

Call for Expressions of Interest

Catalysing change for healthy and sustainable food systems in Eastern Africa

Overview

Canada's [International Development Research Centre](#) (IDRC) is pleased to announce a new funding opportunity to advance the generation and use of context-specific evidence that will drive changes in food systems and enable healthy and sustainable diets in Eastern Africa.

This funding opportunity will form part of a new Initiative, the goal of which is to improve the health and wellbeing of low-income and vulnerable populations who face the double burden of malnutrition and environmental threats like climate change. The Initiative focuses on improving the **relative market competitiveness** of protective, healthy foods, individual and community vulnerabilities to unhealthy food environments, and drivers of food purchasing habits that may be important targets for shifting low income and vulnerable populations toward healthier diets.

This Initiative will support the consolidation of existing evidence and synthesis of new evidence for multidisciplinary approaches that address the global challenge of achieving healthy and sustainable diets as a means of curbing the high levels of malnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The Initiative seeks robust and innovative research that enhances understanding of which policies and interventions promote the **relative affordability and availability** of nutritious and sustainable food and contribute to healthier and more sustainable food systems.

Expressions of interest are invited from organisations based in low- and middle-income countries for project ideas that will generate evidence and knowledge for use in addressing the complex challenge of transforming food systems to achieve healthy and sustainable diets in Eastern Africa. Research objectives should be demonstrably of relevance to and designed with decision makers and influencers of change.

Geographic focus: Proposed research must take place in one or more of the following Eastern African countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

Duration of research grants: Between 12 – 36 months.

Budget: Between CAD\$300,000 and \$1M per project. Grants will be awarded subject to the availability of funds.

Contact email: fehcalls@idrc.ca

Deadline for Submission: Friday 26 June 2020 (17:00 Eastern Daylight Time)

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Background and rationale

Over the past five decades, global food systems and human dietary patterns have changed substantially, with shifts from traditional diets predominantly composed of healthier, minimally processed foods towards modern diets laden with unhealthy processed food imposing significantly greater burden on the environment. These dietary patterns are primary contributors to the rampant rise in global malnutrition – 2 billion people are obese, 820 million are undernourished, 2 billion are micro-deficient and 150 million children are stunted.

Moreover, the transitions in food systems and food consumption are also damaging and degrading natural ecosystems through exploitative and unsustainable land-use practices. For example, food production is responsible for up to 30% of global greenhouse-gas emissions. Finally, new dietary changes around the world are promoting or further exacerbating social and economic inequities, with already vulnerable populations disproportionately facing health and environmental burdens which result from inadequate food systems.

Of central importance in the Global South is the relative affordability and availability of healthy foods. Not only are the prices of protective foods such as fruits and vegetables often significantly higher than calorically dense but nutritionally poor foods, but these price disparities become even more important in low and middle-income countries where households can spend between 65 and 80 percent of their gross incomes on food. As a result, vulnerable households have been observed to shift their consumption towards more affordable, energy dense but nutritionally poor foods. Moreover, household pressures towards the consumption of unhealthy foods is further exacerbated by economic and environmental stressors including the impact of climate change on the volatility of food prices.

In response to these interconnected challenges, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is launching a new initiative to catalyse change for healthy and sustainable food systems. The goal of the Initiative is to improve the health and wellbeing of low-income and vulnerable populations who face the double burden of malnutrition and environmental threats like climate change. The Initiative focuses on improving the **relative market competitiveness** of protective, healthy foods, individual and community vulnerabilities to unhealthy food environments, and drivers of food purchasing habits that may be important targets for shifting low income and vulnerable populations toward healthier diets.

The Initiative will include support to robust and innovative research that enhances understanding of which policies and interventions promote greater market competitiveness of nutritious and sustainable food and contribute to healthier and more sustainable food systems. The need to address these evidence gaps is particularly dire in low- and middle-income countries where research capacity and data systems may be weak, and where resources are lacking to meet the demand for local evidence.

Geographically, this Initiative will focus on Eastern Africa where the burden of malnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases is on the rise. In Kenya and Tanzania for example, premature deaths due to diabetes increased by 31 percent and 42 percent respectively between 2007 and 2017. The prevalence of overweight and obesity is significantly high particularly among adult women in the region; ranging from 10 percent in Ethiopia, 35 percent in Uganda and up to as high as 52 percent in Tanzania. Across all countries in the region for which recent data is available, the levels of consumption of adequate quantities of fruits and vegetables is well below the World Health Organisation's recommendation of at least five servings per day. In Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda for example, less than three percent of the adult population met this recommendation. At the same time, the Eastern African region still faces a persistence of undernutrition, and its agri-food systems remain highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

There are strong indications that food systems in Eastern Africa can and need to change in order to address all forms of malnutrition. Specifically, there is a need for evidence-informed policies and innovation aimed at increasing the affordability and accessibility of protective foods relative to unhealthy, ultra-processed foods. Through previous and existing investments in the region, IDRC, with other funders, aims to enable progress at the country or regional level and stimulate action among food-system players.

Objectives and scope of the Call

This funding opportunity is a means to establish new research collaborations and projects that can generate robust evidence for enhanced understanding of which policies and interventions promote greater market competitiveness of nutritious and sustainable food and contribute to healthier and more sustainable food systems.

Applications are encouraged to address topics relevant to at least one of the following outcomes:

1) Public policies, driven by scientific evidence, which increase the affordability and accessibility of protective foods relative to unhealthy, ultra-processed foods

Possible topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Research to characterize effective policy interventions (e.g. fiscal measures, trade policies, and other economic and structural interventions) that increase the affordability of protective foods relative to non-protective foods
- Research to promote greater equity and coherence in public policies to deliver benefits to environmental sustainability, greater population health, and inclusion and health equity of women, low-income populations and other vulnerable groups

- Research on the economics of protective vs non-protective foods (including price and income elasticity, consumer willingness to pay, and a true costing of food which incorporates health and environmental sustainability impacts)
- Research on retail and market structures, urban design and community infrastructure, food supply chains, and food provisioning mechanisms (including public procurement systems) and their potential to increase the accessibility and availability of protective foods
- Research to integrate health, nutrition and environmental considerations into food consumption indicators (such as food composition tables and food-based dietary guidelines)
- Research on the environmental and economic impacts (including co-benefits and trade-offs) of protective foods, particularly on different population groups

2) Enhanced rules, conditions, dynamics of business environments which shift the behaviours of markets towards the production and consumption of affordable protective foods

Possible topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Identify policy levers or market policies that promote and enable local and regional businesses to develop and/or invest in value chains that deliver affordable protective foods, particularly to vulnerable groups.
- Characterize the impacts of business models and practices on vulnerable groups (including women, girls, low-income populations) and environmental sustainability goals.
- Identify community innovations (e.g. Stokvels), business models (e.g. healthy food cooperatives, certification systems, etc.), and value chain approaches, as well as their barriers and enablers, to promote the supply of protective foods particularly to vulnerable groups
- Explore innovative technologies and processes (including climate-smart innovations) that can improve the efficiency and relative market competitiveness of protective foods.

3) Empowerment of consumers and civil society groups which generate greater local demand for affordable and sustainable protective foods and promote effective and accountable public policies

Possible topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Research to understand LMIC populations and their experiences with their food environments, describing the root drivers of their dietary patterns including socio-cultural factors that enable or hinder consumption of protective foods.
- Explore different modalities of promotion, advertising, behavioral nudges, and information/education related to protective foods and their relative cost-effectiveness.

- Map and support local voices, civil society organizations, community platforms, and other social movements to create market demand and public policy accountability for protective foods.

EOIs may target one or more of the above outcome areas with the amount of eligible funding in proportion to the scale and scope of proposed activities. Research activities should aim to inform policy debates and policy development, engage with and stimulate demand from policy actors, and communicate research results effectively and in appropriate formats.

Out of scope

To maintain a strategic and focused approach, we note that the following types of projects are outside the scope of this Call:

- purely descriptive research on diet-related problems;
- purely clinical, epidemiological or observational studies;
- establishment or continuation of cohorts
- research directed at non-communicable diseases that does not incorporate food systems approaches.
- projects solely focused on education, social marketing, and/or individual behaviour change;
- product development, enrichment, fortification, or reformulation of individual food commodities;
- projects solely focused on improving food production, quantity, and/or access;
- projects solely focused on food safety.

Project Requirements

Eligible projects must reflect elements of the following:

Strengthening research leadership in LMICs and building multi-stakeholder partnerships

to effectively implement solutions with measurable impacts at scale. To help support and grow research leadership on healthy diets from sustainable food systems, we encourage projects that support field- or network-building through activities such as inter-academic training and fellowship arrangements; consortia or networks of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners; and support for communities of practice, academic chairs, or centres of excellence.

Promoting healthy diets from sustainable food systems requires **broad alliances for action across sectors** (e.g. agriculture, health, nutrition, education, environment, economics, and social development) and between multiple actors (government, civil society, business, academia, non-profit organizations). For this reason, we support research that applies a multi-disciplinary and multi-sector approach to guide changes in food systems for population impact.

IDRC requires research ideas that are founded on **social and gender equity, cultural sensitivity and economic viability**. Proposed research must be designed and implemented as much as possible to meet the needs of various vulnerable groups including women and girls, encourage consumption of healthy local foods, account for culinary traditions, and protect the natural environment and resources in the long term. Research is also encouraged that is specifically focused on gender equity dimensions of measures and solutions aimed at promoting healthy diets from sustainable food systems (see Annex A for further details).

This Call is launched amid the ongoing **COVID19 pandemic**. Recognising that the pandemic is likely to take several months to resolve, applicants are encouraged to submit ideas that consider the **immediate and long-term impacts of the pandemic** on regional and local food systems in Eastern Africa. Research is sought on innovative solutions that increase the capacity of food systems, particularly informal food systems, to be resilient to current and future pandemic shocks, while ensuring increased market competitiveness of/demand for healthy and sustainable food.

Geographic focus

Geographically, the initiative will focus on five countries in Eastern Africa (**Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda**) where the burden of food-related NCDs is on the rise, undernutrition persists, and where there is a significantly high vulnerability of agricultural and food systems to the impact of climate change.

Eligibility criteria

The lead applicant organization must have a legal corporate registration in an eligible LMIC country and must be legally eligible to conduct research in any of the five countries of focus – Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda or Tanzania (see Annex B for further details). The lead applicant must also be a citizen or permanent resident with a primary work affiliation in an LMIC.

International organizations (except United Nations organizations and members of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research [CGIAR]) are eligible to apply as co-applicant organizations (developing country collaborators), provided that they have regional chapters or offices with appropriate legal status to operate and manage funds in the five eligible countries where the research will take place. United Nations organizations and CGIAR centers receive significant Canadian funds via other funding windows and shall not apply to this Call as applicant organizations. They may, however, be included in applications by lead applicants as third-party organizations or consultants.

IDRC will only negotiate funding agreements with the lead applicant organizations of selected proposals. These lead applicant organizations will negotiate and develop funding arrangements directly with third-party organizations for specific services. IDRC will not contract directly with third-party organizations. Applications that involve third-party organizations must clearly justify their involvement and explain their role(s). Note that third-party organizations are not required

to be located in the eligible countries. The guideline for total third-party participation in a project remains a maximum of 20% of the budget.

Funding modality

Applications from existing or proposed research consortia are highly encouraged. Any consortium applying to this Call should consist of at least two collaborating organizations (and/or networks) that integrate complementary kinds of knowledge and expertise. Organizations and networks in the consortium may be from a single or multiple low- or middle-income countries. EOIs should outline the nature of the consortium and how partner organizations will work together. Selected EOIs that are invited to submit full proposals will be required to outline in their submission a strategy for knowledge systematization and management that fosters active engagement of all collaborating partners during project implementation as well as a strategy for disseminating research findings with broader national and international stakeholder groups.

Budget and duration of research grants

Project duration should be between 12 and 36 months, including all research activities and final reporting. **A detailed budget is not required to be submitted with the EOIs.** An indicative budget total and or summary will suffice at this stage.

Applying to the Call

Interested organisations should submit an Expression of Interest with supporting documents based on the criteria above, by email to the following account: fehcalls@idrc.ca with the subject title "Submission: Call for EOI" by 17.00 PM EDT on Friday 26/06/2020. Applications must be submitted in English or French and limited to **three pages, Arial font, size 11, single spaced, normal margins.**

Applications must include the following documents: A signed letter of support from collaborating organizations if any and a short biography of the lead applicant and co-leads for consortia applications.

We will inform all applicants about a decision no later than 31/07/2020. Please note that we are unable to provide specific feedback on each submitted EOI. Applicants will simply be notified by the given date on whether their EOI has been shortlisted to the next stage of the review process. IDRC reserves the right to cancel the process at any time without prior notice and/or at its discretion to grant all or none of the awards under this Call. Moreover, grants will only be awarded subject to the availability of funding.

EOI content

Cover page

- Project title
- Country or countries where the research is taking place
- Name and full address of the applicant institution
- Name, title, work affiliation and email addresses of the principal investigator(s)
- Total amount of funding requested and project duration

EOI content, 3 pages maximum

- Brief problem statement
- Objectives, as they relate to the objective of the Call for EOI
- Methodology brief
- Clear rationale as how this research will align with:
 - The Research Themes covered in the Objectives section
 - and the cross-cutting considerations/requirements
- Team composition and credentials
- Dissemination strategy and anticipated outcomes
- Estimated budget (total amount with brief notes and justification)
- Project duration (in months)

Key dates

Deadline for optional letter of intent:	12 06 2020
Deadline for submitting an EOI:	26 06 2020
Successful applicants will be invited to develop full proposals:	31 07 2020
Deadline for submitting full proposals, no later than:	28 08 2020

Contact for further Information

Any inquiries related to the Call and application process should be sent by e-mail to the Food, Environment, and Health program at fehcalls@idrc.ca.

Annex A - Ensuring research ideas are rooted in social and gender equity, cultural sensitivity and economic viability

This Call recognizes the fundamental importance of supporting research ideas that are rooted in social and gender equity, cultural sensitivity and economic viability. In order to develop a full and nuanced understanding of local food systems and entry points for promoting positive transformation, it is critical for research projects to strongly consider investigating the roles of sex, gender and other diverse identities and experiences and their relationship to the history, structures and functioning of food systems.

Sex, gender, ethnicity, income, socio-cultural standing, and other diverse identities, all shape the experiences that people have vis-à-vis their local food system. These differential experiences thus have important implications for finding sustainable solutions that can have a meaningful impact on people's lives.

To this end, an intersectional and multi-dimensional gender approach ought to shape all aspects of proposed research projects including their design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination activities. In practical terms, this Call will give preference to research ideas that:

- seek to understand the root causes of inequality and recognize the importance of multiple vulnerabilities and identities (since gender intersect with race, ethnicity, ability, age, religion, class, caste, and other factors);
- consider how different identities and vulnerabilities could play important roles in the design, implementation, analysis and communication of research projects (such as in project priorities, team skills, scope, budget, data collection and analysis, and project outputs);
- depending on local context, ensure that research outputs reflect the importance of different identities (for example, ensuring that research data systematically captures and reports on sex, gender, class, ethnicity, etc.); and
- are designed and/or implemented in ways that are accessible and affordable to all, encourage consumption of healthy local foods, account for culinary traditions, and protect the natural environment and resources in the long term.

This approach will strike a balance between ambition and pragmatism. It recognizes that actions to address gender and other social inequalities require doing the groundwork to interrogate and surface the ultimate root causes of inequality, while at the same time recognizing that changing gendered structural dynamics takes time, trust, and long-term commitments to policies and practices.

Annex B - Authorization Requirements

IDRC has conducted general agreements for scientific and technical cooperation with a number of governments. These agreements establish the framework for IDRC cooperation with that country by defining the rights and obligations of both IDRC and the government. As such, the applicant institution may be required to obtain approval from the host country in accordance with these agreements prior to receiving funding from IDRC. This requirement applies only for selected applications. IDRC reserves the right to not pursue the funding of a selected project if the country approval is not secured within six months after IDRC officially announces approval of the project, as this would jeopardize the timely completion of the initiative.

Applicants must [meet minimum requirements](#) to receive an IDRC grant. Any selected proponents shall be required to sign IDRC's standard Grant Agreement, as amended by IDRC from time to time. Furthermore, IDRC reserves the right to cancel the granting process at any time without prior notice and/or reserves the right to grant - at its discretion - all or none of the awards under this process. The grant agreement will provide a schedule for submitting interim and final technical and financial reports.