Expression of Interest (EOI): Local Production of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF), small-quantity lipid nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS) and nutrient dense first foods and snacks in Afghanistan

Invitation to Eligible Afghan Companies, International Manufacturers, Investors and Partners.

UNICEF Afghanistan invites expressions of interest from qualified Afghan food and pharmaceutical manufacturing companies, established international manufacturers of RUTF and other specialized nutrition products, and from investors, financing partners and consortia or joint ventures interested in partnering with Afghan companies, to explore opportunities for the local production of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF), Small-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (SQ-LNS) and nutrient dense child-appropriate first foods and snacks in Afghanistan.

This initiative aims to strengthen national capacity to manufacture high-quality therapeutic and supplementary nutrition products and nutritious first foods for young children that support the prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition among children aged 6-59 months. Through local production, UNICEF seeks to improve the availability, affordability, sustainability, and timely delivery of life-saving nutrition commodities, while simultaneously fostering economic growth, industrial development, and employment opportunities within Afghanistan.

Background

Afghanistan continues to face a severe nutrition crisis, driven by a combination of persistent poverty, food insecurity, climate-related shocks, disease outbreaks, population displacement and return movements, limited availability of and access to health and nutrition services, and declining humanitarian funding. These factors continue to undermine livelihoods, household food security and access to diverse, nutritious diets.

RUTF remains the cornerstone product for the outpatient treatment of severe wasting and high-risk moderate wasting among children 6 months to 5 years and is essential to sustaining the national nutrition response. RUSF and Medium-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (MQ-LNS) can support the management of moderate acute malnutrition and help prevent deterioration to more severe forms of undernutrition. Small-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (SQ-LNS) are used to enrich home-prepared complementary foods with essential energy, protein, fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals, helping to prevent undernutrition among vulnerable populations. Collectively, these products are referred to as specialized nutrition products.

In parallel, expanding local large-scale production of nutrient-dense complementary foods, or "first foods," that young children need from 6 months of age, offers a significant opportunity to improve dietary quality among children after six months, reduce child food poverty, and contribute to the prevention of undernutrition. Traditional food security initiatives overlook children's unique nutrient needs and fail to address children's nutrition. Innovative large-scale approaches are needed to improve children's first foods, food environments, and food practices. Such efforts align with the Afghanistan Joint UN First Foods Initiative and would complement household-level and smallholder production approaches.

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.
- 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.

Afghanistan is currently one of the largest consumers of RUTF (using approx. 1.2M cartons annually) and RUSF (approx 550,000 cartons annually), accounting for more than 10 per cent of global RUTF utilization. Despite this substantial demand, the country remains heavily dependent on imported therapeutic and supplementary nutrition products. Growing geopolitical uncertainties, global supply chain disruptions, rising freight and transportation costs, fluctuating donor resources, and importation delays have increased risks to the continuity, affordability, and sustainability of nutrition programmes.

In this context, developing domestic manufacturing capacity could strengthen supply security, reduce procurement and logistics costs, improve responsiveness during emergencies, enhance national resilience, and support long-term access to high-quality nutrition products. Afghanistan's considerable agricultural potential, combined with its emerging food processing sector, presents promising opportunities for local production of nutrient-dense, supplementary and therapeutic foods.

- UNICEF therefore seeks to assess the interest and capacity of qualified Afghan manufacturers, on their own or in partnership with experienced international manufacturers and investors, to produce nutritious first foods, RUTF, RUSF, and SQ-LNS locally.

The Call for Expression of Interest

UNICEF Afghanistan intends to identify and engage Afghan manufacturers, international manufacturers, investors and partnerships or consortia interested in establishing or expanding the local production of:

- Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF)
- Ready-to-Use Supplementary Food (RUSF)
- Medium-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (MQ-LNS)
- Small-Quantity Lipid-Based Nutrient Supplements (SQ-LNS)
- Nutrient-dense complementary foods and snacks ("First Foods")

Local production of any specialized nutrition products or nutrient dense first foods will promote compliance with:

- UNICEF, WHO, and WFP product specifications and guidance.
- Codex Alimentarius standards.
- National food safety and quality regulations.
- International standards for RUTF, RUSF, LNS, and Complementary Processed Food (CPF/CPCF) production.
- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).
- Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) requirements.
- International food safety, quality assurance, and laboratory testing standards.

Goal of the call for expression of interest

- To establish sustainable, quality-assured manufacturing capacity for RUTF in Afghanistan, owned or co-owned by Afghan companies and supported by technology transfer and partnerships with experienced manufacturers and investors, so that a growing share of Afghanistan's RUTF requirement can be met from in-country production that meets UNICEF specifications, while continuity of supply from existing sources is maintained during the transition.

Objectives of the call for expression of interest

- Identify, by the EOI submission deadline, Afghan companies, international RUTF and other nutritional product manufacturers and investors interested in RUTF production in Afghanistan.
- Identify viable partnership models between Afghan companies and experienced manufacturers or investors, such as technology transfer, licensing, joint ventures, contract manufacturing and equity investment.

- The outcome of this Request for Expression of Interest, together with the results of the UNICEF-commissioned feasibility assessment, will be used to assess the technical and commercial viability of local RUTF production (raw-material availability, regulatory pathway, investment needs, cost competitiveness and realistic production ramp-up), and share the findings with respondents at the industry meeting.
- Define a pathway and indicative timeline for interested manufacturers to meet UNICEF RUTF product specifications and quality requirements (GMP, HACCP and UNICEF Supply Division quality assessment), as a prerequisite for taking part in any future UNICEF competitive tender.
- Inform a phased roadmap towards an indicative timeline for local maufacturers readiness to supply the first quality assured products.

Eligibility Criteria

Interested parties are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) demonstrating their capacity, experience, proposed partnership arrangements (where applicable) and commitment to producing high-quality specialized nutrition products in Afghanistan.

Responses are welcome from the following types of respondent, individually or jointly:

(i) Afghan food, pharmaceutical or agro-processing companies interested in producing RUTF or other specialized nutrition products;

(ii) established manufacturers of RUTF and other specialized nutrition products, including current UNICEF suppliers, interested in technology transfer, licensing, joint ventures, contract manufacturing or investment in Afghanistan;

(iii) investors and financing institutions interested in supporting local production; and

(iv) consortia or joint ventures combining any of the above.

Afghan companies that do not yet meet all the technical requirements below are encouraged to respond and may meet them through a technical partner.

A. Applications are eligible from:

1) Companies that align with UNICEF's 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).

2) Companies based in Afghanistan or international companies and investors willing to manufacture in Afghanistan in partnership with Afghan companies, and actively engaged or with strong interest in developing and marketing healthy nutritious food products that cater to the nutritional needs of young children
3) Companies that streamline the nutrition value chain from production to consumption and create meaningful employment opportunities for women and youth.
4) Companies that offer first food 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.

B. Company Requirements

Eligible companies must:

- Be legally registered and authorized to operate in Afghanistan or currently in partnership with an Afghanistan based company/planned to enter partnership with Afghanistan based company.
- Be majority Afghan-owned or demonstrate a significant local ownership and operational presence.
- Have an established manufacturing facility in Afghanistan or present a credible plan for establishing such a facility.
- Be committed to food safety, product quality, and continuous improvement.

C. Technical Requirements

Eligible companies must:

- Have experience in food manufacturing, pharmaceutical production, nutrition products, food fortification, or related industries.
- Operate under recognized quality management and food safety systems
- Possess laboratory testing capacity or have formal access to accredited laboratory services.
- Demonstrate the technical capability and willingness to upgrade facilities, equipment, and systems, where necessary, to meet international production standards.

- Have experience sourcing, processing, or managing agricultural and food-based raw materials.

Submission of Expression of Interest (EOI)

Interested companies are invited to submit an EOI containing the following information:

- Completed the checklist.
- Company profile and background.
- Ownership structure.
- Details of existing manufacturing facilities and production capacity if any or in plan.
- Relevant licenses, registrations, and certifications if available.
- Experience in food manufacturing, pharmaceutical production, nutrition products, or related sectors.

5. Supporting Documentation

Applicants should submit copies of relevant supporting documentation if available, including:

- Business registration certificates and operating licenses.
- Product catalogues if any,
- Any industry certification if any
- Laboratory accreditation certificates, where applicable.

Any additional documentation demonstrating technical competence, production experience, or compliance with national and international standards.

Next steps:

Upon the receipt of the submissions, UNICEF will organize an industry meeting to provide an overview of the Nutrition supplies procurement; processes and companies will be invited to attend the meeting (online and face to face).

Submission of EOI

Interested companies should submit their Expression of Interest through the UNGM, together with the completed checklist.

Timeline:

- EOI submission deadline: **15:00 Hrs, 24 October 2026**

Disclaimer

The submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI) and/or participation in, or invitation to attend, an industry meeting does not create any contractual or financial obligation on the part of UNICEF towards any participating entity. UNICEF expressly reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to accept or reject any submission, and to amend, suspend, or terminate the EOI or related processes at any stage without prior notice or liability.

Neither participation in this EOI nor attendance at any industry meeting shall be construed as a guarantee or commitment by UNICEF to provide technical assistance, procurement opportunities, invitations to tender, or the establishment of any future business relationship or contract. Receipt of an invitation or participation in these activities does not constitute an offer to contract, nor does it guarantee the issuance of a tender or the award of any contract to any participant.

Checklist

Name of your company	
Contact person	
Contact email	
Registered address	
Website	

	Question	**Yes**	**No**	**Comments**
1	Is your company legally registered and authorized to operate in Afghanistan or currently in partnership with an Afghanistan based company or plans to enter into partnership with an Afghanistan based company?			
2	Is your company majority Afghan-owned or demonstrates a significant local ownership and operational presence?			
3	Does your company have an established manufacturing facility in Afghanistan or present a credible plan for establishing such a facility?			
4	Is your company committed to food safety, product quality, and continuous improvement?			
5	Does your company produce and distribute ultra-processed foods and beverages?			
6	Does your company have experience in food manufacturing, pharmaceutical production, nutrition products, food fortification, or related industries?			

7	Does your company operate under recognized quality management and food safety systems?			
8	Does your company possess laboratory testing capacity or have formal access to accredited laboratory services?			
9	Does your company demonstrate the technical capability and willingness to upgrade facilities, equipment, and systems, where necessary, to meet international production standards?			
10	Does your company have experience sourcing, processing, or managing agricultural and food-based raw materials?			
11	Has your company ever violated the code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes?			