



Expression of Interest (EOI): UNICEF First Foods Africa Initiative INVITATION TO ELIGIBLE COMPANIES

UNICEF First Foods Africa (FFA) initiative invites African-owned food companies to express their interest in joining efforts to transform food systems for children in 14 selected countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal in Western and central Africa; Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia in Eastern and Southern Africa. This initiative aims to address the pressing need for nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable foods tailored for young children (6-59 months) in Africa.

The Initiative

Globally, one in four children under 5 years of age (181 million) live in severe child food poverty. One-third of these children (57 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa. Children living in severe child food poverty miss essential nutrients required for survival, growth, and development. Severe child food poverty drives the persisting, high rates of undernutrition – both stunting and wasting – in the African continent.

Traditional food security initiatives overlook children's unique nutrient needs and fail to address children's nutrition. These initiatives focus on improving household access to staple foods and agricultural incomes, neglecting the need for nutritious, safe, and affordable foods for children – especially sources of protein and essential, healthy fats. Innovative large-scale approaches are needed to improve children's first foods, food environments, and food practices. In a recent survey of over 800 products in west Africa, only 20% were nutritionally adequate complementary foods for children, and over 65% were produced outside of Africa.

UNICEF is uniquely positioned to drive this transformation – in partnership with national governments, private sector leaders, and development partners. UNICEF First Foods Africa (FFA) will support local production and consumption of nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods and food supplements for young children, especially those who are most vulnerable to malnutrition and related poor growth and development.

UNICEF FFA aims to respond to child food poverty in early childhood. It builds on UNICEF's expertise and experience with local and regional production of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF). FFA is guided by the UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030 and UNICEF's vision on Food Systems for Children. FFA is a central component of the UNICEF Africa Strategy, contributing to Africa's development agenda.

UNICEF FFA will work closely with national governments in selected countries to support the creation of policy environments that protect and promote access to nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods. Governments will play a pivotal role in shaping regulatory frameworks, providing incentives for local food production, and facilitating partnerships to address child food poverty and malnutrition. By aligning with national development strategies and policies, FFA aims to ensure a cohesive and sustainable approach to improving children's nutrition.

UNICEF First Foods Africa intends to:

- **Incentivize local production** of nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods in Africa, by Africa and for Africa's young children.
- **Shape policy environments** to protect, promote and support access to nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods by the most vulnerable children in Africa.
- **Stimulate adequate consumption** of nutritious first foods through large-scale social marketing and social and behaviour change programmes.

UNICEF aims to work primarily with national and local governments, and a selected number of medium-to-large African food companies who are committed to joining forces to end child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa. UNICEF will also build on its longstanding collaboration with key global partners, including UN Agencies, Academia, and Civil Society Organizations.

First Foods Africa seeks to create systemic, sustainable transformation of food systems for children in Africa, bringing together public and private sector leaders. It aims to change production priorities, policy frameworks, and consumption practices so that every child receives the nutritious diets they need. First Foods Africa will contribute to sustainably reducing the prevalence of child food poverty and malnutrition in Africa, for Africa and by Africa.

Local African Food companies and the FFA Initiative

The 2023 *WHO Guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6–23 months of age*¹ provides key recommendations on how to improve dietary diversity and thus reduce child food poverty. The Guideline acknowledges that starchy staple foods commonly comprise a large component of children's diets - particularly in low resource settings – and should be minimized: they are not good sources of proteins and critical nutrients such as essential vitamins and minerals.

The Guideline recommends higher intake of nutrient dense food groups such as animal source foods (meat, fish, eggs, dairy), fruits and vegetables, and pulses, nuts, and seeds, which are not consumed by most children living in child food poverty and are sources of critical nutrients needed for optimal growth and development. First Foods Africa aims to increase access and consumption of nutrient dense foods that young children – especially vulnerable ones - are missing in their diets.

Support to Food Producers

First Foods Africa aims to support selected food companies to access catalytic investments and strengthen technical capacities to produce nutritious, safe, affordable first foods, targeting under-consumed food groups in alignment with the latest WHO Guideline, and in compliance with the highest national or regional quality standards, best practices, and latest evidence.

Examples of nutritious first foods include:

- Complementary foods: Packaged nutritious and safe complementary foods comprising cereal grains, animal/plant source protein, vitamins and essential micronutrients for children aged 6-23 months.

¹ WHO Guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6–23 months of age. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

- Food ingredients: minimally transformed foods, such as dried powders made of a single food (egg, fish, legumes, nuts) that can be added to home-prepared complementary foods and children's portion of the family meal.
- Food snacks: Nutrient-dense, safe, and palatable snacks that can be used as a complement to home-prepared foods for young children aged 6-59 months.

Participation in the initiative requires companies to adhere to established principles of engagement and to meet specific exclusion criteria. Companies who will express their interest will participate in a rigorous selection process where different criteria will be assessed, including ownership and partnerships, local sourcing of raw materials, affordability of products, among others.

UNICEF First Foods Africa will support selected food companies to:

- 1) Access tailored capital and high-quality business advisory services to enhance the production and distribution of nutritious, safe, affordable, and sustainable first foods that meet the specific needs of young children.
- 2) Strengthen first foods quality systems and ingredient supply chain management through tailored technical assistance, including: training, mentorship, advisory services, and knowledge sharing.
- 3) Support to reformulate first foods products and creating innovative, low cost, sustainable options that meet demand and comply with the highest safety and nutritional quality standards for young children.

Eligibility Criteria

UNICEF First Foods Africa initiative is open to companies that align with UNICEF and National Governments targets to reduce child food poverty and malnutrition. UNICEF does not engage with industries that violate the Code of Marketing for Breastmilk Substitutes or those whose core business is the production and distribution of ultra-processed foods and beverages (UPF). UNICEF has several exclusionary criteria for private sector partnerships, many of which are standard across the UN system, preventing engagement with certain companies (details available upon request).

UNICEF First Foods Africa will engage with companies that are majority-owned by African people, based in one or more of the 14 selected countries, and actively engaged or with strong interest in developing and marketing healthy nutritious food products that cater to the nutritional needs of young children.

UNICEF First Foods Africa will primarily engage with companies that prioritize sourcing raw materials locally, thereby strengthening local economies while promoting sustainable and climate-friendly agricultural, farming, and fishing practices. Additionally, UNICEF First Foods Africa will prioritize companies that streamline the nutrition value chain from production to consumption and create meaningful employment opportunities for women and youth.

Ideal candidates have a solid market presence, and offer products made of food items belonging to those food groups that are mostly missing in children's diets and are essential for optimal growth and development: animal source foods – including meat, fish, or eggs; fruits and vegetables; and pulses, nuts, and seeds. Eligible companies must also align with national and regional priorities for child nutrition and food security. This includes compliance with local policies and regulations,

and active engagement in government-led initiatives that promote sustainable agriculture, food safety, and child nutrition or with a strong interest in the initiative.

Selection Process

The selection process will follow a rigorous step approach to identify the most suitable partners.

Step 1. Initially, interested companies will submit the EOI by completing the online form, which includes three questionnaires - Annex 1a, 1b and 2 (included in this document). Through Annex 1a, the company will certify its commitment to the First Foods Africa Principles of Engagement. Through Annex 1b, the company will certify that it does not meet any of the exclusion criteria, which are based on the international principles and UNICEF guidelines. Through Annex 2, the company will provide information about its products and business operations and processes.

Step 2. Information received through the online form will be used to shortlist companies, based on the criteria established in Annex 1a and 1b and the scoring system presented in Annex 2. Shortlisted companies will then be contacted via email with a request to submit the required documents listed in the following section.

Step 3. Companies that are found to be eligible (Step 1) and that score well in the assessment (Step 2) will proceed to a more detailed financial performance and business plan assessment by investment partners, aimed at ensuring their long-term viability and ability to meet the initiative's objectives.

Step 4. Companies that will be positively evaluated in the financial performance, and business plan assessment will be finally selected to engage in UNICEF First Foods Africa. Continuous compliance with the FFA's engagement principles is critical. Participating companies will be required to maintain compliance with the initiative's principles through ongoing monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of our collective efforts to improve child nutrition in Africa.

The selection process may involve consultations with relevant government bodies to ensure that the chosen companies align with national policies on sustainable agriculture, food safety, and child nutrition. Governments and selected partners may also be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the initiative's impact to ensure that it meets national health and nutrition targets.

How to Express Interest

Interested companies are requested to submit their **Expression of Interest** electronically using an online form. Shortlisted companies, as indicated in Step 2 of the previous section, will be contacted via email to submit the following documents:

1. **Company registration:** relevant certifications, including business incorporation certificate, and/or business registration number.
2. **Company profile:** basic information about the company, core business focus, ownership, location, and organizational structure including list of directors and shareholders and their nationalities and percentage ownership.

3. **Product overview:** a list of products providing enough information to assess the nutritious value of the products, ingredients and nutrition profile (if possible), retail pricing, and source of raw materials within the company portfolio. This information is to be provided at least for products for young children.
4. **Other supporting documents:** market and investment data and working capital.
5. **Preliminary business case (*optional*):** preliminary business case for safe, nutritious first foods - including the type and size of the financial instruments needed (debt, equity, guarantee) will be requested to pre-selected companies, but you can already share it at this stage, to strengthen your expression of interest.

A response to this Request for Expression of Interest does not automatically ensure that you will be considered in the FFA.

Submission and Contact Information

Please submit your EOI through the online form available at this [link](#). Ensure that all relevant sections of the EOI - Annex 1a, Annex 1b, and Annex 2 - are completed.

Based on the responses submitted in the online form, shortlisted companies will be contacted via email and provided with a secure link to submit the required documents.

For any queries or additional information, you may contact firstfoodsafrika@unicef.org.

Timeline

- **EOI submission deadline:** 30 April 2025
- **Documents submission deadline (for shortlisted companies):** 31 May 2025
- **Evaluation period:** June-July 2025
- **Notification of selected companies:** August 2025

We look forward to receiving your submissions and to the potential collaboration in transforming food systems for the betterment of young children's nutrition across Africa.

Disclaimer of Liability

UNICEF shall not be held liable for any direct or indirect costs incurred by companies because of their participation in the Expression of Interest process or the First Foods Africa initiative. Participation in this process does not create any binding obligations or commitments on the part of UNICEF to fund, support, or endorse the activities of any company. All participating companies agree that UNICEF is not responsible for any decisions made by companies based on the information provided in this document or any related communications. Becoming a selected partner for the First Food Initiative is not a commitment from UNICEF to purchase products or services.

Annex 1a - FFA's Principles of Engagement

Engagement in First Foods Africa stands on a shared commitment to transform food systems to deliver nutritious, safe, affordable, sustainable first foods for young children in Africa. Companies engaging in this initiative shall commit to the principles outlined here.

1. Name of the Company:
2. Name and Designation of the Respondent:
3. Email address of the Respondent:

4	Commit to respect the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS-RAI)	Yes / No
5	Commit to respect the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights and the Children's Rights and Business Principles , developed by UNICEF, the UN Global Compact, and Save the Children ²	Yes / No
6	Commit to not engage in lobbying activities which counteract recommended nutrition policy actions including nutrition labelling, marketing regulations, mandatory reformulation, and fiscal policies	Yes / No
7	Commit to respect the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions	Yes / No
8	Commit to the disclosure of information and data on corporate practices which impact child nutrition on an annual basis (including full product and profit portfolio, expenditure, marketing policies/ strategies, products labelling and health claims, reformulation practices and progress, funding of any entities/ trade associations/ lobbying groups)	Yes / No
9	Commit to reformulate products with high sodium/ saturated fat/ sugars/ calories and/or containing trans-fat/ cosmetic additives and/or flavorings added for any reason other than a defined technological purpose and, only those approved by the Codex Alimentarius for use in foods for older infants and young children	Yes/No
10	Commit to develop products that have predominantly ingredients from the missing food groups for children (vegetables, legumes/nuts, fruits, or animal source foods)	Yes/No
11	Commit not to fortify or enrich products that do not pass the WHO nutrient profile and promotion model ³	Yes/No

² The Children's Rights and Business Principles provide a comprehensive framework for businesses to respect and support children's rights. These principles guide companies on actions they can take in the workplace, marketplace, and community to ensure children's well-being. It also calls on companies to integrate children's rights into their core business strategies, policy commitments, due diligence processes, and remediation measures.

³ In Africa, such profiling model has not been developed but the South East Asia could be used:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290210986>

Annex 1b - FFA's Exclusion Criteria

In addition, by marking the corresponding box below, I declare that the Company.....**IS NOT**:

12	Subject to UN Sanction	True/False
13	Listed on UN Ineligible Vendors	True/False
14	Involved in the production, manufacturing and distribution of weapons and armaments (all categories and types, including antipersonnel mines and cluster bombs)	True/False
15	Involved in the production, manufacturing, and distribution of tobacco and/or alcohol (including e-cigarettes)	True/False
16	Involved in the production of adult content (pornography, and violent content)	True/False
17	Involved in gambling and games of chance (with the exception of national lotteries)	True/False
18	Involved in coal extraction (metallurgical and/or thermal) ⁴	True/False
19	Known for not respecting and upholding the human rights to food , health , rights at work , labour and decent work , safe drinking water , the right to clean, healthy and sustainable environments , and respecting legitimate land tenure rights	True/False
20	Complicit in human rights abuses, tolerated forced or compulsory labor or the use of child labor	True/False
21	Recognized as having a track record of violating the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes	True/False
22	Having a core business (>30% of total profits) in production, retail, promotion, and marketing of ultra-processed foods (UPF) and beverages high in saturated fats, sugars, and salt	True/False
23	A subsidiary or local partner of a company having a track record of violating the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, or whose core business is the production, retail, promotion and marketing of ultra-processed foods (UPF) and beverages high in saturated fats, sugars, and salt	True/False

I understand that not complying with the criteria listed here could be a reason for exclusion from engaging with the First Foods Africa initiative.

⁴ While other fossil fuels are currently not a formal exclusionary criterion within UNICEF, extraction of oil and gas, including LNG, is deemed highly sensitive and may become exclusionary for partnerships based on UN-wide discussions. Prospects from this sector will thus be approached and scored cautiously.

Annex 2 - First Foods Africa Self-Assessment

Companies are requested to self-assess key First Foods Africa parameters based on the criteria listed below. Each criterion will be scored, with a maximum possible score of 42 points. The score will be used to pre-select companies for further evaluation of their financial performance and business plans to assess their viability for participation in the First Foods Africa initiative.

No.	Parameter	Select relevant option(s)	Means of verification
24	African owned company producing in Africa	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, fully (4 points) 2. Yes, but with partners from another region with less than 50% stakes in the company and with no portfolio of ultra-processed foods (UPF) or breast milk substitutes (BMS) (2 points) 3. Yes, but with partners from another region with less than 50% stakes in the company and with portfolio of ultra-processed foods (UPF) or breast milk substitutes (BMS) (minus 2 points) 4. Not Africa owned and/or with partners from another region with more than 50% stakes in the company (not eligible) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
25	Formally registered legal entity in any of the First Foods Africa Initiative Countries (please note: individuals or public sector entities are not eligible)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (eligible) 2. No (not eligible) 	Include proof of registration
26	First Foods Africa country where your company is registered	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Benin 2. Burkina Faso 3. Cote d'Ivoire 4. DR Congo 5. Ethiopia 6. Ghana 7. Kenya 8. Malawi 9. Nigeria 10. Rwanda 11. Senegal 12. Tanzania 13. Uganda 14. Zambia 	Include proof of registration

No.	Parameter	Select relevant option(s)	Means of verification
27	Country or countries where your company operates (please select)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Benin 2. Burkina Faso 3. Cote d'Ivoire 4. DR Congo 5. Ethiopia 6. Ghana 7. Kenya 8. Malawi 9. Nigeria 10. Rwanda 11. Senegal 12. Tanzania 13. Uganda 14. Zambia 15. Other(s): please specify 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
28	Percentage of the company's raw materials used for the product portfolio sourced from suppliers located less than 1,000 km from the manufacturing plant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More than 80% (4 points) 2. Between 50% and 80% (2 points) 3. Between 0% and 50% (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
29	Percentage of company products costing less than 10% of median household food spending per adult equivalent (AEQ) ⁵ per serving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More than 80% (4 points) 2. Between 50% and 80% (2 points) 3. Between 0% and 50% (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
30	Size of the company	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annualized revenues more than USD 1 million (4 points) 2. Annualized revenues more than USD 500,000 and less than USD 1 million (3 points) 3. Annualized revenues more than USD 200,000 and less than USD 500,000 (2 points) 4. Annualized revenues less than USD 200,000 (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score

⁵ Data for most of the targeted African countries are available [here](#). If better sources are available, the company should provide the data sources used to estimate their percentage.

No.	Parameter	Select relevant option(s)	Means of verification
31	Leverage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equity to total assets more than 35% (4 points) 2. Equity to total assets more than 25% and less than 35% (3 points) 3. Equity to total assets more than 15% and less than 25% (2 points) 4. Equity to total assets less than 15% (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
32	Profitability: Positive or showing a positive trend	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes - if positive EBITDA for the last three years, or if negative, a positive trend indicating improving profitability (4 points) 2. No - if negative EBITDA without any positive trends (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
33	At least one year in operation and with audited financial statement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (4 points) 2. No (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
34	Company adheres to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (4 points) 2. No (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
35	<p>Company committed to gender diversity, youth representation and pay equity based on the following sub criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>No gender pay gap</i> 2. <i>Women represent 50% of the management</i> 3. <i>Young employees are compensated fairly</i> 4. <i>More than 50% of their raw materials come from women farmers/owned businesses</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meets all 4 of the sub-criteria (4 points) 2. Meets 3 of the sub-criteria (3 points) 3. Meets 2 of the sub-criteria (2 points) 4. Meets 1 of the sub-criteria (1 point) 5. Meets none of the sub-criteria (0 points) 	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score

No.	Parameter	Select relevant option(s)	Means of verification
36	Company with products in food groups that are under consumed by children in their existing portfolio	Yes (3 points) No (minus 2 points)	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score
37	Transparency and Vision. <i>The company has shared all documents requested and has a Vision towards child nutrition in their institutional and foundational documents</i>	Yes (3 points) No (0 points)	Include relevant reference to documents that your company will be required to provide if pre-selected to verify the accuracy of the score

38. I certify that the information provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Name and Designation:

Signature and Date: