

Call for Consultants:

Consulting on data availability and use about food markets in Africa

Period of performance: January 2024 - June 2025

Summary

The Food Prices for Nutrition (FPN) project at Tufts University is seeking one or more consultants for a scoping study on the availability, use and need for data analysis to guide action on food markets in Africa. The consultancy will begin in January 2024, towards completion of a complete draft study in early December 2024 and a revised final version in June 2025. The consultant(s) would work closely with FPN staff and graduate students, under the direction of Prof. William Masters. A description of the entire project is here: <https://sites.tufts.edu/foodpricesfornutrition>

Background

The FPN project was founded in 2020 to scale up use of analytical methods that convert data on food availability and prices into new metrics of access and affordability of healthy diets worldwide. These metrics match a user's dataset of market prices for diverse items to their food composition, and then identify the lowest cost combination of foods to meet a population's needs each day. Using least-cost items by food group to track access and affordability was introduced in a pilot study of costs for diet diversity in Ghana and Tanzania ([Masters et al. 2018](#)), then expanded in a series of studies for other countries and used for global monitoring by the FAO and the World Bank, based on the lowest cost per day to meet a global target based on national dietary guidelines known as the Cost and Affordability of Healthy Diets ([Herforth et al. 2023](#)).

Scope of Work

The consultancy for January 2024 through June 2025 is to conduct a scoping study on the availability, use and need for data analysis to guide market participants involved in the production, transformation, and distribution of food in Africa. By 'scoping study' we mean a summary of findings, perhaps 10-20 pages in length, accompanied by a detailed annex of data obtained on the elements described below. The ultimate deliverable is a draft in early December 2024 to be revised by June 2025 that describes:

- The extent of **food price and availability data** now or potentially being collected and used, in two categories:
 - Public-sector price monitoring, by national statistical organizations for their consumer price index as well as country and regional market information and early warning systems, updating previous published work ([Bai et al. 2021](#)); and
 - Proprietary price monitoring currently or potentially done by private data providers, including direct observations at local marketplaces, webscraped data from online vendors, barcode scanner data obtained at or after purchase, and related market information.
- The potential for **private-sector actors** in African food markets to use analyses of food items' nutritional, environmental and social characteristics, including details on the characteristics of greatest interest for which data could be obtained, along with any available descriptions past, current or potential use of public and proprietary data to inform decision making by enterprises such as:

- Local supermarket operators, online vendors, food manufacturers and distributors within countries, regions or the continent as a whole;
- Multinational firms involved in African food markets, including food and ingredient manufacturers, agricultural commodity traders, and financial service providers or consulting enterprises; and
- Industry groups, associations and initiatives serving both local and multinational businesses in African food markets.
- The interests of **international organizations, government agencies and philanthropic initiatives** to use new data analyses for oversight, policymaking, and public investment in African food markets, including appropriate departments and units within:
 - United Nations system agencies, the World Bank, and other international organizations;
 - Bilateral donors and private foundations making strategic investments in African food systems; and
 - Implementing partners, including international and local organizations and universities or research and outreach agencies with a focus on food production, distribution and use in Africa.
- Lessons from other **data analysis and market development initiatives**, including coalitions, consortiums, associations, platforms and other ways of facilitating data-driven decisions that guide private enterprises towards actions that improve public health, sustainability and equity, such as:
 - Initiatives using data analysis relating to food availability, composition and prices to improve outcomes in Africa; and
 - Initiatives using new analytical methods to improve decision making for other kinds of data in different settings.

This scope of work concerns interest in sharing analytical tools and results, not necessarily the underlying data. Our focus is on sharing the protocols, algorithms and findings from combining datasets and computing metrics to guide decisions. Some of the underlying data may be in the public domain, but it is often proprietary information used within firms or sold by data providers.

The FPN project's own protocols and algorithms are encoded in software tools to convert prices into diet costs per day as a metric of access to healthy diets, for comparison with income per day as a metric of affordability. This new scoping study would address data concerning access and affordability of foods for health, but also for sustainability goals such as lower emissions and water use, and for social inclusion goals such as employment, wages and working conditions.

The scoping study is focused on analytical tools that match foods to attributes for health, sustainability and inclusion, and the underlying price and quantity data are also used to forecast sales and meet internal objectives for each enterprise. The scoping study should address potential synergies or tradeoffs between different goals in the use of price and quantity data, and also address the full range of available data analysis tools, from qualitative description and hypothesis testing to forecasting, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Deliverables

To implement this work, we anticipate that the consultant would collaborate with FPN staff to:

- (1) Draft a workplan based on formative research, including protocols for identifying organizations to contact, initiating communications and identifying appropriate individuals to interview, then recording the results in a form that can be reported as a detailed annex to the scoping study;
- (2) Possibly train and supervise students or other workers in implementing that workplan;
- (3) Summarize progress to date in monthly reports to the FPN team, building up the scoping study document gradually over the year;
- (4) Complete a draft report in early November for revision and submission to funders in early December 2024, then obtain feedback in early 2025 and complete a final report by the end of June 2025.

Funding and modality

We anticipate employing one or more consultants and have budgeted a total of up to \$180,000 for this activity over the course of the 18-month project period. The work could be done from our office space in downtown Boston or remotely, and no travel is anticipated. We are interested in expressions of interest from:

- individuals who would do this as a full-time consultancy;
- groups of individuals who would share the work responsibilities; or
- consulting firms and others who can propose cost-effective approaches to this scope of work.

Individuals would be engaged using a professional services contract as Tufts affiliates, with lump sums for monthly reports and deliverables. We are also open to modifications of the scope and modality based on candidates' prior knowledge of the sector and recommendations regarding cost-effective approaches to the study.

Desired qualifications and criteria for selection

Selection will be based on demonstrated expertise and a track record of success in activities related to this scope of work. We also expect but do not require the following qualifications:

- Graduate training in food and nutrition, economics and data analysis or economic development in Africa, such as a Master's degree and ten years of experience or PhD and three years of experience;
- Previous experience working with private sector actors in food markets in Africa or other regions and/or grant-funded projects in university settings, NGOs, or civil society.

Application process and timeline

Applicants should send their curriculum vitae or capability statement with a cover letter briefly describing how their expertise and experience applies to this scope of work, to alexander.knueppel@tufts.edu prior to 8am Boston time on **Monday November 13th**. Potential applicants are welcome to send preliminary expressions of interest with any questions to that address at any time prior to November 13th, and we will try to respond as quickly and completely as possible. Applications and enquiries can be sent afterwards but are unlikely to receive full consideration. We expect to contact shortlisted candidates on Nov. 20th, conduct video interviews and complete selection by December 6th so as to complete contracting in December for a start date the first week of January.