AFRICAN ECONOMIC RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Policy Analysis for Sustainable and Healthy Foods in African Retail Markets
(PASHFARM)

Background

Established in 1988, African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) has grown to be a premier capacity building institution for the advancement of research and graduate training to inform economic policies in Africa. The consortium's mandate and strategic mission is built on the basis that sustained development in sub-Saharan Africa requires well trained, locally based professional economists. A highly integrated knowledge organization spanning research, training, and policy outreach, AERC is now a vast network of universities, policy makers, researchers, educators, and international resource persons.

The AERC Collaborative Research program addresses topical policy relevant issues and brings together seasoned researchers from both Africa and elsewhere to generate policy-oriented research. Collaboration enables researchers to tackle complex yet contemporary research issues with a bearing on policy making in Africa that otherwise could not be adequately addressed by one or a few researchers and leverages the diverse skills of the various researchers in the project to deliver high quality research outputs. This call requires multidisciplinary research teams comprising economists, nutritionists, and gender experts, among others as demanded by a specific research proposal.

The Project and Its Context

Governments and development agencies seek to encourage and increase the consumption of safe, affordable, nutritious diets year-round. However, there are many barriers to achieving this goal in sub-Saharan Africa. These include affordability and accessibility of nutritious foods in markets serving low-income consumers, and infrastructure constraints. These impose high transport costs leading to food loss and unsafe food going to lower market segments. This creates an environment of food markets that are focused on higher-income consumers that supply significant volumes of processed, unhealthy, or less nutritious foods. This research project focuses on gaining a better understanding of the production, how market structures or segmentations can be organized, and then how policies can incentivize market actors, including food SMEs, to supply safe, affordable nutritious foods to low-income urban and rural consumers, thus navigate across different segments of the market. The research will cover sub-Saharan African countries which comprise the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) network. AERC believes that well-functioning markets will stimulate productivity downstream and incomes upstream. The research activities are expected to generate insights into the functioning of food markets for better nutrition outcomes.

Recently, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) awarded a grant to AERC to undertake rigorous research on Policy Analysis for Sustainable and Healthy Foods in African Retail Markets (PASHFARM) for informed policy development, program design and improved consumption of healthy diets. This inquiry is necessary considering the sub-optimal food environment under which nutritious food is produced, handled, and conveyed to consumers.

The Objectives

This is a call for expression of interest to participate in the AERC Collaborative Research project on policy analysis for sustainable and healthy foods in African retail markets. The objectives of this research are to investigate the impact of the food environment and policy on acquisition and consumption of nutritious foods, and ultimately, health and nutrition outcomes in SSA. A better understanding of the food environment pathways will support the improvement of policy development and program design for improved nutrition outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Turner *et. al.* (2018), the main domains through which individuals acquire and consume food are personal (accessibility, affordability, convenience, and desirability) and external domains (availability, prices, vendor and product properties, and marketing and regulations).

Despite efforts by governments and development agencies, malnutrition persists among the sub-Saharan Africa population. According to Iriti *et. al*. (2022), worldwide prevalence of undernourishment and food insecurity has been steadily increasing despite the United Nations' Zero Hunger target by 2030. Unhealthy diets are a major cause of non-communicable diseases that directly or indirectly contribute to an increase in obesity and malnutrition. For instance, Faria (2022) notes that Rwanda had the most acute malnutrition, with 38.3% of infants lacking access to adequate nutrition while 36.8% of children aged 0-4 years suffered chronic malnutrition in Ethiopia.

In this investment, AERC seeks to utilize the lessons learnt from a previous nutrition research project (AFPON) and focus studies on the food environment, the role of markets in food supply chains and consumer preference, pricing, affordability, and access to nutritious foods by households in sub-Saharan Africa.

Indicative Research Topics for Competitive Grants

The BMGF-AERC Collaborative Research project will consider a wide range of proposals that address the objectives outlined above, based on selection criteria explained in the section below. To guide the kinds of projects that the CR project will support, we present a list of indicative topics. These are only indicative, and we welcome other topics that are consistent with the project objectives:

- *The barriers that food SMEs face in providing low-income consumers with safe, affordable, nutritious foods. These include gendered barriers to women-owned food SMEs in participating in markets serving low-income consumers.*
- *Compliance costs and requirements that food SMEs incur by market segment; impact of compliance costs on product pricing.*
- *How governments can support or incentivize food SMEs (including women-owned) to supply low-income consumers with safe, affordable, and nutritious foods; how incentive schemes can be designed to address specific barriers faced by SMEs owned by women, young adults, or marginalized groups.*
- *Impact of price volatility on consumers' food expenditure and consumption decisions.*
- *Contributions and cost-effectiveness of investments and policies to improve market infrastructure.*
- *Information content of foods in the markets and their monitoring mechanisms.*
- *Varieties of nutritious foods available from various food outlets and how this availability influences their consumption.*
- *Cost-effective policies or programs to address the affordability constraint on nutritious foods.*
- *Consumer trust in food quality by gender and its impact on consumer expenditure decisions.*
- *Policy incentivizes for purchase of safe and nutritious foods and whether policies take gender-specific differences in consumer perceptions and expenditure decision-making into account.*
- *Drivers of accessibility to nutritious diets among the low- income groups.*
- *Size and growth rate of 'Ready-to-Eat (RTE)' food market; impact of RTE foods on nutrition outcomes in SSA; and potential for healthy 'Ready-to-Eat (RTE)' foods in SSA.*
- *Contributions and cost-effectiveness of investments and policies in improving farm-level productivity.*

This call is for research proposals for framework papers (i.e., background papers as part of the AERC Collaborative Research project on *Policy Analysis for Sustainable and Healthy Foods in African Retail Markets*). Submitted proposals will be reviewed by external experts, and acceptable proposals will be selected for grant awards of up to US$40,000 per project. This will be followed by an inception workshop involving the selected researchers, resource persons, and others. The researchers will then carry out the research within a calendar year and present their findings in workshops organized by AERC. Project outputs are normally published in journal/book volumes by reputable publishers and other outlets and disseminated widely. Each project will be required to develop at least 1 peer reviewed paper published in a highly reputed journal and at least 1 policy brief complete with costs that governments may incur when implementing the policy and public investment recommendations.

Requirements and Key Dates
- Proposals must consist of: (i) a maximum of 15 pages setting out the issues to be analyzed together with the methods to be used (ii) a CV for each author indicating nationality, gender, and full contact details. Submit your proposals by March 10, 2023,

to:

- Authors of proposals will be informed of the decision of the reviews by May 15, 2023.

Eligibility Requirements

To qualify, the lead researcher should be a senior scholar/researcher who has worked and/or published extensively in the areas of *policy analysis for sustainable and healthy foods*. We are interested in applications proposing innovative use of quantitative, qualitative, experimental, or mixed methods techniques that demonstrate potential to address programmatic and development needs. Qualified women are encouraged to apply.

Reference Materials

Several institutions and projects have been carrying out research on agricultural policies, food, nutrition, and health. These include the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy; Innovative Methods and Metrics for Agriculture and Nutrition Actions (IMMANA); and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), among others. It is important that researchers refer to these materials for guidance and avoid duplication of effort. Here below are links to some of the recommended references for researchers:

Masters, W.A., A.B. Finaret and S.A. Block, 2022. The economics of malnutrition: Dietary transition and food system transformation. Handbook of Agricultural Economics, volume 6, edited by C.B. Barrett and D.R. Just. Amsterdam: Elsevier. Free preprint: https://arxiv.org/abs/2202.02579

Lele U., W.A. Masters, J. Kinabo, J.V. Meenakshi, B. Ramaswami, and J. Tagwireyi, 2016. Measuring Food and Nutrition Security: An Independent Technical Assessment and User's Guide for Existing Indicators, at the Food Security Information Network. FAO, Rome. Online at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/measuring-food-and-nutrition-security-independent-technical-assessment-and-users-guide .

INDDEX Project, 2018. Data4Diets: Building Blocks for Diet-related Food Security Analysis. Tufts University, Boston, MA. Online at: https://inddex.nutrition.tufts.edu/data4diets .

IMMANA Project, 2022. Support Centre for Agriculture and Nutrition Research (SCANR) -- Research Guidance. Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) Academy, London. Online at: https://www.anh-academy.org/scanr ."