



SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Safeguarding school feeding in Western Africa in times of the global food crisis

THE STATE OF SCHOOL FEEDING IN TIMES OF UNPRECEDENTED NEEDS

In 2020, the **COVID-19 pandemic** severely hit education systems around the world. School closures left millions of children without access to regular school meals. In Western Africa alone, approximately 34 million school children were affected.¹ Even before the pandemic emptied plates, **73 million most vulnerable children in 60 low-income countries are currently not reached by school meals.** Most of these children – **84 percent** - live on the **African continent.** The global food crisis driven by conflict, climate shocks, and the threat of global recession now adds to the

challenges faced by children and their families and threatens to create devastating reversals in the health and wellbeing of children and future generations. **Nearly half of the 345 million people** (up from 135 million in 2020) that are facing acute hunger **are younger than 18 years old – 75 million are school children.** For Western Africa, the consequences of the global food crisis are **particularly devastating** as the region with its young and growing population is characterized by very low coverage of school feeding. National governments are currently reaching only 16 percent of all 136 million school-aged children in the region; **56 million of them are out of school.**

¹ According to evidence from 14 out of 19 WFP Country Offices

With education as the bedrock of human capital, the **global food crisis could be a further step back in the efforts to reach universal school meal coverage by 2030**, resulting in irreversible losses in human capital and adversely affecting the growth potential of fragile, low-income countries.

IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS ON FOOD SECURITY AND SCHOOL FEEDING IN THE REGION

The ripple effects of the conflict in Ukraine alongside insecurity, climate extremes and the fallout from the pandemic have driven up the number of hungry in Western Africa fourfold to 43 million. **Acute food security in the region is now at a 10-year high. Food prices have reached highs not seen since 2011.** Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Mali and Mauritania have seen staggering price hikes up to 40% above the 5-year average.

IN NUMBERS



As food accounts for 40% of a family's expenses, the impact on vulnerable households will be significant. While the region is now dealing with a food access crisis, it could soon be dealing with a food availability crisis. Major deficits of agricultural inputs – especially fertilizer – is expected to impact agricultural production in 2022. Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali are particularly affected – the latter is one of the major cereal producers in the Sahel region. **As rising prices threaten to further diminish the economic resources available to families to send their children to school, they also increase the likelihood of households engaging in negative coping strategies** such as removing children from school so they can contribute economically through child labor.

CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOL FEEDING

While the need for school meals in the region increases, countries in the region are facing **three main challenges** connected to the global food crisis that are impacting school feeding programmes.

- **The economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic** has hit national economies hard. In many countries of the region, the debt rate to the gross domestic production (GDP) is above 70%. The high level of public debt might bring national governments to shift their priorities at the expense of schoolchildren's education, health, and wellbeing. Country examples show that governments may face challenges regarding the capacity or the ability to fund social protection, adjust social transfers and accommodate increased and changing beneficiaries' needs.
- **The consequences of the Ukraine war** put further pressure on the social protection system in countries already operating in tight fiscal space due to the measures adopted to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising global food prices have increased the price of foodstuff on local markets which has in turn impacted the rations provided per child in school meals programmes, forcing countries to reduce, or cut rations

at times (e.g. in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea). In addition, rising fuel prices have led to an average 15% increase in WFP's costs to implement school feeding programmes (e.g. CAR). These developments exacerbate an already difficult funding situation forcing several countries to reduce the number of beneficiaries even as the needs for this essential safety net increase. In Liberia for example, only half of the targeted school children could be reached with on-site meals in the 2021/2022 school year.

- **As global needs face unprecedented levels, funding for school feeding remains critical** within the region. While the funding situation was already tense in 2021 it further intensified in 2022. Financial contributions to meet the growing needs of school canteens are often insufficient and school feeding programs are increasingly dependent on few donors (e.g. in Mauritania or CAR). Pipeline breaks were reported by Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad.

PIPELINE BREAKS IN THE REGION

WFP school feeding operations in the region	2021			2022					
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June
Cameroon	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
CAR (ESF)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Guinea	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Liberia	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Mali	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Mauritania	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Niger	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Chad	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Pipeline Break Overview of pipeline breaks (in red) in the 2021/2022 school year in WFP school feeding operations in the region.
Critical Red = canteens had to be shut down due to insufficient funding. Yellow = the number of beneficiaries or rations had to be reduced. Green = fully operational school feeding operation. ESF = Emergency school feeding.
Funded

Severe funding gaps for school feeding also persist in Liberia. Without additional funding in the last quarter of 2022, WFP will soon be forced to reduce the number of schools and students supported in Senegal. As of September 2022, 102M USD are needed to ensure children assisted by WFP in Western Africa receive school meals over the next six months. Operations in the region are currently facing a funding gap of 34M. This represents 33% of the total requirement and highlights the imminent need for continuous, multi-year funding.

If higher implementation costs, reduced fiscal space at national level as well as competition for donor resources continue to impact school feeding programmes in the region, nearly 1.5 million school children could be affected.

WHY SCHOOL FEEDING MUST BE A CORE PART OF THE RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

School feeding represents one of the most powerful social protection tools available. By improving household food security, reducing protection risks for children by maintaining them in schools, and strengthening local food systems, it could be key to mitigating the impact of the global food crisis.

School feeding is often considered as the largest safety net in the world as programmes **can be expanded rapidly in times of crisis, ensuring food is quickly and directly available for the communities that need help most.** During the pandemic, WFP in Western Africa was able to adapt its school feeding programs in most countries in the region and supported close to one million children and their families with emergency school feeding in form of take-home rations or cash. Lessons learned from the

COVID-19 pandemic also showed that school feeding is capable of serving as a platform for reaching the most vulnerable population with food assistance in times of crises.

It is estimated that school meals programmes supply about 10% of household expenditure for each child who participates, providing a substantial resource transfer to the poorest households in times of unprecedented needs. As food inflation in the region reduces the economic access to food for many families, school feeding can serve as a



Tati Ali collects food items for her school-aged siblings in a primary school in Cameroon. During COVID-19, WFP Take-Home Rations (THR) ensured that pupils continued to study at home on a full stomach.

powerful safety net that decreases financial burdens and serves as an incentive to keep children in school during the crisis. Recent examples from CAR indicate that the number of students has increased compared to original plans.

On top of transferring resources to poor households, ensuring healthy and nutritious diets and building human capital, the benefits of school feeding extend beyond those of children and their families.



Smallholder farmers in Sierra Leone deliver their daily harvest of potato leaves to a primary school. The vegetables are used in the home-grown school feeding program which provides students with one hot meal every day.

Home-grown school feeding approaches (HGSF) benefit the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, cooks, caterers, and others in the supply chain. **They can increase the resilience of communities to global shocks by supporting local food production and strengthening sustainable food systems.** This can help to create jobs, make markets more predictable and tackle food price inflation.

In the long term, **HGSF has the potential to contribute to shortening the global food chain and ultimately help to decrease import dependencies.**

In Burkina Faso, CAR, or the Gambia, HGSF programmes have been acknowledged as solutions that could not only adapt to but also mitigate the global food crisis. In 2021, HGSF programmes were in place in over 5400 schools in most countries in the region, supporting almost 800.000 school children and close to 80.000 smallholder farmers. Nigeria, represents the largest HGSF operation and supports about 10 million school children alone.

SCHOOL FEEDING UNIT

**World Food Programme
Regional Bureau Dakar**

Rue du Mal Gallieni, Dakar, Senegal
 rbd.communications@wfp.org
 rbd.schoolfeeding@wfp.org
fr.wfp.org

WFP aims to continue boosting purchases from local and regional markets, to buying directly from smallholder farmers and together with partners encourage multi-year contracting between schools and producers.

CALL TO ACTION

In times of unprecedented needs, it is more important than ever to invest in measures that address immediate food security needs in the short-term while strengthening the resilience of food systems in the long-term.

This is why **WFP is calling on governments, international financial institutions, technical partners, advocacy groups and stakeholders**

- **to prioritize the scale up of school meal programmes** and
- **provide a robust and multi-year donor response to match domestic commitments** already being made by low- and lower middle-income countries.

Photo page 1: WFP/Evelyn Fey

Photo page 3: WFP/Glory Ndaka

Photo page 4: WFP/Michael Duff