Empowering the future:

ECOWAS homegrown school feeding for human capital development and economic growth

"Investing in homegrown school feeding to strengthen human capital, women's economic empowerment and contribute to economic development."

ECOWAS

WFP World Food Programme

SUPPORTED BY WORLD BANK GROUP

School Meals Coalition
Nutrition, Health and Education for Every Child

LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE

Research Consortium for SHN

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Key messages

- Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) programs have the potential to significantly improve human capital, empower women, enhance nutrition, and contribute to economic development in ECOWAS member states.

- Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ECOWAS countries have demonstrated their commitment to HGSF programs boasting, 22.4 million children receiving school meals—the highest in Africa, where 65.9 million children benefit from such programs. Regional analysis reveals that 38 percent of primary school children enrolled in school received school meals as of 2022.

- Commitment is demonstrated in the substantial investment and the creation of school feeding policies, with regional investment in school meals increasing from USD 450 million to USD 543 million between 2020 and 2022, an impressive 84% sourced from domestic funds.

- The implementation of HGSF models supports gender equality by empowering women through farming, cooperatives, direct employment, and capacity building, leveraging their prominent roles in the agricultural and food sectors.

- HGSF encourages the consumption of locally grown, climate-smart foods, including indigenous varieties, contributing to better food systems and local economic growth.

- In post-conflict and transitional contexts, school meals and to a large extent homegrown school feeding play a vital role in the restoration of education systems, the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees and providing a safety net for school health (e.g., deworming, prevention, and treatment of neglected tropic diseases, water sanitation and hygiene) and nutrition services.

- An ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding which took place in October 2023 identified several common priorities including securing long-term government funding, modernizing data collection systems, empowering rural women, ensuring access to nutritious foods, and fostering ECOWAS-wide collaboration.

- The commitment to documenting best practices, filling evidence gaps, ensuring sustainable financing, and supporting the goals of the School Meals Coalition, demonstrates a united effort to advance HGSF initiatives.

- The School Meals Coalition boasts an impressive list of 90 countries and 101 partners, with 12 out of the 15 ECOWAS member states represented.

- The envisioned 2024 ECOWAS Ministerial meeting aims to further strengthen member states' commitments to HGSF and establish a clear policy framework for the region.

Académicien
MATHEMATICAL
INSTRUMENTS

2023 ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding

The ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding, titled "Investing in Homegrown School Feeding to Strengthen Human Capital, Women's Economic Empowerment, and Contribute to Economic Development," served as a pivotal gathering of over 70 technical experts and government officials.

Held on October 3-4, 2023, in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, this event convened representatives from 14 ECOWAS member states, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.

Technical country delegates represented the education, agriculture, and gender/social protection sectors, along with esteemed partners from ECOWAS, civil society, research institutions, international financial institutions (IFIs), donors and UN agencies.

This event was sponsored by the World Food Program and the World Bank and spearheaded by ECOWAS, highly represented by Professor Fatou Sow SARR, ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs.

The conference aimed to share knowledge and best practices related to homegrown school feeding (HGSF) and its promising impact on human capital development, economic growth, food system strengthening, and women's empowerment, including taking stock of recent research and evidence.

It provided a platform to assess progress in terms of political support for HGSF-friendly policies to identify scaling-up challenges and action plans and assuring ministerial-level support for homegrown school feeding programmes.

The event highlighted the unwavering commitment of ECOWAS member states to Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) while emphasizing the imperative to overcome challenges hindering its widespread adoption. Furthermore, it emphasized the pressing need to expand school feeding programs, given the ample evidence of their manifold benefits, and gradually transition towards more localized procurement and homegrown school feeding approaches. Such strategies offer a range of benefits, including but not limited to fostering local economic growth and sustainability.

In her opening remarks, Professor Fatou Sow Sarr rightly stressed that the promotion of Homegrown School Feeding approach is closely in line with the ECOWAS Vision 2050 which attaches paramount importance to social inclusion "ECOWAS of the Peoples: Peace and Prosperity for All". The vision, in its Pillar 5, places women, children, youth and vulnerable people in the ECOWAS region at the heart of development and the integration process.

Scale, Trends and Evidence on Homegrown School Feeding

Key Facts and Figures

According to the WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide report, the ECOWAS region boasts 22.4 million children receiving school meals—the highest in Africa, where 65.9 million children benefit from such programs.

Figure 1: Children receiving school meals in ECOWAS region

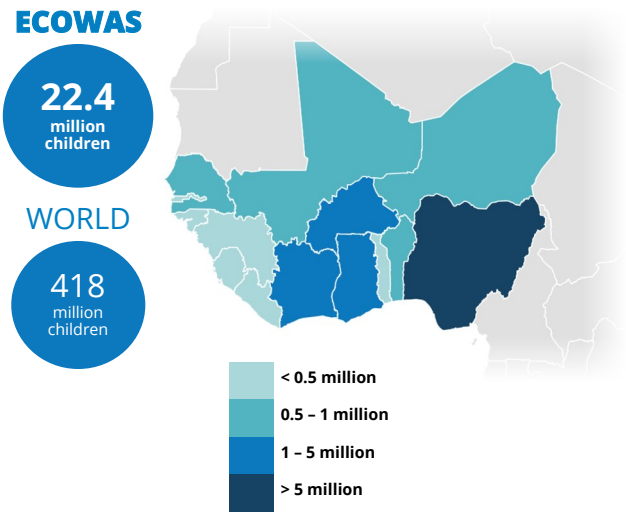


Figure 2: Children receiving school meals in the Africa

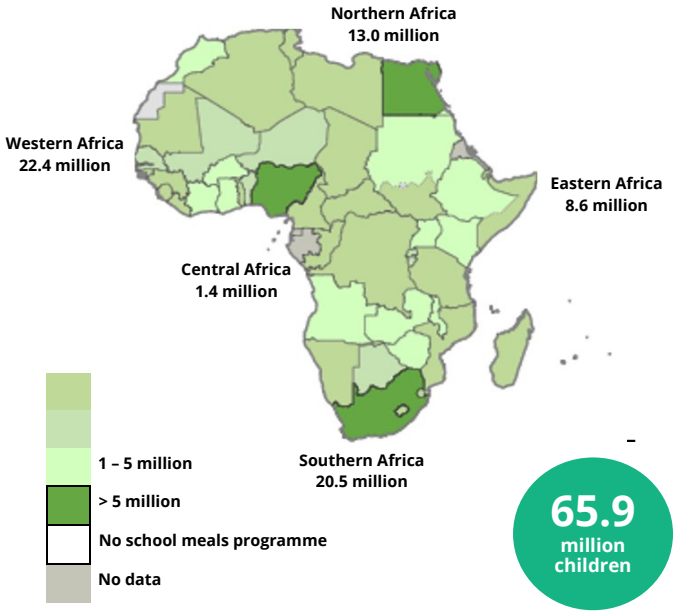
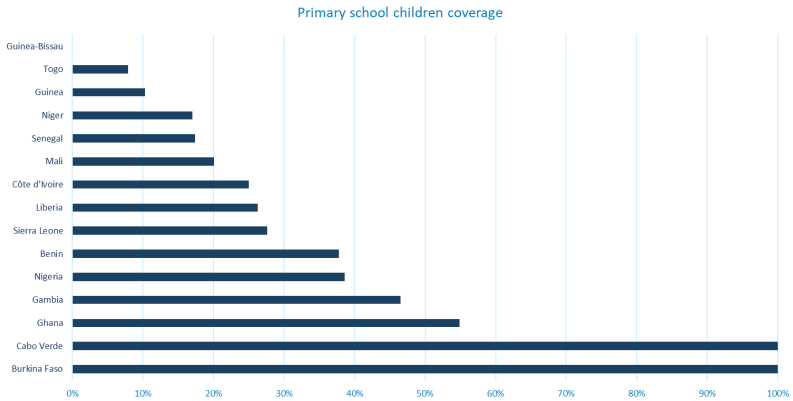


Figure 3: Children receiving school meals in ECOWAS region between 2020 and 2022 (by country)

Country	Number of children receiving school feeding 2020	Number of children receiving school feeding 2022	Change
Nigeria	9,830	9,887	57
Burkina Faso	3,864	3,690	174
Ghana	1,700	3,448	1,748
Côte d'Ivoire	976	1,024	48
Sierra Leone	836	486	350
Senegal	588	588	-
Mali	515	581	66
Benin	460	835	375
Guinea	375	219	156
Liberia	287	278	9
Niger	193	613	419
Guinea-Bissau	178	225	47
Gambia	165	261	96
Togo	91	133	42
Cabo Verde	3	85	82

Figure 4: Coverage of school meal programmes in ECOWAS (by country)



Note: *Guinea Bissau enrolment data not available to calculate coverage*

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ECOWAS regional investment in school meals increased from USD450 million to USD543 million between 2020 and 2022, with an impressive 84% sourced from domestic funds. Even low-income countries raised their domestic financing for school meals by 7% during this period, spending USD89 million on school meals. International partners have also supported countries in scaling up their school meals program such as the World Bank, which has been engaged since 2008 with an investment of over USD221 million for 70 projects in 35 countries, reaching over 16 million children.

Figure 5: ECOWAS region investment in school meals

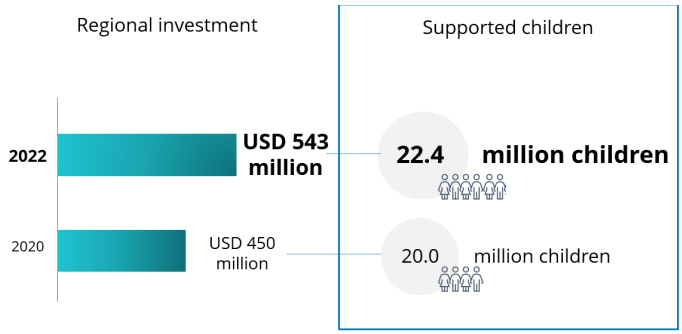
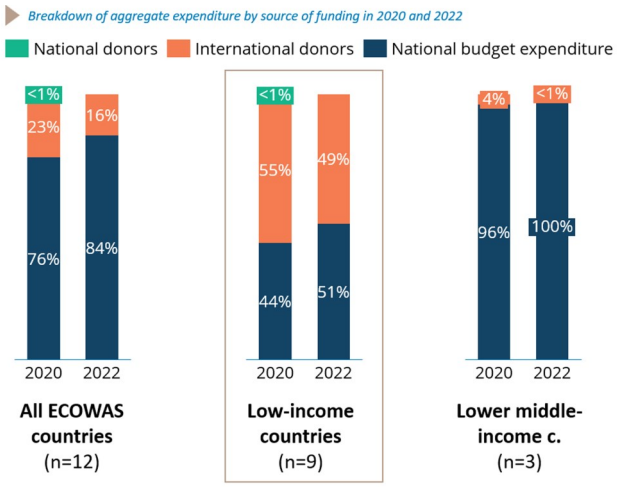


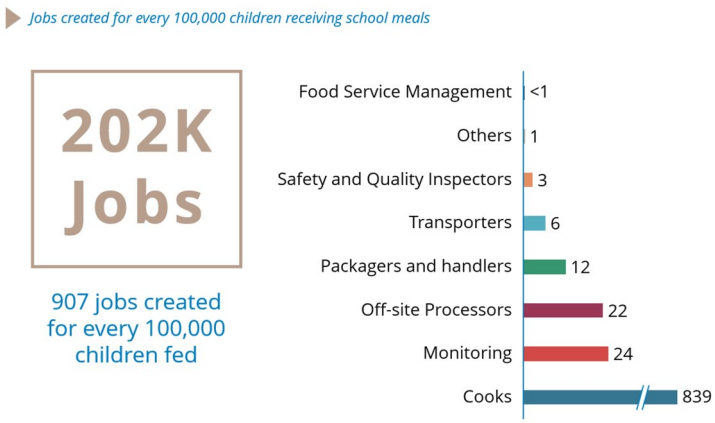
Figure 6: Investment by income category in ECOWAS region



Low-income countries have increased their investment by 7% despite fiscal crunch.

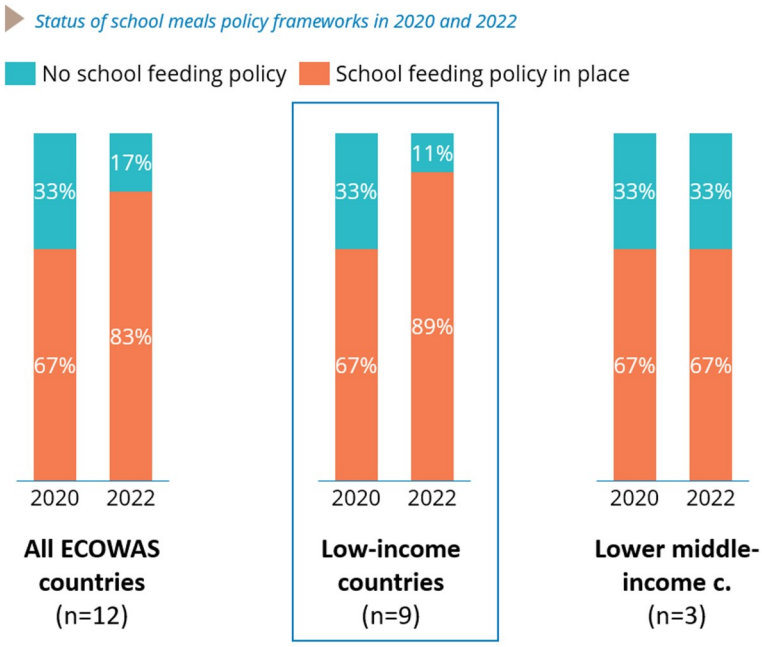
Notably, school meals programs have generated over 200,000 direct jobs in ECOWAS countries, primarily benefiting women.

Figure 7: Jobs created out of school meal programs in ECOWAS region



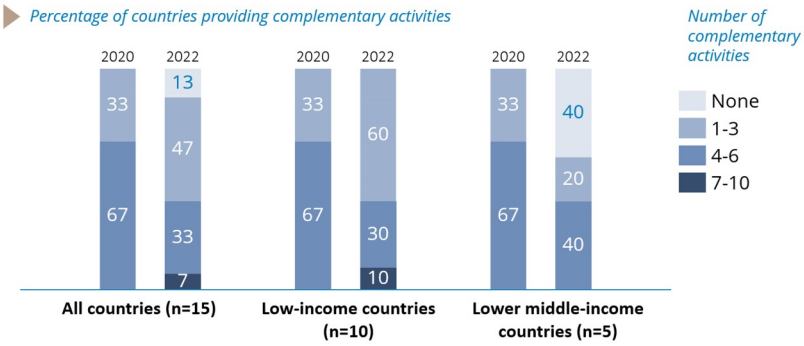
Furthermore, 83% of ECOWAS countries have established a school feeding policy, institutionalizing school meals and underscoring a strong commitment to the school meals programs.

Figure 8: Existence of school meals policy in ECOWAS region (by income category)



As a testament to our collective impact, countries are increasingly delivering complementary health (such as water sanitation and hygiene, deworming, treatment and prevention of neglected tropical diseases, etc.), activities alongside school feeding programs, further enhancing their efficacy.

Figure 9: Percentage of countries providing complementary activities to school meals in ECOWAS region



Evidence

Investing in HGSF has numerous benefits, including strengthening human capital, improving health, nutrition, and education outcomes, supporting gender equality, boosting local agriculture, empowering women, reducing dependance on unstable international markets, and aiding in recovery from conflict and post-conflict situations.

- A 2019 study showed that school feeding improved test scores by 18% for reading and 9% for math.
- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted girls' education and life prospects, emphasizing the importance of school meals.
- HGSF programs empower women through farming, cooperatives, direct employment, and capacity building.
- In West Africa, an estimated 52%[1] of the agricultural labor force, 90% of the labor force in the marketing of farm products, and 70% of producers of food crops are women[2] so school feeding offers a transformational opportunity for empowerment of women.
- By consuming locally grown, climate-smart foods, such as indigenous varieties, HGSF foster better food systems.

Figure 10: Developmental stages sensitive to intervention across the first 8,000 days of life

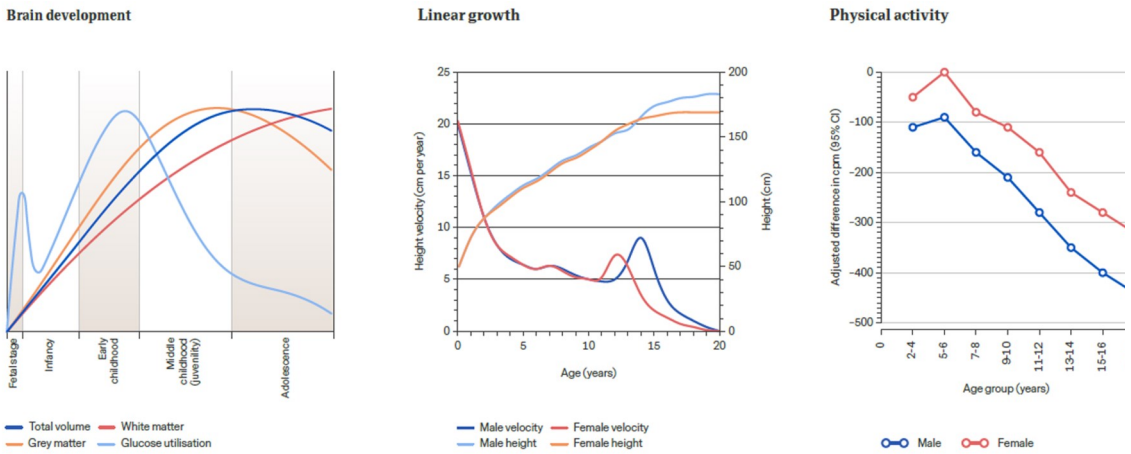
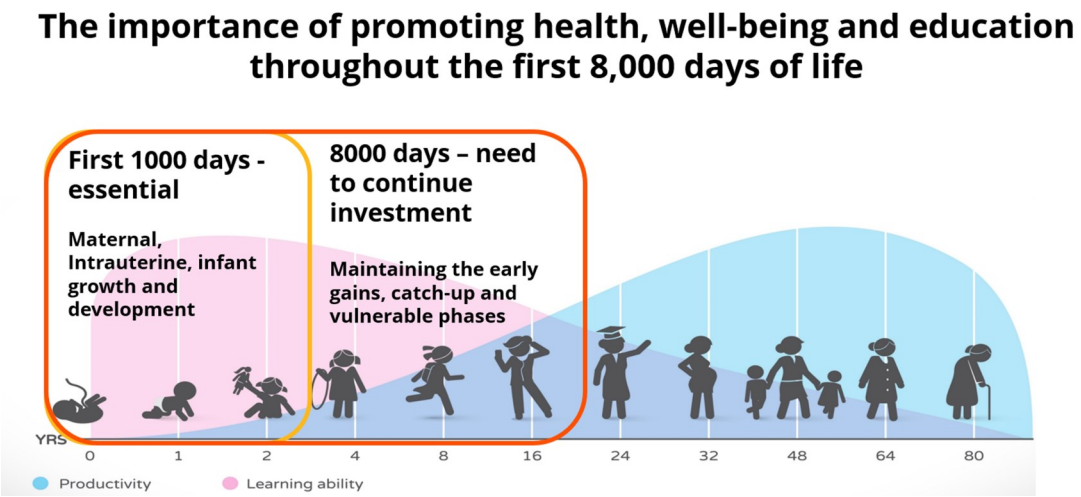


Figure 11: Human capital lifecycle

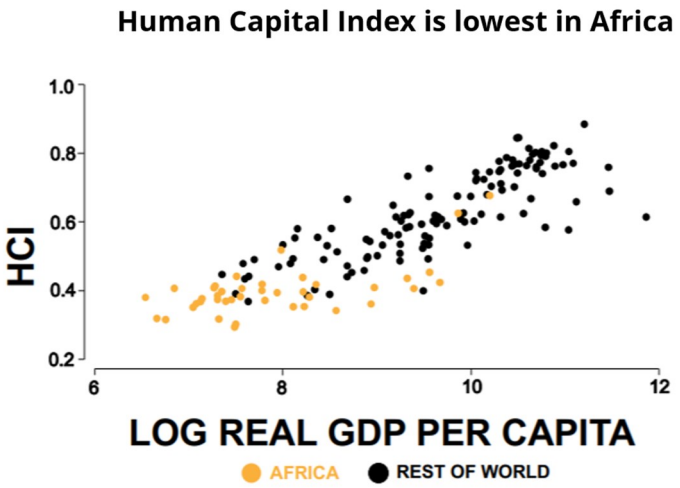


1.Women_and_Agriculture_The_Untapped_Opportunity_in_the_Wave_of_Transformation.pdf (afdb.org)
2.The Role of Women in Agriculture (fao.org)

Figure 12: Human capital contribution to national wealth

Human Capital Index (HCI)

- Human capital is defined **as the sum of a population's health, skills, knowledge, experience, and habits** and seeks to quantify scale of human capital in all countries
- Human capital - largest component of global wealth, but its contribution to wealth in rich countries (70%) far exceeds that in poorer countries (41%)



Source: World Bank

The recent policy recommendations for promoting planet-friendly school meals highlight the potential benefits of integrating context-specific, planet-friendly approaches into school meal programs. These recommendations underscore the importance of prioritizing local, nutritious, and climate-friendly foods, implementing menu planning tools such as the School Menu Planner PLUS, adopting modern energy-efficient cooking technologies, minimizing food waste through effective storage and preservation practices, embedding climate goals within school meal policies and procurement rules, and promoting sustainable practices like agroecology. Additionally, they stress the significance of connecting Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) farmers with climate-smart technologies and resources. These measures recognize that solutions should be tailored to the specific needs and capacities of diverse countries, especially those with limited resources and to minimize the environmental impact of meal preparation and promote sustainable food production.

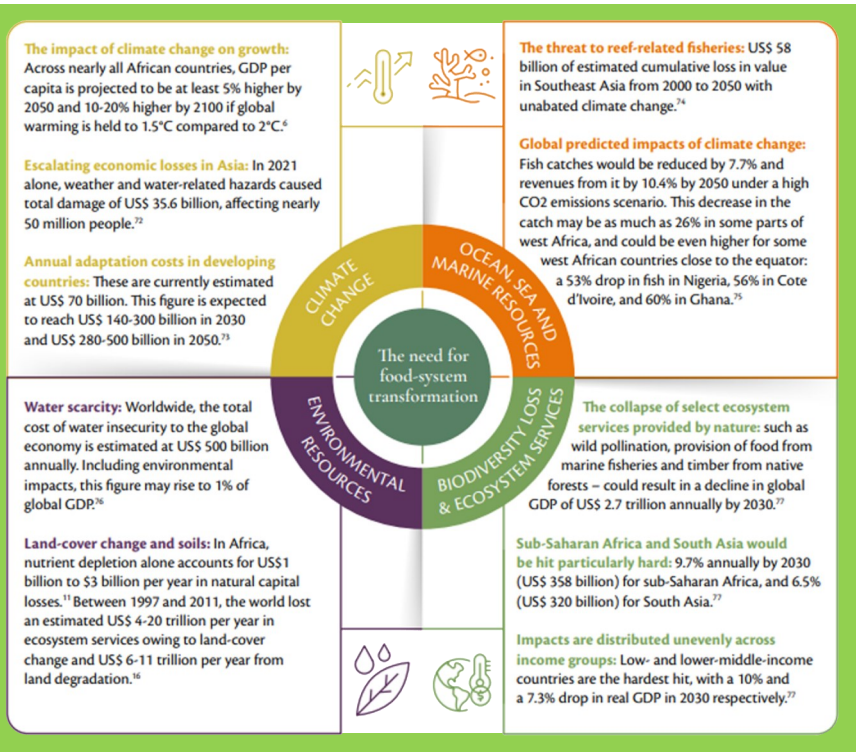
The White Paper / Vision

Research Consortium to develop an **evidence-led policy** document for the policymakers of the 90 SMC member states to present at **COP28**.

The paper aims to support the development of robust national commitments to **planet-friendly, healthy school meals**, sourced from regenerative agriculture, for all school-aged children.

Food Systems Matter

- Food systems are causing depletion and pollution of natural resources, habitat and biodiversity loss, deforestation, ocean acidification, and climate change.
- Food systems contribute to a third of all human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- Food production accounts for 70% of freshwater use and is the principal driver of biodiversity loss.
- The Global South will bear the brunt of these impact sooner and more intensely.



While there is ample evidence on the positive impacts of all models of school feeding, including home grown approaches on education and the well-being of children and adolescents, there's still a gap in evidence on how the HGSF model brings additional benefits on top of the regular programmes. There is preliminary evidence and growing research on the impact on smallholder incomes, some showing promising results (example from Northern Nigeria). But more needs to be done, and together, we are committed to enhancing this research agenda.

There are still significant evidence gaps in...

- Long-term impact
- Cost effectiveness
- Variability by context

Country Best Practices in ECOWAS region

Financing

Benin's journey in improving school feeding programs serves as a remarkable example of transformation. Prior to 2016, the school feeding system was in its infancy, with canteens operating for only three months a year. However, with resolute government reforms, the school canteen system underwent a profound transformation. The implementation of a USD 79 million funding program not only increased coverage from 30% to 75% today but also set the ambitious target of reaching 100% coverage by the end of 2023. The commitment to this goal extends beyond the government's political will; communities are actively engaged. Advocacy efforts, backed by community mobilization, are instrumental in securing the necessary funds. Three robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the presidential, education ministry and external partner levels ensure program effectiveness. The success of the school feeding program depends on making it a political priority, establishing strategic alliances with partners with extensive implementation expertise, such as with the World Food Programme (WFP), and implementing a diversification plan based on the regional availability of local foods.

Nigeria's Homegrown School Feeding program, as of 2022, serves as a beacon of success. The school feeding programme is the largest in the region and benefits an impressive 10 million school children and adolescents in 57,000 public primary schools nationwide. It engages over 117,000 aggregators and smallholder farmers and provides employment for 127,000 cooks. In 2023, the establishment of the National Social Investment Programme Agency and the passage of the first National Home-Grown School Feeding Policy provided legal backing for sustainable funding through direct appropriations from the national budget. The federal government has taken full ownership, funding the program entirely. Plans are underway to extend the program's reach to 15 million children and adolescents and include those living in humanitarian contexts. The government is eager to invest further and explore collaborations with state governments, potentially expanding support to school children and adolescents in primary school grades 4 to 6.

Sierra Leone demonstrates effective collaboration in its Homegrown School Feeding program. The government partners with CRS to manage government-established funding. The World Bank has provided funding to the government, enabling the WFP to conduct its operations in country. Notably, schools receive direct cash assistance to procure fresh produce. The program is firmly integrated into the government's budget portfolio, with government support extending to 70% of schools nationwide. Additionally, complementary initiatives, such as WASH programs, enhance the impact of school feeding efforts. Sierra Leone's approach emphasizes climate sensitivity, emphasizing practices to reduce firewood consumption. The active involvement of communities further underscores the success of the school feeding activities.

Data/Tools and Systems

In **Ghana**, the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) has taken a remarkable step forward in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). WFP provided GSFP with 300 tablets loaded with Tableau and ONA software, ushering in a transformative era in school feeding. This pilot project covers 260 schools across all 16 regions of the country and enables real-time monitoring of school attendance and feeding. The tablets, equipped with visual data tools, offer an unprecedented ability to understand and utilize data swiftly, fostering prompt decision-making. Off-line data collection makes it easier to collect data in all areas covered. Beyond technology, WFP's support includes training for key personnel. This collaborative effort showcases a commitment to enhancing the quality and reach of school feeding programs, ultimately benefitting approximately 4 million beneficiaries across 11,000 schools in Ghana.

Guinea-Bissau is leading the way in modernizing school feeding operations through the innovative School Connect program, a WFP web-based application that has enhances the process. School staff can now efficiently record student attendance, meal consumption, and food stocks using smartphones or tablets. This collected data is readily available through a real-time dashboard, particularly valuable for monitoring schools in remote areas. Guinea-Bissau's adoption of School Connect serves as a pioneering example, as it was among the first countries to test the application. The program launched a successful pilot in May 2022, encompassing 47 schools in the Biombo region, and later expanded to include 33 schools in the Oio region in August 2022. This initiative underscores the country's commitment to improving school feeding operations and enhancing the overall quality of the program.

Togo's commitment to enhancing its school feeding and health programs is underscored by its adoption of the SABER evaluation, leading to significant improvements in program design, legislation, and standards. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of children's health, Togo was among the first countries to pilot the World Bank and WFP HEALTHY-SABER tool, encompassing health, food, hygiene, and sanitation components, enabling them to evaluate national policies, institutions, and programs while providing valuable data for decision-making. In the realm of school health, Togo offers diverse care services, but formal systems and specific policies are yet to be established. In the context of school feeding, a long history of collaboration with international organizations and the government's commitment culminated in a dedicated law passed in 2020 and entrusted management to the National Development Support Agency (ANADEB), benefitting approximately 90,000 school children and adolescents across 335 public primary schools. collaboration with international organizations and the government's commitment culminated in a dedicated law passed in 2020 and entrusted management to the National Development Support Agency (ANADEB), benefitting approximately 90,000 school children and adolescents across 335 public primary schools.

Gender and Women’s Empowerment

Gambia demonstrates positive practices in women’s empowerment and gender equality within the context of school feeding programs. These achievements include a notable improvement in the girls-to-boys ratio in school participation, increased completion rates for girls, and a significant reduction in early marriages. The active engagement of women's farmers' organizations in home-grown school feeding initiatives has been instrumental. In 2019, Gambia established the Ministry of Gender, which plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about the crucial contribution of women to the country's development. Additionally, there is a remarkable improvement in women's resilience to the challenges posed by climate change, underlining Gambia's commitment to fostering gender equality and empowering women.

Guinea has made significant strides in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. With support from partners, the country has initiated school canteens that not only prioritize the purchase of local produce but also offer subsidies to smallholders. Moreover, these canteens provide dry rations to girls, a crucial intervention that encourages their continued education and reduces the incidence of early marriages. Additionally, Guinea's Center for Autonomous Learning and Female Entrepreneurship (CAEF) serves as a vital support structure, empowering young girls who may have left school, mothers' daughters, and women by equipping them with valuable trade skills for improved socio-economic integration. Guinea is also collaborating with technical and financial partners to facilitate women's access to land and financial resources, as well as providing essential training opportunities, further reinforcing their commitment to fostering women's empowerment and gender equality.

Liberia's achievements include capacity -building to professionalize businesses, amplifying production and sales, the provision of essential materials and infrastructure for agricultural enterprises, strengthening Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to empower women for increased investments, and enhancing the capacity of these associations. Liberia's dedicated efforts underscore a commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Nutrition

In **Mali**, the school feeding program is transforming communities and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. With local support, it ensures that school children and adolescents receive nutritious meals, reduces the financial burden on vulnerable families, and supports local economies. The program's innovative approach, where school management committees purchase food from local markets, not only enhances children's academic performance and health but also boosts agricultural production and the economy. Moreover, the initiative empowers women, as exemplified in the cooperative efforts of the Wellekama and Gbarwaken Women Cooperatives. This multifaceted approach showcases Mali's commitment to investing in its human capital, even amidst complex challenges, to enable future generations to fulfil their potential.

Senegal has demonstrated a powerful best practice in its school feeding program, benefitting over 156,000 school children and adolescents in the 2017–2018 school year. The program provides daily hot meals on weekdays, with a crucial role played by community-based cooks, often mothers of pupils, who volunteer to procure supplementary food items. Notably, the introduction of the Nutrifami application has been a game-changer. This user-friendly, literacy-friendly tool, initially established in Colombia, educates vulnerable communities on healthy eating habits and good hygiene practices. Senegal's success in utilizing Nutrifami has not only enhanced the knowledge and skills of cooks but has also opened doors to new opportunities for these individuals, improving their livelihoods and ensuring the sustainability of the program. This initiative's innovation and impact underscore Senegal's commitment to nurturing the well-being and educational prospects of its school children and adolescents.

Coordination and Governance

Burkina Faso's Presidential Initiative, "Ensuring each child of school age at least one balanced meal per day," represents an exemplary model of collaboration and governance. The State's resolute commitment to this multi-sectoral social protection program is reinforced by well-defined roles for various stakeholders, from local authorities to civil society, technical and financial partners. Key governance structures, including the Permanent Secretariat, the Strategic Orientation Council, and the Technical Consultation Framework, ensure effective coordination and implementation. The Initiative places particular emphasis on school canteen governance, fostering greater state involvement and enhancing local authorities' and communities' roles. Notably, it bolsters financial resources for education, creates jobs, and improves household income, while promoting food and nutritional security and student health. Partnerships with organizations like WFP, CRS, Educo, and UNICEF further support the program's implementation, with the mobilization of crucial financial resources remaining a primary challenge. Burkina Faso's Presidential Initiative serves as a shining example of collective efforts to ensure food security and quality education for its school-aged children.

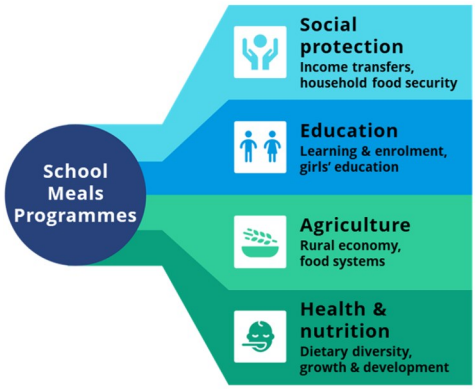
Cabo Verde's exemplary approach to collaboration and governance in the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program is marked by a combination of state funding and community participation, underpinned by a legal requirement that 25% of the program's budget be allocated to local purchases. This model effectively combats poverty, particularly in rural areas, and reduces insecurity. The nation has cultivated successful partnerships with both international and national organizations, such as Coopération Luxembourgeoise, which provide technical support, funding, food supplies, and professional training, ensuring the program's impact and sustainability. At the local level, Cape Verde's collaboration with women's farming associations reinforces its commitment to the local economy and domestic production by supplying schools with locally sourced produce. This comprehensive approach sets a high standard for effective governance and collaboration in the HGSF program.

Côte d'Ivoire's school feeding programme showcases a strong governance and collaboration model, characterized by strong leadership from the Ministry of Education and Literacy, which provides clear guidelines and oversight. Crucially, the program thrives on extensive coordination, involving various ministries and forming local partnerships for education. The program's success is underpinned by a commitment to evidence-based decision-making, as exemplified by the school feeding benefit-cost study, which shapes the future direction of the programme and attracts substantial funding. This holistic and data-driven approach not only ensures the program's effectiveness but also secures the resources necessary for its sustained growth and impact.

Emerging Priorities and Action Plans

Financing: Participants emphasized the importance of securing long-term government funding for Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) programs. This includes instituting policies with budget allocations across key sectors like Education, Agriculture, Health, and Gender/Social Protection to showcase the Return On Investment (ROI).

Figure 14: The Economic benefits of planet-friendly school meals



- **Large returns, potentially between $7 and $35 for each $1 of investment**
- **Extensive safety net**
- **New markets and jobs for local farmers - 2,000 new jobs created for every 100K children fed**

Data/Tools and Systems: Governments underlined the need to prioritize the adoption of modern, online, and digital data collection systems. They highlighted the need for adequate funding and capacity building of government personnel engaged in data collection are vital to uphold data quality and accuracy. It is equally crucial to disaggregate data by gender to gain profound insights into specific needs, key stakeholders, and gender disparities, thereby informing transformative programs that promote gender equality. Simultaneously, emphasized the necessity for local research evidence to document what works and showcase the benefits of the homegrown school feeding model. Additionally, the enhancement and institutionalization of data availability for national homegrown school feeding programs, including the creation of an accessible public database, were emphasized for monitoring, reporting, and informed decision -making in this vital domain.

Women's Empowerment: To empower women in rural communities and amplify their influence in decision-making, barriers related to finance, literacy, and societal norms and stereotypes must dismantled according to the delegates. By facilitating women's access to tailored knowledge, training, and tools, we can bolster their vital roles throughout the entire food system's value chain.

Nutrition: Governments should ensure that nutritious, safe, high-quality, and affordable foods are available. The conference stressed the importance of dietary diversity, including healthy indigenous foods, and the provision of nutritious school meals to schoolchildren.

Human Capital: According to the World Bank, Africa's Human Capital Index (40%) shows that the region is losing almost 60% of its potential of productivity. Poor nutrition and health are among the key factors. For millions of children, missed school meals also means missed vaccinations, missed nutrition supplementation, missed learning, and missed human interactions. Governments acknowledged the important role school meals has in the wider mix of health interventions and human capital development.

ECOWAS-Wide Call to Action

- **ECOWAS to support the School Meals Coalition:** by signing the declaration of support and encouraging Ghana, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau to join as soon as possible.
- **Documenting Best Practices and knowledge Exchanges:** ECOWAS, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and key partners such as the School Meals Coalition (SMC) Research Consortium and CERFAM, should spearhead efforts to support member countries in the comprehensive documentation of best practices in Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF), coupled with promoting learning visits between countries. This initiative must also identify a suitable platform for curating and disseminating these documented best practices. The ultimate aim is to create a knowledge-sharing platform that promotes the adoption of successful HGSF strategies across the region.
- **Filling Evidence Gaps in Homegrown School Feeding by Linking the Design of National HGSF Programmes to the Evidence Base:** ECOWAS and WFP should take the lead in coordinating ECOWAS regional research and evidence-generation activities, collaborating with the SMC Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, which already has an established partnership with academics and practitioners in many ECOWAS countries and provides access to the global evidence on HGSF. It is also important to collaborate with International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the SMC Data and Monitoring Initiative, universities within the region, and others. A primary objective should be the identification of key indicators essential for evaluating the impact of homegrown school feeding on nutrition, women's empowerment in food systems, local economy, and climate resilience. By harmonizing these efforts, bridge critical knowledge gaps in HGSF and refine its implementation.
- **Sustainable Financing of Homegrown School Feeding:** ECOWAS and WFP should convene and facilitate active collaboration between IFIs, the SMC Sustainable Financing Initiative, and other stakeholders, including the private sector. The collective goal should be to develop innovative financing and blended financing models tailored to address the funding challenges faced by member countries in implementing HGSF programs. By securing sustainable financing options, ensure the long-term success and scalability of HGSF initiatives across the ECOWAS region.
- **2024 Ministerial Meeting and another Technical Conference:** In 2024, ECOWAS, WFP and strategic partners to convene a follow-up conference with a clear set of objectives:
    - Strong ECOWAS Member States Commitments: The Ministerial Conference aims to showcase ECOWAS member states' commitments to homegrown school feeding and school meals, aiming to develop and invest in accessible programs for all children and adolescents in the region, which will contribute to human capital development, women's empowerment, and economic growth.
    - Leadership and Vision: The Ministerial Conference aims to highlight the importance of homegrown school meal programs in transforming lives and promoting healthy eating norms, presenting a regional vision and national commitments based on 2023 technical conference discussions.
    - Partner commitments: Another key objective is to demonstrate and secure additional commitments from partners, including international financial institutions, to support governments in fulfilling their obligations related to education, food systems, women's empowerment, climate change, and economic development. These partnerships are pivotal in achieving the collective goals of the region.
    - Policy Framework: The conference will produce a clear policy action plan focused at improving the quality and efficacy of homegrown school feeding and school meal programs. This agenda will direct the region's policy implementation to guarantee positive outcomes and impact.
    - Positioning on Africa-Wide Agenda: Position homegrown school feeding and school meals prominently on the Africa-wide agenda, addressing key concerns such as peace, social cohesion, and economic development. Build upon and expand on previous initiatives such as the 2023 ECOWAS HGSF technical conference, School Meal Coalition ministerial meeting in Paris, and engagement with COP28 to maintain regional leadership on the topic.

The ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding in Dakar, October 2023, represented a significant milestone in the journey toward realizing the transformative potential of HGSF across ECOWAS member states. The commitment of governments, partners, and stakeholders, as highlighted in the conference, underscores the pivotal role of HGSF in fostering human capital development, women's empowerment, and economic growth in the region.

The identified priorities and development of in-country action plans in financing, data systems, women's empowerment, and nutrition, serve as a clear roadmap for advancing HGSF programs. Furthermore, ECOWAS-wide collaboration and the need and commitment to a 2024 Ministerial Meeting emphasize a strong collective resolve to drive positive change, position HGSF prominently on the regional and Africa-wide agendas and maintain regional leadership.

Ultimately, the success of HGSF programs in ECOWAS hinges on the united efforts of all stakeholders to advance human capital development in the region and create a brighter future for the region through education, nutrition, and women's empowerment.

References

- Figure 1-4 page 10: *WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 report with support from GCNF survey data*
- Figure 5-7 page 11: *WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 report with support from GCNF survey data*
- Figure 8-9 page 12: *WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 report with support from GCNF survey data*
- Figure 10-11 page 13: *Image Source: Shuttershock.com*
- Figure 12 page 23: *The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition 2023*

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