

Important information

MECS is seeking a consultant or consultancy team to conduct **rapid (short-term), qualitative research** of how people living in urban areas of Vietnam, Philippines, Laos and Indonesia learn to cook.

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 a post on a Kenyan cooking page on Facebook, a discussion on where and how one 'could learn to cook' showed that many members felt frustration at not having been taught to cook, or had not found formal cooking classes – especially as they had moved away from their homes and were living in peri-urban or urban areas. Whilst a few group members offered their services to one another in the form of small group cooking lessons – either in person or via online – several made reference to the learning via social media: *“Cooking can be self-taught too. If you aren't able to take classes, YouTube can be of great help,”* and *“Kuna yu tube shannols. Just install wifi and you are good to go.”*

Our **hypothesis** is: *The acquisition of cooking skills has largely moved away from the family/household kitchen space – i.e. from mother to daughter – with younger generations, including men, favouring learning to cook via digital platforms such as YouTube and social media platforms.*

Research Objectives

The aim of this research is an exploration of how people living in urban areas of ASEAN countries learn to cook. Time spent investigating day-to-day cooking practices, their cooking techniques, and the networks (both human and digital) that people learning to cook engage with will help us to understand more clearly what cooking behaviours (diversity, innovation (e.g. adopting innovative food products), implications on labour and time burden, etc.) look like.

Scope of Work

The core research question to be addressed is:

How can an understanding of the ways in which different generations acquire knowledge of cooking techniques and practices aid the transition to cooking with clean, modern fuels?

To answer the core research question, the consultant/s are required to collect data in order to answer the following 9 sub-questions.

1. When and how do individuals learn to cook? From whom? Or, alternatively, from what (social media, YouTube, etc.)?
2. If online media is an effective channel, why does it hold such appeal?
3. Are there different ways of cooking and learning to cook depending on generations?
4. What dishes are taught and mastered? What techniques, tricks or shortcuts in cooking, do individuals adopt? And are these dishes/techniques mastered at different life stages and why?
5. What influences their longer-term cooking practices?
6. How do they feel (e.g. consider the emotive elements of cooking - how cooking and meal choices feed into perceptions of cultural identity, relationships, etc) about modern alternatives of cooking/eating?
7. What ambitions do they have for their cooking ability? And how are their aspirations formed/influenced?
8. What does the future of cooking look like?
9. What does modern energy look like to them, and how will they learn to adapt to this transition?

These 9 questions form the minimum requirements of the study and make up the base of the interview schedule. Consultants are encouraged to expand the questions asked to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of how people learn to cook.

The following activities must be included in the proposal:

1: Open-ended interviews: conducted in **10 households** to understand how people learn to cook. If possible (covid permitting), an observation of the kitchen/cooking space to understand the composition and organisation of the kitchen/cooking space, the way in which participants approach the kitchen tools, appliances, fuels and technologies they are engaging with, and the techniques employed.

2: Focus groups:

- **2 focus groups of 12 women each who cook** – it is suggested that this be divided according to age (for example, mothers and daughters, young and old) to determine whether learning to cook has changed across generations, and how; please keep in mind these groups should be a cross-section of the urban spaces and be inclusive of all economic and social diversities; these groups should **not** be professional cooks/food bloggers, etc;
- **1 focus group of 12 men who cook** – Ideally, we would like this group to focus on men who have migrated to urban areas for work or those in displaced settings, who are suddenly living alone or in spaces (e.g. compounds) where there are no women to do the cooking; questions should include what they cook; how they have learnt to cook; if they live in a shared space, how is the cooking divided; what cooking practices do they rely on outside of the family home;
- **1 focus group of 10-12 local food bloggers/vloggers** (both men and women) to understand the contents, reach and methods that cooking blogs/vlogs have and the audiences that they attract.

3: Development of vignettes:

Taking photographs of participants in their kitchens or taking video footage of participants expressing their views on the foods they cook 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, a minimum of 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.

Members of households selected for open-ended interviews may also participate in focus groups. It would be ideal for the focus groups to be conducted **after** the interviews so that the individual experience and personal view is accurately captured prior to the potential contamination in Focus Groups, where opinions are socially negotiated, contested and developed.

Recruiting participants

The research is expected to take place in urban and peri-urban households within the country, representing a cross-section of the local urban population (inclusive of migrant workers/those from other regions, people living with disabilities) and diverse cooking cultures.

Members of households selected for open-ended interviews may also participate in focus groups. It would be ideal for the focus groups to be conducted **after** the interviews, so the individual experience and personal view is accurately captured prior to the potential contamination in Focus Groups.

The consultant is responsible for sourcing households and participants and securing their participation. Participants should be representative of both the diverse demographics of urban spaces, including people living with disabilities, displaced persons (refugee, IDP or otherwise); and the range of cooking cultures in the country. This is imperative as cooking practices vary considerably according to region, access and ability.

The consultant should indicate where they intend to recruit the participants and provide a brief description of the characteristics for each location selected.

Timeline, deliverables, and budget

All contracting will be completed prior to this start date.

Contract start date: **15 October 2021** (or as soon as contracting has been completed).

Research and fieldwork phase: **20 October 2021 – 15 December 2021** (8 weeks).

Translation, Vignette, and brief report development: **15 December 2021 – 15 January 2022**.

The final date is 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 **£12,000** (ex VAT where applicable).

Payment is contingent on successful completion of all deliverables.

| Deliverable | Payment value |
|--|---------------|
| Contract signing | 20% |
| Draft interview 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.
- An 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 'Learning to Cook: [COUNTRY SELECTED] – add relevant country name'. All proposals must be received by 23:59 GMT on **22 SEPTEMBER 2021**.

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 Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office. 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.

Annex 1: Additional background to the modern eating workstream

A working paper summarising recent research findings, *Landscape Study - Modern Foods*, was published in August 2020. A common theme that has emerged is that little attention is given to the energy implications of food-related interventions in the Global South, which are typically driven by nutrition, sustainability and economic development. The Modern Eating workstream is focused on identifying what ‘modern foods’ and ‘modern eating’ encompasses, and the opportunities it may offer in reducing energy consumption in the form of modern cooking across households in MECS priority countries.

When we think of cooking, what springs to mind is the standard definition: the preparation of food through means of heating. Although food has been a topic of anthropological/sociological analysis for decades, it has quite often been positioned as a symbolic or material marker for the dichotomies that exist within society. Existing literature states that cooking:

- Is highly representative of cultural identity;
- enhances nutrition;
- provides pleasure;
- is used as a symbol of an individual’s ties to their family, religion or social group(s).

In the 1940s, anthropologist Leslie White made the association between culture, food, and energy, and claimed that the *law of cultural evolution* was rooted not within humanity’s use of energy through industrial and technological evolution, but rather by humanity’s use of energy in relation to food and cooking. Simply put: our food systems changed over time in relation to the energy we put into cooking food, and as a result our cultural habits changed, too. As we increasingly moved from raw to cooked food, through the use of energy, we moved from nomadic lifestyles to more settled ones.

Thus, if energy is central in understanding the course of culture’s development, and culture is grounded on our ability to transform our food (from raw to cooked), then clearly cultural adaptations around food and cooking need to be considered within the context of energy and fuel transitions.

Whilst within energy studies – especially in literature addressing climate change and sustainable energy transitions – White’s work is well-known and highly regarded, his linking of our food systems, cultural development and energy choices has largely been forgotten. There seems to be a significant gap in food literature in seeking a deeper analysis of the actual *practice of cooking* and how cooking is shaped by shifts in food availability, globalization, and transformations in energy availability and reliability. Despite being an essential part of human life, the practice of cooking itself remains surprisingly under researched.

Existing studies view food and cooking as being purely symbolic, rather than active processes. The team in MECS want to push beyond the concept of food as ‘sustenance’ or ‘identity’, and cooking as a ‘gendered division of labour’. Thus, we wish to explore the question of how individuals might face cooking as they simultaneously face conditions of modernity. Whilst studies on food on one hand focus on production and distribution, and on the other describe a number of diverse consumption practices (rituals of food consumption), we have found a gap that existing literature does not specifically focus on cooking practices. We suggest that by closely examining cooking practices, we are pushed to consider how culturally-specific cooking practices are produced and reproduced over time and from generation to generation. The act of learning to cook – and the associated means by which we learn to cook whether that be through others (mothers, grandmothers, aunts, friends, oneself), or

tools (cookbooks), and media (YouTube) used in the developing of cooking skills – is an important component of study in understanding how people adopt, adapt and transfer cultural tools over time.

A commodification of culinary culture exists, which we've already seen in the culture of celebrity chefs across the Global North. However, when examining cooking practices and the transference of cooking techniques, how different are the bloggers/influencers across MECS countries who share recipes on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, from the celebrity chefs of the US and Europe?

In a post on a Kenyan cooking page on Facebook, a discussion on where and how one 'could learn to cook' showed that many members felt frustration at not having been taught to cook, or had not found formal cooking classes – especially as they had moved away from their homes and were living in peri-urban or urban areas. Whilst a few group members offered their services to one another in the form of small group cooking lessons – either in person or via online – several made reference to the learning via social media: *"Cooking can be self-taught too. If you aren't able to take classes, YouTube can be of great help,"* and *"Kuna yu tube shannols. Just install wifi and you are good to go."*

What is of interest are the comments that followed which questioned whether social media would be a feasible method of learning. People tend to not view cooking as instructional when it's self-taught and outside of the traditional setting of the mother-daughter narrative (or older/younger woman) or outside of the formal setting of a kitchen-classroom.

Additionally, research anecdotes/vignettes from within the existing MECS research has shown an increased preference of social media and online digital media in the process of learning to cook.