IFPRI and University of Michigan Podcast Series on
"Ending Hunger and Malnutrition: Can It Really be Done?"
Project Overview and Lessons Learned

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Can we really rid the world of hunger and malnutrition in under a decade? In 2016-2017, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) partnered with the University of Michigan School of Public Health to create a podcast series on this very question. Eight graduate students undertook training in storytelling and then conducted fascinating interviews with the world's top policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. The interviewees shared the latest groundbreaking thinking about nutrition, from challenges facing the sector, such as climate change and urbanization, to solutions that are showing huge promise in tackling malnutrition, including biofortification, giving poor women more opportunities, and scaling up the eating of insects. The podcast episodes were released in June-August 2017. Together, they tell the story of how small and large movements—and everyday people—can help us achieve a food- and nutrition-secure world.

This short report captures the yearlong experience of putting together the podcast series. It provides a timeline of activities, the project's end results in terms of listenership, and lessons learned, in the hopes that others will be inspired to carry out similar communication projects about food security, nutrition and health, and poverty reduction.

Overview of Process

In June 2016, IFPRI released *Nourishing Millions: Stories of Change in Nutrition*, a collection of the most intriguing evidence-based case studies about nutrition from around the world. *Nourishing Millions* is a product of Compact2025, a bold new initiative facilitated by IFPRI, seeking to accelerate progress and scale up investments in ending hunger and malnutrition by 2025. One of the aims of Compact2025 is to generate knowledge, synthesizing best practices from all over the world, on how policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and civil society can jumpstart progress against hunger and malnutrition. The *Nourishing Millions* book and its associated communication products, such as brochures, an infographic, quiz, and more, have been an integral part of fulfilling the aims of Compact2025.

As *Nourishing Millions* continued its outreach activities in 2016 and 2017, IFPRI sought new ways of communicating its messages. It identified podcasting as a new opportunity. The popularity of podcasts among listeners has skyrocketed during the past five years. Nearly 40 million people have listened to a podcast during the previous month. The production of a podcast series on ending hunger and

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malnutrition by 2025 was thus approved by IFPRI management and generously funded by New Venture Funds.

In the fall of 2016, IFPRI Senior Program Manager Sivan Yosef partnered with Dr. Andrew Jones, associate professor in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, to move forward with the project. Dr. Jones created an independent study course for the Winter 2017 semester for Master of Public Health students. Eight students enrolled in the course.

A producer with experience in public radio and podcast, Zak Rosen, was hired as a consultant to provide training and support throughout the life of the project. Ms. Yosef created a list of ten podcast topics, some based on the *Nourishing Millions* chapters and others based on other interesting initiatives and research. She reached out to potential interviewees--senior researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of food and nutrition security from around the world--to secure their commitment to the project.

In January 2017, Dr. Jones held an orientation with the students and assigned two students to each podcast episode, with one serving as an interviewer and the other as a producer. During the subsequent weeks, the students received two trainings. The first training was provided by Mr. Rosen and focused on storytelling, interviewing skills, and minimal discussion of the technicalities involved with podcasting. The second training was held at the University of Michigan Groundworks media lab, where students practiced recording and interviewing one another using the media's audio equipment. In the meantime, Ms. Yosef reached out to the subjects to schedule their interviews and Mr. Rosen secured audio engineers to simultaneously record the interviews face-to-face, in order to get optimal audio.

In February 2017, students conducted extensive research on their topics and interviewers. They created 4-6 page annotated outlines on their topics, with potential questions and notes, which were submitted for feedback by Mr. Rosen, Dr. Jones, and Ms. Yosef. The students then created one-page interview guides which contained the final questions to be asked.

In March-April 2017, eleven podcast interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted on Skype and recorded from the University of Michigan's Groundworks Media Lab as well as by local sound engineers. The students and sound engineers uploaded their audio files to a cloud-based dropbox. Following the interviews, the students transcribed their full interviews. They also created communication materials for their interview, including description blurbs, blog post, Twitter and Facebook blurbs, and Lessons Learned.

In April-May 2017, Mr. Rosen edited the podcast episodes down to 8-12 minutes, with periodic feedback from Ms. Yosef. In the summer of 2017, the final podcast episodes were posted on the Compact2025, *Nourishing Millions*, IFPRI and SPH websites and social media, and were also more widely disseminated through iTunes and other popular podcast outlets.

Podcast Episodes

The project produced 11 podcast episodes:

Episode 1. "Grasshopper a la Mode" with Jacob Anankware: SoundCloud or iTunes.
Episode 2. "From the Farm to the Schoolhouse" with Catherine Bertini: Soundcloud or iTunes
Episode 3. "The Private Sector Puzzle" with Lawrence Haddad: Soundcloud or iTunes
Episode 4. "Can Nutrition Beat the Heat?" with Sam Myers: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 5. "A Million House Calls" with Regine Kopplow and Meghan Anson: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 6. "Rise of the Dragon" with Shenggen Fan: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 7. "On to the Road to 1 Billion" with Howdy Bouis: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 8. "Supersizing Big Ag" with Danielle Nierenberg: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 9. "Where Things Won't Grow" with Corey Ellis: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 10. "Does Money Really Talk?" with Akhter Ahmed: SoundCloud or iTunes
Episode 11. ""Just 12 Spoons of Sugar" with Elisabeth Donaldson: SoundCloud or iTunes

Podcast Uptake

Overall, the project was a great success.

- Eight students were trained on how to conduct, host, and produce a podcast, research complex topics related to food and nutrition security, and create effective communication materials.
- The 11 episodes and series preview received 2,700 listens through SoundCloud and 880 listens through iTunes.
- The School of Public Health's Twitter posts received 34,000 impressions
- The School of Public Health's Facebook post received 1,200 impressions.

Lessons Learned

This project was a unique opportunity to leverage a partnership between a research institute and a university to build up student capacity while creating great communication pieces on interesting food- and nutrition-security related issues. Some overarching lessons include:
- If possible, universities should create an independent study course to secure student participation for the duration of the project (4+ months). Graduate students are ideal for the level of research and communication required by the project.
- The project team composition of a professional producer, a UM professor to ensure the students' academic aims were being met, and an IFPRI project manager to bring all the pieces together, was ideal.
- A producer can be hired as a consultant to deliver effective trainings, troubleshoot technical issues, hire audio engineers, and edit the final podcast episodes. This project scheduled two trainings for the students, but more would have been ideal, especially to allow students to practice interviewing. One factor to consider is that most professional podcast shows rely on a single, experienced interviewer for all episodes. This project, on the other hand, used a

different student interviewer for each episode; furthermore, none of the students had interviewing experience. The benefits of giving the students a unique, meaningful learning experience were considered to be more important than having a perfect, consistent podcast series.

- A mix of high-level and mid-career professionals are optimal as interview subjects. High-level interviewees can draw a wide audience, but mid-career professionals have more time to devote to the project. Make sure to pay attention to diversity also in terms of gender and geography.

The students' more detailed lessons can be found below:

In preparation for our interview, we reviewed the IFPRI website among others to learn more about the interviewer and his work. We developed an initial set of questions and used our research to gain some insight on how he might answer these questions. These initial set of questions were refined into a 10-question interview guide, which was reviewed by Professor Andrew Jones, IFPRI's Sivan Yosef, and Michigan Radio's Zak Rosen. In preparation for our interviews, we learned how to use the recording booth and software, as well as storytelling techniques to create compelling podcasts.

The interview went smoothly; he was a great interviewee and provided thorough responses to all our questions. The most important lessons we learned about developing a podcast included: how to hone in a specific topic when interviewing and developing questions to create a story for a wider audience. However, more training and practice on storytelling would have been beneficial, because for many of us, it was our first time conducting interviews for a larger audience. Overall, our experience contributing to this podcast series was a great learning experience and very enjoyable. We are excited for the final podcast series to be released!

For this podcast, I researched the topic, and how the interviewee's company in particular is working on it. This interview went very well because the interviewee was very well versed in his answers and provided clear and concise explanations to my questions. This is probably because he is used to advocating for his company through public relations. I enjoyed this interview because it was based on a newer topic that is not as popular or well-known. My advice to future students would be to think outside the box when it comes to choosing a topic, and also reach out to smaller, lesser known companies because they may be able to provide more flexibility and enthusiasm than a busy company, or a high level researcher that does not have time to properly satisfy an interview.

I met my interviewee in my class during his visit to the University. I knew he was someone I wanted to interview because of his passion and persistence on the topic. I asked him some preliminary questions and read some content about the topic in class before inviting him for an interview. He was a pleasure to interview. He was flexible, cooperative, and extremely knowledgeable about the topic. He made a very compelling argument for his work, and I think it will be a very catchy topic for many listeners. With that being said, I would like to continue to interview people so I can practice my interviewing skills. If I could give any advice to future students, it would be that research and preparation is great, but at the

end of the day, stay curious, ask questions you're truly interested in, and have a natural conversation with your interviewee.

Our preparation for our interview consisted of a half day workshop on interviewing skills--led by Zak Rosen, a Michigan Radio host and local media freelancer--along with training on the tech equipment. In a second session, we worked again on the sequence of steps to ensure a successful recording, and did a couple rounds of practice interviews. Once acquainted with the logistics, we compiled a shared document and researched the interviewee's background, read up on her work, and identified interest points in the topic. One of the major challenges of this research is that it has not drawn much media attention and seems to be happening behind closed doors, so it was difficult to identify the evolution of the issue. We crafted questions trying to follow the story arc of first having the interviewee contextualize the problem---what is going on, how did we arrive at this point, followed by examples of resistance to the issue and hopes for the future. In the future I think it would be helpful to have more practice interviews so that students have more experience in how to steer the conversation. I felt that I ended up listening to podcasts on my own to get a sense of the cadence of the podcast, and was not clear to what extent the interviewer should be responsive; in some incidences it seems like interviewers will tell a bit of their own story, and some will stick to the script more and simply respond with one word before moving onto the next question. I also think this would have been helpful because I found our interview took a completely different direction than anticipated, and it was difficult to improvise and steer the conversation back to where we had been hoping to direct the conversation.

In preparation for our interview, we reviewed the IFPRI and interviewee's websites for background information. We developed an initial list of questions based on our research, and read through the interviewee's blog as well as research articles for insight on his perspective and how he might answer these questions. We combined our questions and research into an interview guide, which was refined with feedback from Professor Andy Jones, IFPRI's Sivan Yosef, and Michigan Radio's Zak Rosen. Our finalized guide included 10 questions. We completed two training sessions in advance of the interview, learning how to use the booth and recording software as well as practicing interviewing techniques.

This interview was the first of the series, and we suffered a few technical difficulties. We were unsuccessful in recording the interviewer's voice from the booth, discovering afterwards that the audio of the media lab was captured rather than the microphone in the booth. We were able to record her voice for the questions from our guide, and hope to use the recording from the interviewee's end to capture questions not in our guide. In addition at one point near the end of the call, we lost our connection to our interviewee and had to reinitiate the Skype call. While this was a minor inconvenience, we were able to pick back up where we left off without problems. With regards to the interview itself, we had a hard time coming up with follow-up questions as he was extremely thorough in his responses. When undefined terms came up, or a question about something he left out came to our minds, his next statements answered our questions before we could answer them. The interviewer had the opportunity to ask a few follow-ups that deviated from our guide, and overall, we were extremely happy with the content of our interview.

In preparation for our podcast interview, we researched our interviewee's written work and listened to some of her previous talks. From this research, we developed an annotated interview guide with questions and supporting research that answered some of these questions so that we could be informed as we conducted the interview. After editing and feedback, we narrowed down the interview guide to questions only and ordered the questions to develop an appropriate story arc. In the weeks leading up to the interview, I actively listened to other podcasts, such as Terry Gross on NPR's Fresh Air, to get a sense of how good interviewers interact with their interviewees. This built on the preparatory sessions we had with Zak Rosen about effective interviewing with podcasts. The sessions with Zak were also crucial to the success of the project since he brought to life the concept of storytelling with podcasts, including real soundbite examples of what and what not to do while interviewing. Having a second person to work with was critical for both the interview guide development process and the interview itself. It was great to have two people developing questions and discussing which questions would best address our topic, how to best word those questions, and what order they should go in. During the interview, the student producer was actively engaged in formulating new questions, suggesting which questions to jump to on the interview guide (since the interview jumped topics and did not follow the order we expected), and she also provided encouragement and support. In the future, I think it will be important to send an email to interviewees to explain the logistics of the podcast beforehand, including what a podcast is (some people don't know), the format of the podcasts (audio only, not video), and a reminder of what the project is about and its goals.

To prepare for our interview, we first created an annotated interview guide. We began by exploring what information about the interviewee and his work existed -including his publications as well as news articles and other audio segments he had been a part of. We read a few of his primary works. We designed our interview so that in the first part of the interview, we understood why he was interested in his research question, and then followed with questions we had that came out as we read his work. Having a teammate in this process worked very well. Meeting together to brainstorm questions for the interview was crucial. It helped us not only develop questions but also order them in such a way that told a story for a podcast. Without a partner, this process would have been much more time consuming. It was also really helpful to have a producer in the studio. The student producer did a great job of encouraging the host, and also typing up questions to follow up with as she had them. It was necessary to arrive 30-45 minutes early for our interview, as we found out when we got there that our reservation, for some reason, was not actually available on their system. We still had 15-20 minutes to set up, which was just enough, but it was a bit stressful! For future projects like this, encourage students to take advantage of "messing up" and asking questions a second time as a host. In our interview, we did not take advantage of that, and I think it could have sounded more professional if I could have repeated a question. It may have made it easier on Zak as well!

We conducted extensive research on our interviewee's background and publications, and it was fun to put each of the pieces together on our own in the form of a central interview question and guide. It could have been beneficial to have a bit more instruction or guidelines on the process of interview guide creation, but receiving feedback on our first draft from the teaching team was really helpful. Although I

was initially nervous to conduct the interview, conducting and listening to the interview was extremely rewarding. It was so crucial to have a producing partner and therefore a two-person team for each podcast episode--being able to check in, collaborate with, and partner with the student producer throughout the interview process from interview development to execution was critical to our success. Using the sound booth was slightly stressful on the day of the interview (it could have been helpful to have a tech team with us on the morning of), but it ended up working out totally fine. It also would be great to have some sort of follow-up with our interviewees around the release of the podcast, but I know this (or any other kind of informal networking) may not be possible due to the high-level position of our interviewees. This was a really fantastic experience! I look forward to hearing the finished product--let us know how else we can help and when we can hear it! Thanks so much.

In preparation, we reviewed the IFPRI and interviewee websites for background information. We developed an initial list of questions based on our research, and read through the interviewee's blog posts and research articles for insight on how he might answer these questions. The student producer gathered additional questions from global food security colleagues with whom she was acquainted. We combined questions and research into an interview guide, which was refined with feedback from Professor Andy Jones, IFPRI's Sivan Yosef, and Michigan Radio's Zak Rosen. Our finalized guide included 15 questions, with a number of potential follow-up questions based on what the interviewee might say. We completed two training sessions in advance of the interview, learning how to use the booth and recording software as well as practicing interviewing techniques. We had no problems with the technical aspect of this interview, though we had each previously conducted an interview and thus already worked out the technological kinks. As the software used for the recording, Camtasia, did not show the sound waves as they were recorded, we had some fear we were not recording and might recommend an alternative program that shows the sound as it is recorded. With regards to interviewing technique, additional practice would have been helpful. Having a thorough guide with 15 questions was extremely valuable, but with more practice, the interviewer would have felt better prepared to generate follow-ups based on the interviewee's responses and would have stuck less to the script. That being said, having two students present for the interview did help in this regard, as the interviewer had a second ear for listening and mind for developing responsive questions.

My interview proceeded much more seamlessly than previous ones, likely as a result of previous practice. I would advise to students to be well-versed in the area before they embark on a podcast, and that this helps to dig into more penetrating questions. There was an instance where the interviewee could not answer my question due to conflict of interest, which is unfortunate, but I think generally these are the kinds of questions that make for interesting interviews. One area I would advise for practice in the future is a workshop on how to start and conclude the conversation---once the ark of the conversation was established, proceeding was easy, but knowing how to begin and end conversation in a polished way was something I and others struggled with. Another subtle area of practice was knowing how to respond to their statements--do you always acknowledge what's said? Or do you ask another question? These are some of the subtler pieces that I feel could be refined in future projects.