

## Call for a research organisation for implementation of a Research Study within the Nutrition Research Facility (NRF) project

### About the Nutrition Research Facility

The **Nutrition Research Facility (NRF)** is established under the Knowledge and Research for Nutrition EC project, aiming to respond to requests for evidence from decision makers, to support the design, the monitoring, the evaluation, and the learning in relation to policies and programmes for **better nutrition outcomes** in low- and middle-income countries.

The NRF operated between 2020-2024 by **Agrinatura** seeks to **stimulate the demand for scientific input** from decision makers (1), to **bring evidence through research** and analyses (2), to **provide expertise for the M&E** of policies and programmes (3) and to **share knowledge** with decision makers and build their capacity (4), thus creating a continuous dialogue between science and policy. Further information about the NRF can be found at the attached short description and the [NRF website](#).

### Terms of Reference

There is a widespread agreement that nutrition policies and programmes are likely to be more effective if they are better informed by contextualised evidence, which is generated by a research agenda that is co-established with decision makers and researchers. Based on the increasing recognition of the importance of the researcher-policy dialogue, the NRF team initiated consultative processes with decision makers to co-create research questions and address those recognised as the most urgent to inform development and update nutrition policies and programmes in the European Union's (EU) partner countries.

The whole process of consultations was structured into two main phases: firstly, virtual regional workshops, including an online preparatory questionnaire; and secondly online prioritisation of research questions. The first phase of the consultation process was the organisation of two virtual regional workshops with decision makers and other stakeholders in EU partner countries: one in Anglophone East Africa and one in Francophone West Africa and the Sahel. The two-workshops were carried out with great engagement and participation from attendees. Participants had the opportunity to: i) meet virtually and discuss nutrition related issues in their respective countries; ii) share experiences, learn from each other and discuss further evidence needs for effective nutrition policy and programming; iii) participate in a researcher – policy dialogue to identify priority evidence needs and co-create research questions; and iv) agree on priority research questions to be considered for the NRF agenda.

The virtual workshops achieved their objectives of identifying nutrition research questions that are grounded on decision-maker needs. Within the scope of the research study “Drivers of persistent high rates of undernutrition in the Sahel – a comprehensive contextualized research study” AGRINATURA is looking for a research organisation with expertise in participatory approaches for contextualisation of drivers of persistence of undernutrition, by analysing the structural conditions in which nutrition-related development projects take place in Sahelian settings, as per the following Terms of Reference (ToR).

## Background

Persistent undernutrition such as wasting and stunting in children under-five, or anaemia in women of reproductive age, has been consistently observed in the Sahel, despite substantial and sustained concentration of investments for intervention. North Burkina Faso and Niger are examples of such areas where, despite all efforts, undernutrition continues to be highly prevalent.

Success in nutrition programming is highly contextual at both country and intra-country levels in the Sahelian region. Even within the same area it varies seasonally and accompanies social dynamics, introducing additional complexity in determining the effectiveness of a given intervention programme. Particularly relevant are: i) the divide between urban and rural and between coastal and landlocked areas; ii) demographic dynamics (e.g. population growth); iii) the specific social-ecological environment; and iv) climate, seasonality, livelihoods and gender.

There is no silver-bullet approach and most nutrition programming per se often fails to deliver clear-cut benefits on the occurrence of undernutrition, which may be an issue of poorly informed programme. Some of the most relevant explanatory variables found in the literature include child age, birth interval, mother's educational status, mother's nutritional status, maternal occupation, place of residence, household conditions (source of drinking water and type of toilet facility), family size, number of children living in the household, birthweight, duration of breastfeeding and timing of complementary feeding initiation (Masibo 2013; Akombi et al. 2017). The failure in reducing undernutrition in some locations also prompts, thus, the need to address drivers explaining effectiveness not only of nutrition-specific, but also of nutrition-sensitive interventions, bridging other sectors beyond health, such as agriculture, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, and social protection, for example. Environmental (both natural and socioeconomic) exposures are thought to contribute to stunting, but evidence regarding specific exposures remains inconclusive, although attesting to individual setting or country specificities and to the multifaceted nature of the associated risk factors (Masibo 2013; Akombi et al. 2017; AAS 2021).

Based on existing evidence, a high-level Theory of Change of reducing persistence of malnutrition in the Sahel indicates that:

- If contextual and structural drivers of malnutrition in specific contexts are known and addressed, and
- If association of such drivers with systemic, basic, underlying, and immediate causes of undernutrition is well understood, and
- If nutrition actions and investments are well designed, and
- If undermining effects of the contextual and structural drivers on implementation effectiveness of nutrition actions and investments are reduced,
- Then, national, and international programmes would be more effective in reducing persistence of malnutrition in the Sahelian context, and
- Then, reduced prevalence and incidence of malnutrition in the Sahel may materialize.

With this Research Study, we aim at understanding contextual drivers that may explain the effectiveness/efficiency of nutritional programming on reducing malnutrition in the region, in order to gain insights on the structural circumstances under which interventions are set up and to determine their impact.

The study aims at examining systemic/root causes of poor nutrition and health and illustrate the complex, multi-level causation of malnutrition in the Sahel building on the assumption that multidimensional, cross-sectoral interventions to sustain nutritional improvements over the long term are needed, together with increased political commitment and adequate funding. Understanding the implementation effectiveness of nutrition interventions is even more challenging as these depend on political, economic, cultural, and religious systems, community ownership and institutional structures, which govern society, influence women’s status, and control the availability of potential human, economic and organizational resources at the household level.

AAS. 2021. “Investigating the Developmental Origins of Stunting in Nigeria.” 2021. <https://www.aasciences.africa/news/investigating-developmental-origins-stunting-nigeria>.

Akombi, Blessing J, Kingsley E Agho, John J Hall, Nidhi Wali, Andre M N Renzaho, and Dafna Merom. 2017. “Stunting, Wasting and Underweight in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14 (8): 863. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080863>.

Masibo, Peninah K. 2013. “Trends and Determinants of Malnutrition among Children Age 0-59 Months in Kenya (KDHS 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2008-09).” WP89. Calverton, Maryland, USA .

## Scope

This Research Study aims to produce evidence to assist decision-makers in addressing the problem of persistent undernutrition in several areas of Sahelian countries, despite the significant concentration of regular and sustained nutrition programming supported by national governments and international humanitarian agencies.

There are many different reasons behind the persistence of undernutrition, even in settings having received a concentration of support programmes for decades: programmes not well designed or implemented, not addressing the systemic, basic and underlying causes of undernutrition, dispersion of actions, series of external events (e.g. climate shocks or locust invasions), stunting not being the right nutrition outcome to target, etc. The problem has been analysed in multiple but fragmented streams, under traditional methods of statistical analysis. Linking these multiple standpoints into one comprehensive, contextualised and investigative approach will contribute to visualizing critical issues that may have been “falling into the cracks” of the segregated approaches. The aim of this research is to understand which and how drivers explain the lack of sustained effectiveness of nutrition programming. A focus will be made on the impact of the enabling socioecological and political environment on sustainability. The underlying proposition is that nationally and development assistance supported policies and interventions related to tackling undernutrition, comprising not only initiatives targeting the health sector or the food system and agricultural sector, but all those which are implemented in a specific setting, have the potential to influence the nutritional status of the populations. The said influence depends on the specific socioecological context and enabling environment, including issues related to political commitment towards nutrition, financing mechanisms, accountability and alignment between national and development partners’ priorities.

<b>ToR</b>	<b>Research organisation with expertise on participatory approaches for understanding undernutrition in the Sahel</b>
<b>NRF Activities</b>	WP2 activities (Act.2.2.2 - Elaboration of Research Studies and Reports) – NRF Research Study “ <i>Drivers of persistent high rates of undernutrition in the Sahel – a comprehensive contextualized research study</i> ” (Task 4 and Activity 5.1).
<b>Period of assignment</b>	May 2023 (expected) – end of January 2023

<b>Place of assignment</b>	The position could be home-based, with field missions to Niger and North Burkina Faso.
<b>Objectives of the assignment</b>	This study stems from the need, expressed by regional decision-makers, for evidence to explain the persistence of high undernutrition rates in the Sahel region, despite the high concentration of investments in nutrition interventions for decades. Specifically, the assignment aims to contextualise a set of potential explanatory drivers of the persistence of undernutrition, by analysing the structural conditions in which nutrition-related development projects take place in Sub-Saharan vulnerable settings. Attention will be given to community participation in implementation as a factor for increasing the effectiveness of interventions in improving nutritional status. For that, the successful tenderer will be assigned to implement Task 4 (Qualitative longitudinal analyses through in-depth case-study approaches - Activities 4.1-4.5) and Activity 5.1 (organising a dissemination workshop), as presented in the work plan section of the Research Study Fiche (Annex 1; pp. 24). Since this study will be informed by findings delivered in Components 1 and 2 of the same project (see “Project Management” section on the Research Study Fiche), the specific methodology will be reviewed at the beginning of the study. The tenderer will report directly to the NRF Research study coordinator – Luis Goulao (WP2 Leader).
<b>Specific activities to be performed under this assignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the research methodological approach.</li> <li>• Prepare and approve the research ethics protocol.</li> <li>• Identification and collection of the main types of context-specific data and relevant reports on prevalence of undernutrition, from local and regional organisations, to be reviewed.</li> <li>• Develop an analysis framework and review the documents.</li> <li>• Identify the main categories of local actors and stakeholders to be interviewed.</li> <li>• Develop guides for interviews, focus groups and roundtables.</li> <li>• Conduct interviews, focus group discussions and multi-actor roundtable discussions with local actors and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Organise a dissemination workshop.</li> <li>• Write reports for each activity, comprising the proposed methodology for data collection and analysis (data review, participatory methods), main findings and preliminary recommendations.</li> <li>• Write a report with the synthesis of the dissemination workshop.</li> <li>• Write a final comprehensive activities report.</li> </ul>
<b>Required qualification, experience and skills</b>	<p>The successful tenderer must demonstrate technical and professional capacity, notably concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• team expertise in a field related to food systems, nutrition, epidemiology, statistics as well as design and evaluation of public policies and strategies in development contexts, with demonstrated relevant professional experience, preferably in Sahelian countries.</li> <li>• team expertise in qualitative/social science methods (e.g. interviews, focus groups, etc.).</li> <li>• experience of collaboration with networks of partners in Sahelian countries.</li> <li>• proficiency in English and French languages</li> <li>• skills in local languages would be an advantage.</li> </ul>
<b>Expected outputs</b>	<p>The successful tenderer is expected to submit the following deliverables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inception report and research ethical protocol (D1). To be submitted 30 days after the signature of the contract</li> </ul>

- Report on the context-specific data analysis (D2). This deliverable should be submitted by the end of month 6 after the signature of the contract.
- Report on interviews and focus group discussions conducted with local stakeholders (D3), submitted by the end of month 7 after the signature of the contract.
- Report on the roundtable with local stakeholders and actors (D4), submitted by the end of month 8 after the signature of the contract.
- Final evidence-based report (D5), submitted by the end of month 9 after the signature of the contract.
- Research dissemination workshop and report (D6), organised by the end of month 9 after signature of the contract.