Desired skills

Applicants need to provide evidence of how they meet the following criteria.

	Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications and experience			
1.	Have a Masters degree in Political science, Sociology, Public Health Nutrition or related subject, preferably with a focus on the global south.	X	
2.	Experience of undertaking evidence synthesis and producing systematic reviews, e.g. mapping review/systematic map, narrative review, critical review, rapid review, mixed methods review, scoping review		X
3.	Experience of undertaking qualitative and/or quantitative research in low- and middle-income country settings, including semi-structured interviews		X
4.	Expertise in using interdisciplinary research methods in nutrition and/or policy studies		X
5.	Experience of liaising with a range of stakeholders, decision-makers and/or other research users, preferably using participatory approaches		X
6.	Experience of identifying and implementing pathways to impact of research activities		X

Technical and management skills			
7	Knowledge of relevant software including qualitative and quantitative analysis packages, Microsoft Office, Reference management software, e.g. ENDNOTE		X
8	Ability to analyse and solve problems creatively, with an appreciation of longer-term implications.	X	
9	Ability to assess and organise resources, and plan and progress work activities.	X	
Communication skills and team working			
10	Effective communication skills, both written and verbal, report writing skills, experience of delivering presentations ; communicating to staff at all levels	X	
11	Experience of working well in an interdisciplinary team		X
12	Experience of developing and maintaining good working relationships with collaborators		X
13	Willingness to travel in Europe and in low and middle income countries, as required by the project	X	
Personal effectiveness			
14	Can demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in English and French	X	
15	Evidence of flexibility and adapting own skills to new circumstances.	X	
16	Demonstration of attention to detail	X	
17	Ability to work independently	X	

Submission of application

Applications should be sent by email to eve.fouilleux@cirad.fr , michelle.holdsworth@ird.fr and arlene.alpha@cirad.fr , by **27th September (before midnight French time)**.

Procedure:

- **27 September:** applicants are invited to send their full application which contains:
 - A CV and letter of motivation in English, explaining how you have the competencies outlined in the criteria above
 - Names and contacts of one or two referring persons (teachers, supervisors, researchers)
- **30 September:** the selected candidates will be informed and will receive the date for an interview in week 41. They will need to confirm their participation. They will be asked to write a scientific proposal of maximum 4 pages for submission before the interview.
- **1 November:** start of the PhD.

Funding

The PhD will be hired by CIRAD according to current legal allowance of 1758 euros gross per month. The PhD candidate will have full access to the working environment at the CIRAD (desk, computer, payment of mission and operating costs, access to training and research skills development).

References

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