

Important information

MECS is seeking a consultant or consultancy team to conduct an in-depth and broad exploration of behaviour relating to the consumption of foods cooked outside of the home amongst people living in urban areas of Cambodia or Vietnam.

Given the global dispersal of the countries, the need to achieve good value for money, and the current difficulties with international travel due to Covid-19 we do not anticipate that a consultant will submit a proposal for more than one country. Consultants wishing to submit proposals for multiple countries must demonstrate through an additional section in their response to these ToRs why and how they are specifically qualified and able to conduct the work in multiple countries. Generic proposals not tailored to a specific country context will be rejected without review.

Project Background

MECS is supporting the transition of low-income economies from biomass to the use of modern energy cooking services (i.e. cooking with electricity, gas or renewable energies). It calls for a greater focus on modern energy as the source of clean cooking, and has evidenced that cooking with modern energy using energy-efficient appliances can be cost effective, particularly for urban communities. In February 2020, the programme added the Modern Eating (ME) workstream which aims to support the MECS programme's broader goal of reducing the use of biomass fuels in household kitchens by exploring opportunities for changing the foods cooked, and for changing where foods are cooked (i.e. eating out). A working paper of the findings, [Landscape Study - Modern Foods](#), was published in August 2020.

Gaps in the existing research that we have identified include an understanding of how consumers make decisions around eating out, and the energy needs of street vendors in informal food markets. Additionally, there is a lack of data on how transitions to clean fuel use impact on the broader social relationships and networks of urban dwellers. We know from social dynamic studies that people living in the Global South (especially Asia) have deeply-rooted relationships of responsibility, and we are interested to know whether barriers to the transition to electrical cooking, for example, are based on a social structure of obligation and responsibility to purchasing fuel from the vendor in the markets where they purchase food produce.

Hypothesis 1 (linked to activity 1): *Increasingly busy urban lifestyles are creating a latent demand for eating out that presents opportunities for innovative food preparation entrepreneurs.*

Hypothesis 2 (linked to activity 2): *Despite a growing number of urbanites, fuel and food choices remain intrinsically linked to deep, historical social relationships and networks that are predominantly located within informal markets.*

Scope of Work

A study of informal markets is necessary to build on the larger conversation of food studies and understand the barriers and challenges faced by food producers, retailers, consumers, and investors. These may be in the form of misunderstood policies or procedures, or a lack of access to financing or information.

This project aims to conduct a scoping study of the informal food sector – from the street vendor and consumers' perspectives. We wish to understand and explore the how food vendors enter the informal food sector and what their cooking needs are. Further, we wish to explore when and why urban dwellers consume street foods (or eat out) and what, if any, implications this has on cooking back home.

The study must answer the following questions:

1. What motivates consumers to buy street foods?
2. What networks and relationships exist within these spaces (i.e. informal markets) where urban populations in SE Asia buy the bulk of their food – whether as street food or raw produce – and their fuels?
3. What are the reasons why urbanites might transfer their buying practices from markets to formal shops/grocers/butchers, etc. (Is this aspirational and a move to the ideal of “modernity”?)
4. How do ideas of modernity and aspiration influence energy and cooking system transitions in the growing number of urban dwellers?
5. How committed are people to locally-produced food? How loyal are they to the networks they have for purchasing or exchanging produce/food?
6. How can food vendors scale up through a transference to electrical cooking? Is this a possibility?
7. What do market electricity supplies look like in informal markets? Would vendors consider using electricity for food-related retail?
8. What drives individuals to purchase not only street food, but also ready-prepared meals?

These 8 questions form the minimum requirements of the study. Consultants are encouraged to expand the questions asked.

Research

The following activities must be included in the proposal:

1: 3 focus groups of 12 participants each. The focus groups are to be as follows:

- 2 x Focus group of female consumers (women who are responsible for the purchasing of food);
- 1 x focus group of male consumers (men who are responsible for the purchasing of food).

2: semi-structured interviews of 10 street vendors and 10 consumers within the food (wet) market space(s).

3: Development of vignettes:

Taking photographs of participants in their market space or taking video footage of participants expressing their views on topics included in the research questions are highly valuable to the MECS programme. The consultant should aim to capture photos and short videos of participants, shops, markets, and other scenes that they think will be of interest. From across the interviews and focus groups, 8 vignettes must be developed showcasing key findings from the data collection (4 from interviews; 4 from focus groups). A vignette is a descriptive story accompanied by an image, or series of images, or a short video (e.g. a talking head). Consent forms for the collection and use of personal images will be provided by MECS.

We expect the focus groups to be conducted first so that the semi-structured interviews with street vendors and consumers can be designed to explore issues of interest arising from the focus groups.

Recruiting participants

The activities draw on both urban and peri-urban households, however, the research needs to focus on their experiences with informal food markets and street vendors (including the purchase of pre-prepared foods that are simply finished off or warmed up at home). For this research we are not interested in household experiences of cooking at home from raw ingredients. The consultant/s should identify areas for this research that demonstrate a spread of markets that are representative of local ethnic differences, regionally-distinct cuisines, and where street vendors are present. It should include both peri-urban and urban areas.

It would be ideal for the focus groups to be conducted prior to the semi-structured interviews. This is to ensure that the surveys and semi-structured interviews are written in a more focused manner, and so that we can identify key indicators and points for study.

The organisation is responsible for recruiting participants, and securing their participation. The consultant should indicate where they intend to recruit the participants and provide a brief description of the characteristics for each location selected.

Deliverables, budget, and duration

The research is expected to commence no later than **1st October 2021**. All contracting will be completed prior to the 1st October. All deliverables must be completed and delivered no later than **15 January 2022**. These dates are non-negotiable. The consultant should demonstrate in their response to these ToRs how the work can be completed within the time available.

The total budget is a maximum of £11,000 (ex VAT where applicable). Payment is contingent on successful completion of all deliverables.

Deliverable	Payment value
Contract signing	20%
Draft outline of focus group schedule and questions developed (5 days after start of contract)	10%
Full data sets: all interviews and focus groups to be translated into English and transcribed verbatim (summaries of discussions will not be accepted)	30%
Eight vignettes from across the interviews and focus groups	20%
Final report (concise, e.g. 10 pages) and follow up interview (with the MECS ME lead). The report should focus on the study context (method, geography, social and economic context) and findings from the interviews and focus groups	20%

Communication and Reporting

The contractual requirements will be managed by the MECS Programme Manager of Loughborough University. All other communications and reporting, including in-country consultation, task management and consultations on the research process, will be managed by the Modern Eating Coordinator. Support for the consultant/organisation will be provided in conjunction with the relevant country Link Researcher and other relevant MECS team members.

The consultant/organisation is expected to communicate with the ME Coordinator regularly throughout the project via two-weekly update meetings or phone calls, WhatsApp communication and emails, on:

- research progress and milestones achieved;
- anticipated challenges or changes to research plans, activities and timelines;
- upcoming activities and next steps; and
- delays or concerns on reporting.

All meetings and appointments to discuss the overall progress of the project against the contract will be agreed and arranged in advance and at mutually convenient times. Any significant changes to the approved research plan and timelines have to be discussed and approved in advance.

Loughborough University reserves the right to request the consultant/organisation to make revisions to the deliverables if they do not meet the required quality. The consultant/organisation will be required to make these revisions at no additional costs to Loughborough University.

Expertise required

The consultant/s doing the field work will be the primary point of contact between participants and MECS programme. It is, therefore, important that they are polite, courteous, fully informed about the programme and able to answer participants' queries. The consultant should demonstrate experience in using the qualitative methods required for this study and details of experience on similar studies.

Responding to these ToRs

Responses should be a maximum of 8 pages with up to 3 additional CVs (no more than 2 pages each).

Please provide the following when responding to these ToRs

- State explicitly which country context will be studied.
- A description of how the proposed activities will be designed and implemented to address the research questions.
- A description of how participants will be recruited.
- An initial draft of the research tools to be used.
- A detailed breakdown of the budget in terms of personnel, materials, travel etc. Where costs have been estimated please highlight these and provide a brief explanation of the assumptions used to generate the cost.
- Details of all personnel who will be involved in the study, along with their responsibilities.
- A proposed Gantt chart of activities.
- As assessment of how COVID-19 might impact on the proposed activities and whether any mitigation measures can be put in place.

Proposals should be sent to MECS (mecs@lboro.ac.uk) with the subject '**Informal markets: [COUNTRY SELECTED] – add relevant country name**'. All proposals must be received by 23:59 GMT on **24 August 2021**.

Please provide the following when responding to these ToRs:

- A description of the proposed programme of research and how it will address the research questions;
- A detailed breakdown of the budget. Where costs have been estimated please highlight these and provide a brief explanation of the assumptions used to generate the cost;
- Details of research staff who will be involved in the study, along with their responsibilities;
- Details of the locations identified for the research to take place;

- A proposed Gantt chart of activities;
- An assessment of how COVID-19 might impact on the proposed activities and whether any mitigation measures can be put in place.

Assessing proposals

Shortlisted consultants may be invited to an interview in order to finalise selection. The assessment process will take into consideration the criteria below in order to ensure **value for money**.

- Quality of proposal and methodology;
- Appreciation and understanding of the task;
- Skills, expertise and experience of consultant/organisation team members;
- Past performance (CV);
- Proposed management of the activities;
- Price.

Ethical considerations

All research must be in line with the Code of Practice for research, Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct (UK Research Integrity Office, 2009).

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) is an independent charity, offering support to the public, researchers and organisations to further good practice in academic, scientific and medical research. Its confidential advice service is available to free of charge to individuals (members of the public, research participants, patients, researchers and students) and subscribing organisations. Their advice service can be [accessed here](#).

At a minimum, participants must not be subjected to physical, social, legal or psychological harm. Due consideration and ethical steps must be taken into safeguarding all participants, especially the vulnerable. A detailed Participation Information Sheet (this will be provided by MECS) explaining the full scope of the study, what confidentiality entails, and that no participants will be forced into participating, must be completed as part of the recruitment process. Participants are to be made aware that participation is fully voluntary and there are no repercussions if they choose to no longer participate in the study at any point in time. Participants should, ideally, sign a consent form which includes consent for the use of photographs and videos.

Confidentiality must be maintained at all times. With regards to confidentiality and privacy of participation, participants must be informed that their anonymity will be maintained in any outputs and that all identifiable markers will be removed from any data sets that are published. Additionally, due consideration must be made to ensure that participants are safeguarded during the research process in line with the local government issued guidelines around COVID-19.

The consultant will be responsible for securing any research or ethical permissions needed from local authorities in each of the field work locations. There may be additional ethical, or research clearance needed for this kind of user centric design research in the chosen country.

MECS is funded by UK Aid through the Department of International Development. It is a partnership between researchers, innovators, policy makers, and ESMAP drawing on their expertise and relevant work from around the world to co-construct new knowledge with practitioners and the private sector. It is led by Loughborough University, UK.