



# Drivers of Food Choice

## Competitive Grants Program

Managed by the University of South Carolina  
Arnold School of Public Health  
Columbia, South Carolina

Funded by

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*



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# 1. Funding Opportunity

## Synopsis

A grants program funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK aid from the UK government through the Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by the University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health has been developed to support new research on food choice. The purpose of the Drivers of Food Choice (DFC) Competitive Grants Program is to solicit applications and select research projects for funding that will provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor, particularly in the 34 low- and middle-income countries that account for 90% of the global burden of undernutrition; strengthen country-level leadership in nutrition; and foster a global community of food-choice researchers. A conceptual understanding of the drivers of food choice would provide guidance for the development of more effective nutrition-sensitive programs and inform evaluation designs to better assess the impact of these programs on nutrition outcomes, particularly among those living in the 34 highest need countries. Studies will use qualitative or quantitative methods or both to examine key aspects of food choice in the targeted regions. Furthermore, projects that have the potential to strengthen country-level leadership in nutrition to support future efforts will be prioritized.

## Background

Global commitment to improving nutrition among the most vulnerable has never been higher or more coordinated. Scaling up of evidence-based, nutrition-specific interventions with the most potential for improving nutrition outcomes and attention to nutrition-sensitive development for long-term sustainability of improvements in nutrition have framed the global response. Attempts to achieve ambitious goals have led to identification of key challenges, including recognition of the limited knowledge about drivers of food choice, particularly among the poor in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). Reductions among children in under-five prevalence of stunting and wasting have been achieved in many LMIC, but substantial challenges remain,

particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Thirty-four countries account for 90% of the total global burden of undernutrition, and eastern and central Africa and south-central Asia continue to have the highest rates of stunting, with 69 million of the 165 million children with stunted growth and more than half of all children with wasting living in south-central Asia. Furthermore, many countries experience the double burden of undernutrition and increasing prevalence of obesity; some have described economic development as a “double edged sword for nutrition”.

Improving nutrition across the life course from conception through adulthood is essential for the long-term well-being of families and communities and for successful economic and social advancement. Better understanding of how to design and implement nutrition-sensitive development programs, especially those that focus on agriculture or food systems, to ensure the best nutrition is needed. A key challenge to achieving sustainable improvement is the limited knowledge about drivers of food choice, particularly among the poor in LMIC. An understanding of the drivers of food choice would provide guidance for the development of more effective nutrition-sensitive programs and inform evaluation designs to better assess the impact of these programs on nutrition outcomes, particularly among those living in the 34 highest need countries.

Delivery of successful nutrition-specific interventions to scale requires the use of innovative strategies and often relies on the structure of nutrition-sensitive development programs, including targeted agriculture programs, social safety nets, early child development, and schooling, to foster changes in underlying determinants of undernutrition including poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to health care. Some evidence for the impact of targeted agricultural programs on nutrition outcomes (specifically Vitamin A) has been shown when these programs include behavior change and communication strategies and a focus on gender equity. Conclusive evidence for the impact of nutrition-sensitive programs on nutrition outcomes is lacking, in part because of limited understanding of how these programs impact food choice of individuals in households and communities in LMIC.

Fostering healthy food systems that provide the necessary support for nutrition programs is essential for long-term sustained improvements in nutrition outcomes. Efforts to reduce undernutrition, particularly among children under five years, to improve health are complicated by shifts in societal dietary practices. Rapid changes in traditional dietary practices have been observed in many countries that involve increases in consumption of industrially or locally processed foods. It is assumed that these changes are being driven in large part by changes in agriculture and food systems and can be better understood by studying relationships between agricultural productivity, fiscal and monetary policy instruments, value chain modifications, and behavior change communication. When communities and households move from subsistence livelihoods and are faced with more options in the marketplace, what motivates or drives their food choices? Understanding how food choices are made under “normal” conditions and how these choices are affected by changes in household income, access to food, farm practices and productivity, food prices, and local food systems is important for program planners and policy makers. An understanding of the drivers of food choice would provide guidance for the development of more effective nutrition-sensitive programs and inform evaluation designs to better assess the impact of these programs on nutrition outcomes, particularly among those living in the 34 highest need countries.

Food choice research involves the study of cognitions, processes, and behaviors by which people consider, select, prepare, distribute, and consume foods and beverages. The overarching question addressed in studies of food choice is, “why do individuals eat the foods they do?” Understanding the drivers of food choice necessitates the study of interconnected biological, psychological, economic, social, cultural, and political factors. Food choice is integral to social and economic expression of identities, preferences, and cultural meanings and ultimately influences nutrient intake and health. Understanding how changes in drivers of food choice differentially impact household members, particularly women and children, is important for designing interventions that improve the well-being of all, including the most vulnerable.

## **About the Drivers of Food Choice (DFC) Competitive Grants Program**

The DFC Competitive Grants Program is a 5-year endeavor supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK aid from the UK government through the Department for International Development (DFID) dedicated to providing evidence to guide on-going and future programs to improve food and nutrition security in LMIC. The DFC Competitive Grants Program aims to fund research projects that provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor in LMIC, with preference given to projects based in the 34 countries identified in Appendix A. The purpose is to guide on-going and future programs to improve food and nutrition security and to foster a community of practice in food choice research in LMIC countries. It is led by the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC (USA).

The DFC Competitive Grants Program will fund research grants that use qualitative or quantitative methods or both to examine key aspects of food choice in one or more of the thirty-four countries that account for 90% of the global burden of undernutrition. We expect to fund 15 research grants of up to \$300,000, to be awarded in two rounds.

Please visit <http://www.driversoffoodchoice.org> for more information about the DFC Competitive Grants Program.

## **2. Award Information for DFC Grant Funding**

### **Objectives and Scope of Work**

The DFC competitive research grants aim to provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Funded research will use qualitative or quantitative methods or both to examine key aspects of individual food choice in the targeted regions. Approaches that can potentially be extended to different countries/settings are of greatest interest. Priority will be given to projects that are aligned with the goals of the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's research strategies in

agriculture and nutrition, and that have the potential to strengthen country-level leadership in nutrition to support future efforts.

Research supported by DFC grants must be innovative, demonstrate originality and development relevance, and be supported by high-quality collaboration. Applicants are also encouraged to incorporate a gender-transformative or gender-aware approach to increase the likelihood that outcomes will benefit women and children.

### **Potential Research Topics**

Food choice involves the processes by which people consider, select, prepare, distribute, and consume foods and beverages. Food choice research involves the studies of cognitions, processes and behaviors related to the selection and consumption of food. The overarching question addressed in studies of food choice is, “why do individuals eat the foods they do?” Food choice behaviors are integral to social and economic expression of identities, preferences, and cultural meanings and ultimately influence nutrient intake and health. Understanding the drivers of individual food choice involves the study of interconnected biological, psychological, economic, social, cultural, and political factors. Potential food-choice themes include studies that provide a conceptual understanding of the factors that influence food choice, investigate how changes in food environments and food systems influence food choice, and evaluate the impact of nutrition-sensitive interventions (particularly agricultural interventions) that influence food choice.

Examples of potential research topics are listed below. **Proposal submissions are not limited to the topics presented below, and proposals on culturally- and context-specific issues of food choice that are not reflected in the list are encouraged.**

- **Development of an understanding of factors that influence food choice among consumers in lower wealth quintiles in LMIC to inform policy and practice.**

*Example of potential proposal topics*

- Cultural, regional, and ethnic identities that influence food choice, with particularly emphasis on expectations related to class, gender, and age to provide insight for tailoring nutrition and agricultural programs and messages.
  - Gender role differences in food choice to inform development of gender-aware or gender-transformative agricultural programs.
  - Food choice schemas of poor consumers in rural and urban areas to better understand cognitive factors that drive food choice behaviors, particularly of women and children
  - Food choice behaviors of household food providers in urban and rural settings to illuminate linkages in the agriculture-income-nutrition pathway to better explain barriers and incentives for adoption of different interventions.
- **Investigation of how changes to traditional food environments and food systems influence food choice among consumers in LMIC settings.**

*Example of potential proposal topics*

- Examine factors that drive changes in traditional food choice behaviors and increased consumption of industrially or locally processed foods in LMIC, particularly among primary food providers, women, and children.
- Evaluate the impact of different food packaging or food labels on the food choices of individuals with particular emphasis on primary food providers, women, and children.
- Examine the impact of food systems changes on food choice among households and individuals, particularly primary food providers, women, and children.
- Develop an understanding of the causal pathways and/or evaluate the impact of fiscal and monetary policy instruments on food choice at the household and individual levels and, with attention women and children.
- Examine the influence of value chain modifications on food choice behaviors, particularly primary food providers, women, and children.

- **Evaluation of the impact of nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions (e.g., home gardening, aquaculture, livestock production, cash cropping, bio-fortification) on food choice behaviors of different household members, especially women and children.**

*Example of potential proposal topics*

- Examine how increases in agricultural productivity and agricultural income differentially influence the food choice behaviors of individual household members (e.g., fathers, mothers, children, aged).
- Evaluate the impact of programs that increase diversity in household food production on food choice behaviors of individual household members.
- Examine the influence of changes in distribution of agricultural work on food choice behaviors of individual household members.
- Development of methodologies to measure the impact of agricultural projects on food choice processes, in particular food expenditures by households and individual food consumption.

### **Funds Available**

About fifteen grants of up to **\$300,000 USD** each will be awarded. The DFC Competitive Grants Program anticipates distributing a total of \$2,152,500 in the first two-year funding cycle and \$2,152,500 in the second two-year funding cycle of the grants program. Grant requests may not exceed \$300,000 for the total duration of the project. Grant requests should be for two-year projects. Two-year projects will be awarded but the second year of funding will be contingent upon satisfactory progress by the recipient during the first year.

### **3. Application Process**

#### **Eligibility**

Grants can be awarded to any organization with a demonstrated interest and commitment to improving food and nutrition security in LMIC, including research

organizations, non-government organizations, public (e.g., government) institutions, and private sector organizations. All recipients must have prior experience conducting relevant nutrition, food systems, or agricultural research, and must demonstrate prior experience in efficient and effective fiscal management. In the case of partnerships, a lead organization should be identified that meets these criteria and can submit the concept memo as the prime applicant. All applicants named in the proposal should be described by their roles and responsibilities, as well as the value added by their partnership.

### **What activities are eligible for funding?**

Grant activities can include formal qualitative or quantitative (or mixed) research studies, development and evaluation of pilot programs, operational research, testing of novel public-private partnerships, and related work. Add-ons to ongoing larger projects are allowable; how the add-on is distinct from the larger project must be clear in the application. All applications will need to specify how the success of the project will be evaluated. All applications will be scrutinized for value for money.

### **What activities are NOT eligible for funding?**

Applicants who propose to simply *identify* drivers of food choice, without demonstrating how findings are relevant to nutrition and agriculture practitioners and policymakers, are unlikely to be selected to submit full proposals.

### **Proposal Submission and Selection**

Grants will be awarded to successful applications during a two-step application process:

- Submission of a concept memo. Selected applicants will be asked to submit a full proposal.
- Submission of a full proposal. Selection of full proposals for grant award will be made.

The concept memos and full proposals will be evaluated by the interdisciplinary DFC Technical Advisory Group. Not all applicants who are asked to submit full proposals will receive funding. The amount of funding available and the size of each grant will be

dependent upon the availability of funds and the number of acceptable applications received.

**Concept memos and cover sheets must be submitted by email to [info@driversoffoodchoice.org](mailto:info@driversoffoodchoice.org) by 5PM EDT. November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015.**

We will acknowledge by email reply receipt of submitted concept memos and cover sheets on November 2, 2015.

The concept memo should include the following elements:

- **Cover sheet** – Basic details of the proposed research
- **Case for support** – A short description of the proposed research and how it will achieve its aims. Include:
  - a. Significance of the proposed research and rationale
  - b. Brief summary of research, its scope, objectives, and methods
  - c. Innovative and original elements
  - d. Development relevance and potential impact (including how the research will consider gender)
  - e. Planned collaborations or partnerships, and how they will help the project achieve its aims and scale up the proposed intervention
- **Timeline and summary of funding required (USD)**. See *Eligible Costs* below for additional clarification.
- **Evaluation** – Indicate how you will measure whether your project is successful.
- **Organizational Capacity** - Brief overview of your organization's past success in carrying out similar projects

Please submit concept memos as PDF documents with the following formatting guidelines (proposals submitted with incorrect format will not be accepted):

- No longer than two (2) pages (not including the cover page, timeline, and budget)

- Arial font size 11
- Single-line spacing
- One (1) inch margins on all sides of the paper, set up for A4 or 8½ x 11 inch paper

**Based on the merit of the concept memos, the DFC TAG will invite selected applicants to submit full proposals.**

**Eligible Costs**

Grant monies may be used to pay for salaries, supplies, equipment, and travel that are specifically related to achieving the objectives of the project. Any indirect costs must be part of the total costs, and may not exceed 10% of the direct costs. The total, including both direct and indirect costs, cannot exceed \$300,000. Grant monies may not be used to cover the following types of costs:

- Purchase of motor vehicles, office furniture
- Construction or physical improvement of offices/facilities

**Timeline**

Submission of concept memos	November 1, 2015
Notification of invitations to submit full proposals*	on or about December 15, 2015
Submission of full proposals	March 1, 2016
Notification of awards	May 2016
Grants begin**	Within 30 days of receipt of signed funding document

\*Applicants who progress to the proposal stage will receive further details regarding the submission of full proposals.

\*\*Applicants with grants awarded will receive further details regarding the funding schedule.

**Assessment Criteria**

The overall potential for the proposed research to provide a deep understanding of the drivers of food choice among the poor in LMIC will be an important criterion in the

assessment of proposals. The proposed research is expected to be responsive to the DFC Competitive Grants Program goals and priorities, specifically the compatibility with relevant ongoing DFID and Gates Foundation initiatives including the Nutrition Embedding Evaluation Program (NEEP, <http://sites.path.org/mchn/our-projects/nutrition/neep/>), the Innovative Metrics and Methods in Agriculture for Nutrition Action (IMMANA, <http://immana.lcirah.ac.uk>), and the technical assistance program Improving Nutrition Outcomes Through Optimized Agricultural Interventions (ATONU, <http://fanrpan.org/projects/atonu/>). The research is expected to generate global public goods and publications in high-quality scientific journals. The applicants and co-applicants are expected to demonstrate their capacity (e.g., organizational, including ability to manage budgets) to deliver high quality research in the relevant areas. The following criteria will be used to assess the concept memos and full proposals:

- 1. Innovative nature of the research proposed, relative to existing approaches**
- 2. Scientific excellence and originality of the research proposed**
- 3. Development relevance of the research and its potential for application in LMIC**
- 4. The collaborative, intersectoral, and/or interdisciplinary nature of the research proposed**

*1. Innovation*

- Does the proposed research portray new and innovative perspectives on the drivers of choice among consumers in lower wealth quintiles in LMIC?
- Does the research use innovative methods to investigate how changes to traditional food environments and food systems influence food choice among consumers in LMIC settings or to evaluate the impact of nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions on food choice behaviors?

*2. Scientific excellence and originality*

- Is the proposed research consistent with the highest international standards of scientific excellence in all of the sectors and disciplines that it includes?

- Does the proposed research add value to the existing body of knowledge about food choice in general and specifically in LMIC?
- Are the proposed methods well-defined, realistic, and feasible?
- Does the proposed research use rigorous study designs and top quality research methodologies?

### *3. Development relevance*

- Does the proposed research have the potential to benefit those with highest need, specifically in one or more of the 34 countries with the highest burden of undernutrition?
- Does the proposed research have the potential for uptake of research findings in program and policy settings, particularly as this related to on-going and future programs and research activities to improve food and nutrition security in LMIC?
- Is the research gender-sensitive or gender-aware?

### *4. Collaborative approaches*

- Does the proposed research demonstrate integration of relevant expertise across multiple sectors, particularly nutrition, agriculture, marketing, and/or economics?
- Does the proposed research involve, and have the potential to empower, LMIC researchers?

## **Review Process of Full Application**

The Technical Advisory Group will evaluate full proposals and recommend applicants for grand awards. The DFC Team from the University of South Carolina will oversee the review process.

## **4. Dissemination, Data Sharing, and Intellectual Property**

Information about research funded through the DFC Competitive Grants Program will be made available on the public DFC website (<http://www.driversoffoodchoice.org>). Grant holders will be asked to collaborate with the DFC team on research uptake and dissemination activities, which may include, among others, presentations at seminars and conferences, blogs, interviews and opinion pieces. Grant holders will be expected

to disseminate the results of their research as widely as possible, based on the premise that publicly-funded research data are a public good, produced in the public interest, and should be made openly available to other researchers in a timely manner to the maximum extent possible. As well as scientific communication, emphasis is placed by the funder on engagement with potential users and beneficiaries of research, and the route to application of its outcomes. Consideration of possible pathways to impact will form an important element of the assessment of proposals.

The DFC Competitive Grants Program will utilize the free Dataverse Network project to facilitate public access to datasets. The “Dataverse Network project develops software, protocols, and community connections for creating research data repositories that automate professional archival practices, guarantee long-term preservation, and enable researchers to share, retain control of, and receive web visibility and formal academic citations for their data contributions.” Further information about this service can be found here: <http://thedata.org/home>. Datasets will be finalized for public access within six months after the end of each grant funding period. Datasets will not be made available for public access until 12 months after the end of each grant funding period. During this 12 month period, the grantee will have exclusive use of the data for publications and reports. After 12 months the data will be available for public access. Extensions up to 18 months may be requested by the grantee and must be authorized by the DFC Competitive Grants Program. Users requesting access to the data must enter into a data-use agreement, which specifies that the user may publish based on the data, with the exception of publications on to the grantee’s subject of focus. We have extensive previous experience in making data-use agreements and have a template to use to initiate agreements. In cases where grantees have pre-existing agreements or legal constraints that preclude providing full access to data, they will be required to identify these limitations in the Data Access Plan. Consultation with the DFC Competitive Grants Program staff and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will be necessary to come to agreement on what data will and will not be made publicly available and how these limited data are to be shared prior to receipt of funding.

All intellectual property rights for all material (including but not limited to reports, data, designs, whether or not electronically stored, and technologies) produced by the investigator(s) or the investigators' personnel, and arising from research funded through the Grant, will be the property of the investigators' institution(s). The investigators' institution(s) will grant to the funders of the program, if requested, a world-wide, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use all such material. If investigator(s) wish to apply for a patent for a particular application arising out of the information, however, they may request that publication of data is withheld until the patent application has been made. After that time, the data must be made freely available. The funders should be consulted about any request of this kind at an early stage, and any license(s) granted must be managed in a way that is consistent with the core principles of Global Access, i.e., that the findings of the research would be disseminated promptly and broadly, and that products and technologies arising from the knowledge gained would be made available and accessible at reasonable cost to people most in need in developing countries.

### **Privacy and Non-confidentiality Notice**

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## Appendix A

### List of 34 low- and middle-income countries with 90% of the worldwide burden of malnutrition

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan   | 18. Malawi       |
| 2. Angola        | 19. Mali         |
| 3. Bangladesh    | 20. Mozambique   |
| 4. Burkina Faso  | 21. Myanmar      |
| 5. Cameroon      | 22. Nepal        |
| 6. Chad          | 23. Niger        |
| 7. Congo         | 24. Nigeria      |
| 8. Cote d'Ivoire | 25. Pakistan     |
| 9. Egypt         | 26. Philippines  |
| 10. Ethiopia     | 27. Rwanda       |
| 11. Ghana        | 28. South Africa |
| 12. Guatemala    | 29. Sudan        |
| 13. India        | 30. Tanzania     |
| 14. Indonesia    | 31. Uganda       |
| 15. Iraq         | 32. Vietnam      |
| 16. Kenya        | 33. Yemen        |
| 17. Madagascar   | 34. Zambia       |

(Click [here](#) to access the full Executive Summary of the Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series 2013)