

## First Call for Research Proposals

### Food System Transformation for Healthier Diets in Children and Adolescents in the Latin-American and Caribbean Region

- **Introduction**

The first call of COLANSA's Research Award schema will focus on Latin-America and the Caribe regional projects that address different evidence needs for achieving food system transformation for healthier diets in children and adolescents.

- **Context for the Proposals**

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), 11.5% of children under 5 years old live with chronic malnutrition (low height/age), and 30% of children and adolescents between 5 and 19 years old live with overweight or obesity. Both conditions are primarily the result of inadequate food intake in quantity or quality. Poor diets start with insufficient breastfeeding and from complementary feeding onwards are reflected by insufficient intake of nutrient-rich foods such as rich fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole grains, and excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods and foods high in added sugars, fats, sodium, and energy that damage health. Unhealthy diets during childhood and adolescence are associated with a series of adverse health conditions in the short and in the long-term.

Thus, there is an urgent need to transform the food systems responsible for the quality, safety, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of children's diets to ensure that childhood in LAC enjoys healthy feeding practices. This transformation must consider the right to health of girls and boys, include actions to ensure healthy foods in the environments in which they operate, and prevent access to unhealthy, ultra-processed foods from becoming the norm in food environments, as is currently the case.

In October 2023, in Cuenca-Ecuador, the Global Alliance for Healthy Food for Children and Adolescents was formed, and the Cuenca Consensus was signed, urging the governments of the LAC region to implement concrete actions to advance the transformation of food systems.

However, more evidence is needed for benchmarking, monitoring, prioritized, and effectively implementing actions to transform the food systems that promote healthier diets for children in our region; the recognition of barriers and the existence of more vulnerable populations is also critical for ensuring advancing this goal without leaving anyone behind. Applicants to the current call are invited to explore these barriers and to describe the reality of more vulnerable populations.

- **Expected Impact of this call**

Projects funded under this call will collectively contribute:

- to generate evidence for promoting food systems transformation, healthier and more sustainable diets for children and adolescents in the LAC region with children's rights and equity approach
- to raise awareness on the existing inequities on children's and adolescent's diet and thus, contribute to decreasing these inequities
- to expand researchers' capacities to engage with key food systems stakeholders

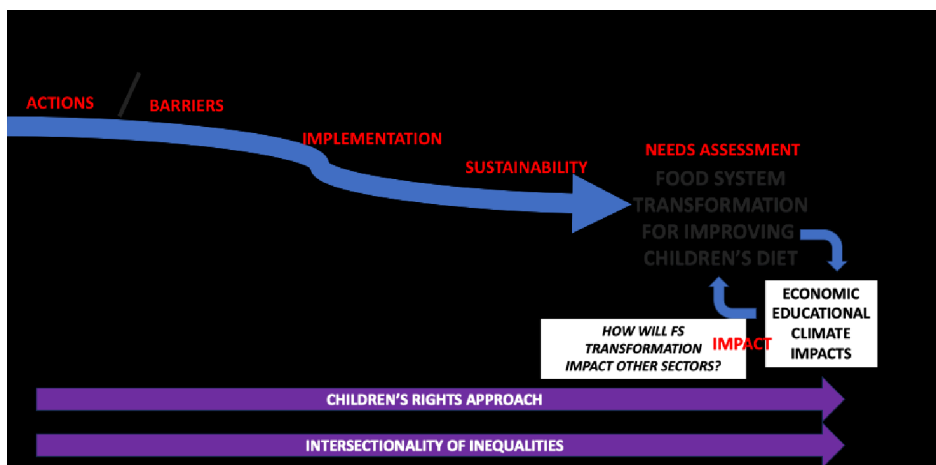


-to improve regional research capacities to work collaboratively (i.e., data harmonization, multi-country analyses, etc.)

• **Objectives and Scope of the proposals**

The aim of the current call is to provide funding to proposals that will generate evidence to contribute answering any of the key areas identified as needed for achieving food system transformation for healthier diets in children and adolescents (Actions, Barriers, Implementation, Sustainability, Needs Assessment, Impact) described in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Roadmap for food systems transformation



Applicants **MUST**:

- Address one or more of the areas described as in need of evidence for promoting food systems transformations in **Figure 1** (Actions; Barriers; Implementation, Sustainability; Needs Assessment; or Impact).
- Clearly justify why addressing the selected research question will contribute to food system transformation in the region. This can be presented as intermediate (outcome) or a long-term goal (impact) of the project.
- Restrict the study population to children and adolescents. Considering vulnerable subpopulations within this age group is highly desirable.
- Define the study setting, clarifying the potential generalizability of the findings.
- Describe the methodological approach (descriptive, impact evaluations, implementation science, etc.) selected for answering the proposed research question with a solid methodological framework, when needed.
- Describe concrete outcomes of the proposal and provide robust evidence that these outcomes are achievable during the one-year period of the proposal.
- Evaluate potential challenges for successfully conducting the project as planned and mitigation strategies.
- Specifically address equity considerations with respect to the proposed research problem.
- Engage a research team with all the skills needed for conducting the study.
- Engage or provide a plan for engagement with key stakeholders for adequate dissemination of study findings.
- Include capacity building activities that can consider inclusion of early career researchers in the team, student participation, formal training, institutional development, among others.



- Participate and contribute to COLANSA activities by presenting the project and its results in webinars or members meetings, engaging with other grantees, participating in scientific meetings on behalf of COLANSA, among others.

The following types of projects will *NOT* be funded:

- Studies that will not provide evidence for promoting policies or actions for transforming food systems.
- Efficacy trials at any stage
- Pharmacological trials at any stage
- Single country studies or studies conducted outside the LAC region, and that do not have direct application to the LAC population.
- Studies only focused in adults and that cannot have a direct application to children and/or adolescents

### ● **Funding and duration**

In this First Call, COLANSA will fund qualifying projects with a maximum duration of 12 months (August 2024 to July 2025). Total budget available for the call is up to \$ 110,000 USD. Funding of 3-4 proposals with a maximum of 35,000 USD per proposal (including overhead) is anticipated. Budget requested is expected to be aligned with the activities and duration of the proposed project, and appropriately justified. It should also take into consideration the number of partners included.

### ● **Eligibility**

Graduate students, researchers, or civil society organizations based on LAC countries are eligible to apply for this call. All applicants need to have an institutional affiliation (e.g., University, research institute, non-profit organizations, etc.). Research teams could be from a single country (single-country team) or can include team members of more than one country of the region (multi-country team). Applicants must have independent legal status, be capable of contracting as well as receiving and administering funds, and have the authority to lead the proposed project activities.

The following are NOT eligible to apply:

- 1) Individual persons without any institutional affiliation
- 2) Governmental agencies or institutions
- 3) UN agencies or UN Country Teams
- 4) Alcohol, tobacco, or ultra-processed foods companies or entities that have received direct financial support from alcohol, tobacco, or ultra-processed foods companies in the last 5 years.
- 5) Entities that have received any type of financial support from Bloomberg Philanthropies in the last 5 years.
- 6) Members of the steering committee of COLANSA

### ● **Application Process**

Interested applicants should submit a research proposal following the guidelines provided in the extended call (**Annex 1**). Proposals must include the following components:

1. Project Title and Abstract (1200 characters with spaces as maximum)
2. Background (2400 characters with spaces as maximum)
3. Objectives and Research Questions (1200 characters with spaces as maximum)
4. Research Plan & Outcomes (4800 characters with spaces as maximum)
5. Dissemination and Impact (1200 characters with spaces as maximum)
6. Research Team (1200 characters with spaces as maximum)
7. Work Plan & Timeline (1200 characters with spaces as maximum)



8. Annex: References; CVs; Letters of Support (if applicable)
9. Budget and budget justification

- Applications can be written in Spanish or English.
- Applications can be submitted in pdf format to: [investigacion.research@colansa.org](mailto:investigacion.research@colansa.org)
- All documents (i.e., proposal template, budget template, budget justification and annexes) should be submitted together as one package.
- You may not make changes to your application after it is submitted but you can withdraw an application and send a new one.
- Proposal templates, including any annexes cannot be altered. Incomplete applications, use of different templates or applications exceeding the requested length will not be considered.
- Please DO NOT resend your application unless you do not receive a confirmation of receipt within three days.

### • International Standards

It is expected that projects funded under this call will comply with international standards and best practices codes such as:

- Due ethical approvals
- Administrative authorizations for use of clinical or retrospective data
- Preregistrations of systematic reviews and clinical trials in public data bases
- Standards for reporting epidemiological studies (observational and analytical) such as STROBE or SPIRIT

### • Budget justification

- The costs of your proposal should be break down in the budget justification template (i.e., technical personnel, supplies, equipment, travel, dissemination expenses and other operational costs).
- The costs included in the budget justification template should be feasible and realistic for the proposal and must be aligned with the proposed aims and objectives of the study.
- The following guidelines detail the general criteria that should be addressed when justifying the budget needs:
  - a) Technical personnel: person involved in the project, position of employment, salary. Please state the roles and explain why you require the level (in terms of qualifications and salary) that you are requesting.
  - b) Supplies: detail all the supplies needed for the execution of the proposal. Please provide the name/description of the item, the total value of the item and a justification for the particular item requested.
  - c) Equipment: detail all the supplies needed for the execution of the proposal (i.e., laptop, cell phone, among others). Please provide the name/description of the item, the total value of the item and a justification for the particular item requested.
  - d) Travel: attendance to conferences, team meetings, field visit, among others. Please indicate the purpose of the trip(s), the people that will be traveling, number of days, and their destination(s).
  - e) Dissemination expenses: costs of article publication, book chapter, and other dissemination materials should be included in this item of the budget. Please provide the name/description of the item, the total value of the item and a justification for the particular item requested.
  - f) Other operational costs: Please detail any other cost that is not included in the other items of the budget (if applicable).

### • Evaluation committee & guidelines





Proposals will be first screened by members of the COLANSA research team to ensure eligibility. Proposal that complies with the guidelines will be then scored by two external reviewers based on the evaluation criteria (see below). Proposals with equal or higher scores compared to the mean of the reviewers scores will be presented and discussed on a virtual meeting including all Evaluation Committee members.

Evaluation Committee will be formed by 5 people: three representatives of the scientific community with experience working in the region, one civil society representative, one ALSANNA representative. Names of the committee members will be available at the website after completion of the selection process.

- **Evaluation criteria**

Submitted proposals will be evaluated using a score system from 0-10 points according to the following criteria: a) quality of the proposal for this grant call, b) feasibility of the proposal, c) potential impact and d) quality of the team. A scoring evaluation template will be used to calculate the final score of each proposal (Annex 1).

- a. Quality of the Proposal (30%)**

- The proposal addresses at least one of the key selected areas outlined in the call (i.e., Actions, Barriers, Implementation, Sustainability, Needs Assessment, Impact).
- Justification of the research question is properly stated.
- The proposal describes the aims, objectives, and has a robust study design.
- The research questions, aims, objectives and methodical approach of the proposal are properly aligned.
- The proposal describes the methodological approach including study population/participants, study setting, inclusion, and exclusion criteria (if applicable), variables of the study, measurements of variables, and statistical plan designed for answering the research questions.
- The proposal clearly described the outcomes of the study.
- The proposal has appropriately accounted for ethical and context considerations that might arise. Ethical considerations might be related to: including vulnerable life age stages (children and adolescents), potential cultural differences between non-indigenous and indigenous team members, stakeholders or participants of the proposal.
- A workplan with a detailed timeline according to the objectives of the project are included in the proposal.
- The budget and budget justification are consistent with the research plan and context include in the proposal.

- b. Feasibility 20%**

- The proposal identifies the major technical, operational, and organizational challenges and includes a plan to tackle them.
- The proposal considers the variety of socio-political, cultural, policy and economical context of their study settings (i.e., different context of LAC countries) and provide a plan to address them (if applicable).
- The proposal includes the identification of any potential external challenge that may affect the development of the project (i.e., natural disasters, forced displacement) and develop a plan accordingly.
- The proposal identifies potential challenges of working with vulnerable populations (i.e., children and adolescents of LAC countries) and include a plan to overcome these challenges.
- If the proposal is focused on a particular population (e.g., gender, race and/or ethnicity), then the reason for this should be well-justified.
- The proposed budget seems feasible for the type of work proposed.

- c. Potential for Impact 20%**



- The proposal responds to needs or research gaps for achieving food system transformation for healthier diets in children and adolescents based on what was outlined in the call.
- The proposal includes equity needs as a key element on improving health and diet in children and adolescents in LAC countries.
- The proposal includes a unique perspective and provides new insights based on the key areas selected in the proposal (i.e., Actions, Barriers, Implementation, Sustainability, Needs Assessment, Impact).
- The proposal includes strategies or plan, including stakeholder involvement for the uptake of project results.
- The proposal considers a gender equality perspective (See <https://colansa.org/library/herramienta-de-evaluacion-de-sensibilidad-al-genero/> for guidance)

#### d. Quality of the team 30%

- The proposal includes a multidisciplinary research team which will contribute with different and complementary perspectives to tackle the defined research gap included in the proposal. <https://colansa.org/library/herramienta-de-evaluacion-de-sensibilidad-al-genero/>
  - Team members have the skills and the capacities to conduct the proposed study.
  - The team incorporates early-career researchers.
  - There is a capacity building plan.
  - Team members have proven capacity for adequate dissemination of findings in terms of scientific and public health outputs.
  - If high and low-income researchers are included, there is evidence of an equitable type of partnership.
  - There is sound evidence that key stakeholders have been considered when designing the study proposal.
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- **Key dates:**
    - May 27<sup>th</sup> 2024 Call Opening
    - July 7<sup>th</sup> 2024 Submission Deadline
    - July 26<sup>th</sup> 2024 Results of the Call
    - August 15<sup>th</sup> 2024 Estimated Beginning of the Project

**Further questions regarding this call can be addressed to: [investigacion.research@colansa.org](mailto:investigacion.research@colansa.org)**



## Annex 1. Evaluation grant scoring

Criterion	Descriptor	Score
1. Quality of the proposal (30%)	<b>Excellent:</b> Well written and very organized. Study objectives are well presented. Methods and justification of the project are complete and well presented. Clear and concise statements. Robust evidence is provided and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the topic. Budget justification is properly explained and detailed.	7-10
	<b>Good, but with areas of improvement:</b> Writing is clear, but some important areas are missing. Methods and justification of the project are easy to understand but presents some gaps. Methods are not fully justified or not totally aligned with the research questions. Budget justification is explained and detailed but does not seem fully appropriate for the work proposed.	4-6
	<b>Week/insufficient:</b> Writing is unclear. Confusing and choppy, incomplete sentences. Evidence is insufficient to support research questions. Methods and justification of the project are not clear or do not align with the research questions. There are fundamental errors on the scientific approach. Budget justification is unclear or not consistent with the proposal.	1-3
2. Feasibility (20%)	<b>Excellent:</b> Personnel, project activities, timeline, and budget expenditures are congruent with project description and outcomes. Challenges are clearly identified, and a detailed mitigation plan is included in the proposal.	7-10
	<b>Good, but with areas of improvement:</b> Deficiencies or overestimations exist in personnel, timeline, or budget within tolerable range, outcomes appear achievable despite gaps or leaps. A detailed mitigation plan is included in the proposal but there are potential risks remaining.	4-6
	<b>Week/insufficient:</b> Project's assembled personnel, timeline, or budget expose weaknesses in plan design. Outcomes unlikely to be achieved in project's current form. The proposal does not include a mitigation plan, or the mitigation plan is not adequate.	1-3
3. Potential for Impact (20%)	<b>Excellent:</b> The project identifies an important area of need for achieving food systems' transformation that support children's and adolescent's healthier diets. The proposal takes a sound equity perspective. Strong rationale and significance of proposed work. Innovative approaches are considered. Clear engagement with key stakeholders and dissemination plan.	7-10
	<b>Good, but with areas of improvement:</b> The area for improvement will somewhat improve the health and diet of children's and adolescent's in LAC countries. There are efforts to address equity properly, but it is not a primary goal of the project. Rationale and significance of proposed work is stated but it is not clear that corresponds to a priority. Innovation is not clear	4-6
	<b>Week/insufficient:</b> The project is unlikely to meaningfully contribute the transformation of food systems to support children's and adolescent's health and diet in LAC countries.	1-3
4. Quality of the Study Team (30%)	<b>Excellent:</b> Study team is multidisciplinary and includes all the necessary skills for achieving the goals proposed. Early-career researchers have been meaningfully involved in the proposal. There is clear demonstration of involvement of key stakeholders. Researchers show capacity for effective dissemination of findings including different audiences.	7-10
	<b>Good, but with areas of improvement:</b> study team is solid but seems to be missing some capacities. Early career researchers are considered but it is not clear their role. Study team has proven capacity for dissemination of findings but mostly considering	4-6



	scientific output. There is involvement of stakeholders, but their role is somewhat unclear.				
	<b>Weak/insufficient:</b> study team lacks of important capacities for successfully conduct the project. There is no involvement of early-career researchers or key stakeholders. Study team does not seem to have the capacities for adequate dissemination of findings.				<b>1-3</b>
<b>Total score</b>					
<b>Recommend funding?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Partial</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Additional comments:</b>	

