

HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING IN WEST AFRICA

A Landscape Analysis



WFP/Evelyn Fey



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1. KEY MESSAGES & MAIN FINDINGS

1.1. KEY MESSAGES

a. Universal Adoption, Local Empowerment:

- ECOWAS member states have universally embraced HGSF programs, showcasing a collective commitment of their social protection systems to improve the wellbeing of schoolchildren, enhance learning outcomes, and bolster education.
 - Example: Togo's national HGSF initiative, driven by community involvement, showcases the region's commitment to local empowerment and sustainable development.
- National ownership of HGSF initiatives is gradually increasing, demonstrating a shift towards sustainability and self-reliance within the region.

b. Regional Synergy for Progress:

- Integration of home-grown school feeding into broader development goals, such as the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), showcases ECOWAS's commitment to regional alignment and cooperation.
- Home-grown school feeding programs are being recognized as a leverage point for the transformation of food systems in the ECOWAS member countries

c. Evidence-Driven Policies for Impact:

- Evidence generation would support scaling and sustaining efforts as well as the mobilization of required investments.
- Investments in research, monitoring, and evaluation contribute to the continuous improvement and adaptation of HGSF strategies, promoting evidence-driven decision-making within the region .

d. Community-Centric Sustainability:

- HGSF programs in the ECOWAS region prioritize community involvement and empowerment, fostering ownership and sustainability at the grassroots level.
- Leveraging local resources, knowledge, and capacities enhances the effectiveness and resilience of HGSF initiatives, ensuring they are tailored to local contexts and needs.
 - Example: In Ghana, local farmers are actively engaged in supplying nutritious food for school meals, empowering communities and promoting economic growth.

1.2. MAIN FINDINGS

a. Policy Implementation Challenges:

- While policy adoption for HGSF is prevalent, challenges persist in translating policies into effective legal frameworks, highlighting the need for enhanced efforts in institutionalization within the ECOWAS context.
- Strengthening legal frameworks and institutional capacities is crucial to bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation, ensuring sustained programme impact.

b. Financial Sustainability:

- Financial constraints pose significant challenges to the scale-up and sustainability of HGSF programs in West African countries, necessitating collaborative resource mobilization efforts and innovative financing mechanisms.
- Strengthening financial capacities at both national and regional levels is essential to ensure the long-term viability and effectiveness of HGSF initiatives within the ECOWAS region.

c. Data-Driven Decision Making:

- Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are essential for informing evidence-based decision-making and driving programme improvements in the ECOWAS region.
- Investing in robust data management systems and capacity building for data-driven analysis enhances programme accountability, transparency, and impact assessment.

d. Empowering Communities for Success:

- Community participation and ownership are critical drivers of HGSF programme success, fostering resilience and ensuring interventions are tailored to local contexts and needs.
 - Example: In Benin, community-led initiatives to establish school gardens have not only improved nutrition but also provided valuable learning opportunities for children, showcasing the transformative power of community engagement.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The landscape of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region has undergone significant evolution since the [last assessment in 2020](#). This executive summary provides a comparative analysis across six domains, offering insights into the evolving dynamics, challenges, and best practices within the realm of HGSF.

Expansion of HGSF Programs: All 15 ECOWAS countries have embraced HGSF programs, marking a milestone in regional efforts towards food security and education access. Benin, Mali, and Sierra Leone have integrated HGSF initiatives into their national school feeding strategies, showcasing growing recognition of the importance of locally sourced meals.

Trends in HGSF Coverage Across ECOWAS Countries: With 22.4 million children in ECOWAS countries receiving school meals, this region leads Africa in the number of beneficiaries receiving school meals. However, variations exist in coverage trends, emphasizing diverse challenges and successes encountered in expanding school feeding programme coverage.

Government and Partner Collaborations in Expanding HGSF Programs: Collaborations between governments and various partners, including the World Food Programme (WFP), have facilitated the establishment and scaling up of HGSF initiatives, underscoring collective commitment to food security and education access.

Comparative Analysis of Countries within ECOWAS Region: A comparative analysis across six domains since 2020 provides valuable insights for policymakers,

practitioners, and stakeholders committed to advancing education, nutrition, and sustainable development agendas. Efforts to fortify legal foundations, address financial constraints, enhance coordination mechanisms, and promote community participation are key findings. Moreover, the integration of nutrition-sensitive programming and the strengthening of data and monitoring systems are essential for successful HGSF programs.

Global Advocacy and South-South Cooperation: The School Meals Coalition, originating from the 2021 Food Systems Summit, stands as a government-led initiative striving to revitalize school meals programs, bolster food and education systems, and drive actions toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 14 out of 15 ECOWAS member states have signed on to the School Meals Coalition as of May 2024. The report highlights the importance of global collaboration and knowledge exchange for sustainable school feeding initiatives.

This comparative analysis serves as a comprehensive resource for navigating the complexities and opportunities inherent in HGSF implementation across ECOWAS countries. It offers actionable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of HGSF programs, emphasizing the importance of political will, sustainable funding mechanisms, multisectoral coordination, and community engagement. By implementing these recommendations, ECOWAS countries can strengthen their HGSF programs, ensuring sustained impact on education, health, nutrition, and local economies while fostering resilience to future challenges.



3. INTRODUCTION



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3.1. CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

Investing in a country's future is inextricably linked to supporting its next generation. The provision of affordable, safe, and nutritious, food is a critical component of human capital development, establishing the foundation for future generations' health, well-being, and skills. The importance of food and nutrition security cannot be stressed, especially during the next 7,000 days of life -- the period following on from the critical first 1,000 days of life up through early adulthood -- when children and adolescents undergo key physical and cognitive developmental changes. Childhood is characterized by rapid growth and high activity levels, necessitating a diet rich in critical nutrients, minerals, and vitamins to promote long-term health and productivity.

3.2. RECENT GLOBAL CRISES AND RENEWED FOCUS

Recent global crises have shed light on the paramount importance of school feeding programs, illuminating them as vital social protection tools. As the world grappled with unprecedented challenges that interrupted agri-food supply chains and forced children to stay at home, the absence of school meals exacerbated food and nutrition insecurity, especially in low-income households. When educational institutions shuttered their doors and prompted widespread school closures amidst the Covid-19 crisis, governments discerned the fundamental role of school feeding programs, recognizing them as multifaceted solutions capable of addressing urgent priorities such as meal provision, local food production, enhanced nutrition through fortification, and leveraging school meals platforms to accelerate health outcomes such as vaccinations, nutrition screening and treatment, medical checkup, and deworming.

3.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

- a. Provide an overview of the current HGSF landscape in West Africa, assessing the development of these programs amidst recent global crises and evaluating their evolution over the past years.
- b. Conduct a comparative analysis of country programs against a comprehensive set of criteria, including different implementation models, to understand the factors contributing to successful implementation and sustainability of programs.
- c. Identify prevailing gaps, challenges, and the emergence of national commitments, with a focus on distilling lessons learned and best practices.
- d. Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of HGSF programme implementation.

3.4. METHODOLOGY

This report embarks on an in-depth exploration of the HGSF landscape across the 15 ECOWAS countries in West Africa. It seeks to map the evolution of HGSF programs amidst various global crises, particularly since the last Landscape Analysis in 2020. With a keen focus on the progress and challenges faced by these programs, the report underscores the imperative of a robust policy framework, clear operational guidelines, and sturdy monitoring systems to enable successful implementation at scale.

The analysis was structured around six key domains, namely: policy and legal frameworks, financial capacity, institutional arrangements, multisectoral coordination, community participation, procurement and supply chain processes, nutrition-sensitive programming, and data monitoring systems.

4. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4.1. DEFINING HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING

At its core, Home-Grown School Feeding embodies a vision of sustainability, equity, and nourishment. It encompasses a school feeding model designed to provide children with locally sourced, nutritious meals, fostering not only their physical well-being but also the vitality of local economies and agricultural sectors. This approach champions the empowerment of smallholder farmers while nurturing the minds and bodies of future generations (FAO and WFP, 2018).

4.2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL MEALS IN ECOWAS REGION

HGSF programs have emerged as vital instruments for addressing malnutrition, enhancing educational outcomes, and fostering local agricultural development across the ECOWAS region. This timeline (*see Timeline page 9*) highlights key milestones and developments in the evolution of HGSF initiatives within ECOWAS countries, tracing the journey from early adoption to nationally owned programs and joint implementations with international partners.

The history of HGSF in the ECOWAS region is characterized by a multifaceted approach, leveraging regional frameworks, partnerships, and government commitments to advance education, nutrition, and agricultural development. The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) provided a foundational framework, aligning HGSF initiatives with broader continental development goals.

Over the years, African Heads of State recognized the potential of HGSF to not only improve educational access but also stimulate local economies and promote smallholder agriculture. This recognition led to the establishment of the African Day of School Feeding and the formation of multidisciplinary committees to facilitate HGSF implementation.

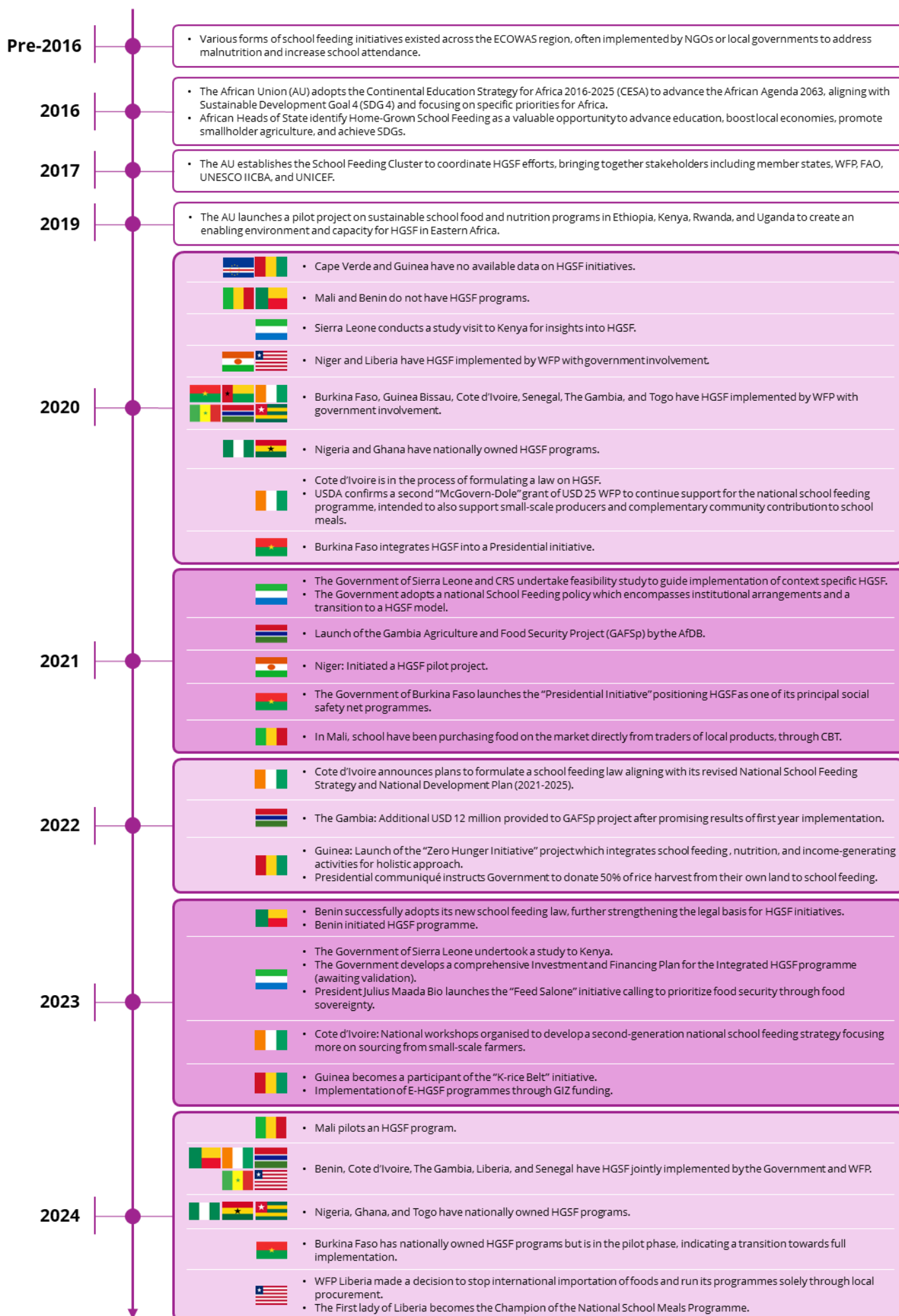
Partnerships with organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP), FAO, and UNICEF have played a crucial role in scaling up HGSF programs, particularly in countries where government capacity and resources were limited. However, there has been a gradual transition towards nationally owned programs, with countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo taking the lead in establishing comprehensive HGSF initiatives embedded within national policies and legal frameworks.

Recent developments underscore a shift towards joint implementations between governments and international partners, aiming to enhance programme sustainability and effectiveness. Mali's piloting of an HGSF programme and Burkina Faso's integration of HGSF into a Presidential initiative exemplify ongoing efforts to expand and institutionalize school feeding initiatives.

As countries continue to navigate challenges and seize opportunities, HGSF remains a cornerstone for advancing education, nutrition, and agricultural development, with the potential to transform the lives of millions of children across West Africa.



4.3. EVOLUTION OF HGSF IN ECOWAS REGION



5. FACTORS INFLUENCING HGSF EFFECTIVENESS

5.1. MACRO FACTORS INFLUENCING HGSF EFFECTIVENESS IN THE ECOWAS REGION

West Africa encompasses a diverse landscape, spanning from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea, including countries like Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria, among others. This region, with its 442 million inhabitants, is witnessing rapid economic and demographic growth. Despite progress in access to education over the years, 80 percent of 10-year-old children in Western and Central Africa are unable to read and understand a simple text, and more than 32 million children remain out of school, the largest share of all regions worldwide. Even before the pandemic, the world was already experiencing a learning crisis. If we are to take on this global challenge, we must focus on Western and Central Africa, a region with half a billion people and amongst the youngest population in the world (World Bank, 2022).

It's noteworthy that by 2050, young Africans under 35 are projected to exceed one billion, constituting 75 percent of the continent's youth population. Despite progress in primary and secondary education enrolment rates, West and Central Africa still grapple with low literacy levels among children, with 8 out of 10 unable to read basic texts by age 10. This education deficit perpetuates high dropout rates and limits social mobility, exacerbating challenges in creating a skilled workforce.

Africa's struggle to harness its human capital potential is evident, with sub-Saharan countries utilizing only 55 percent of this resource. The West African Human Capital Index (HCI) averages at 0.35, substantially below the global average of 0.57. Moreover, the region is facing escalating climate change impacts, with temperatures rising faster than the global average, leading to recurrent droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall patterns. These environmental shifts heavily affect livelihoods dependent on agriculture, exacerbating food insecurity worsened by conflicts, global economic disruptions like the Russia-Ukraine war, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current food insecurity crisis is exacerbated by soaring food prices and currency inflation across the region, leading to a projected increase in hungry people to 49.5 million by mid-2024. The prices of staple commodities have surged, driven by various factors such as inflation, elevated transportation costs, and constraints on agropastoral product flow. Consequently, household affordability of nutritious diets is severely limited, contributing to acute malnutrition in children under five and pregnant women, particularly in conflict-affected areas like northern Mali, north-west Nigeria, and Burkina Faso.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires concerted efforts, including investments in land restoration, value chain development, and ensuring uninterrupted education for children, who represent the future leadership of the region. Home-Grown School Feeding programs offer a promising avenue to provide access to essential social protection systems, ultimately aiding vulnerable communities in meeting their basic needs and fostering sustainable development.

5.2. IMPACT AMIDST CHALLENGES

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ECOWAS countries have remained steadfast in their commitment to HGSF programs. Currently, 22.4 million children across the region benefit from school meals, marking the highest coverage in Africa. However, regional analysis indicates that coverage varies, with 38 percent of primary school children enrolled in schools receiving school meals as of 2022.

Overall, the comprehensive expansion of HGSF programs in the ECOWAS region underscores the commitment to ensuring food security and education access for children, while also highlighting the need for continued efforts to address challenges and further improve coverage. For a detailed breakdown and visual representation of HGSF coverage trends, please refer to figures 3 and 4 on page 12.



6. CURRENT LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

6.1. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT HGFS LANDSCAPE

Since the last assessment in 2020, the landscape of HGFS programmes within the ECOWAS region has undergone notable evolution. Here, we present a comparative analysis of the trends observed, highlighting key developments and challenges across the region.

Expansion of HGFS Programs

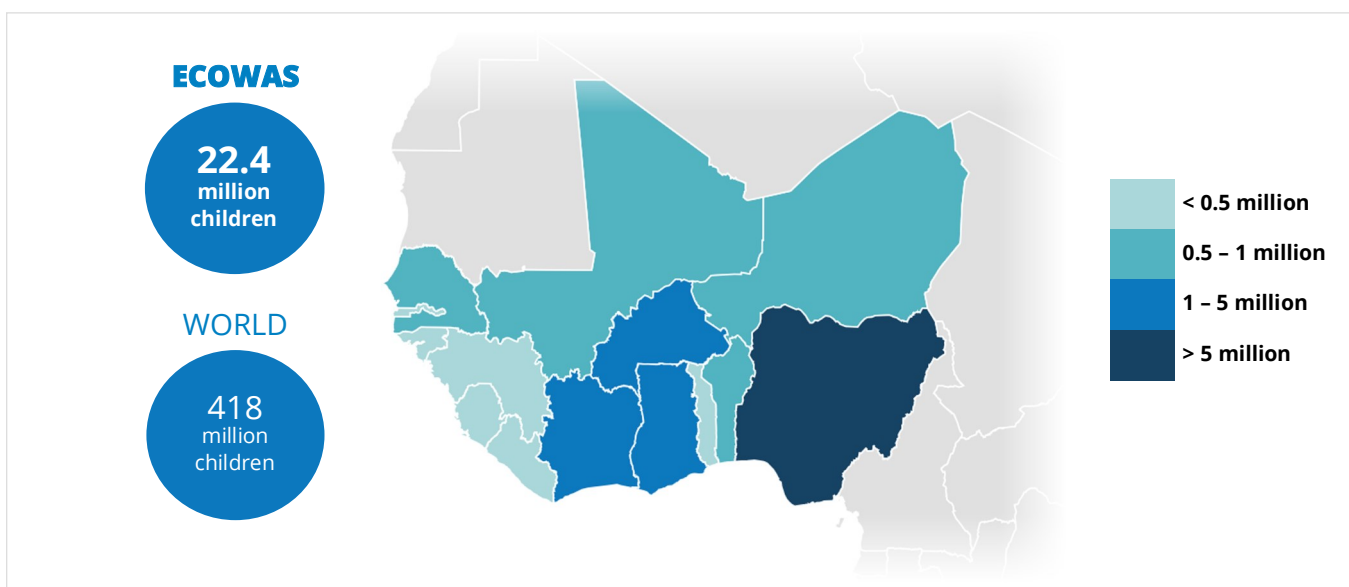
As of the current review, all 15 ECOWAS countries have embraced HGFS programs, marking a significant milestone in regional efforts towards ensuring food security and education access for children. While Mali's programme remains in its pilot phase, Benin, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have integrated HGFS initiatives into their national school

feeding strategies, showcasing a growing recognition of the importance of locally sourced meals in school feeding programs.

Trends in HGFS Coverage Across ECOWAS Countries

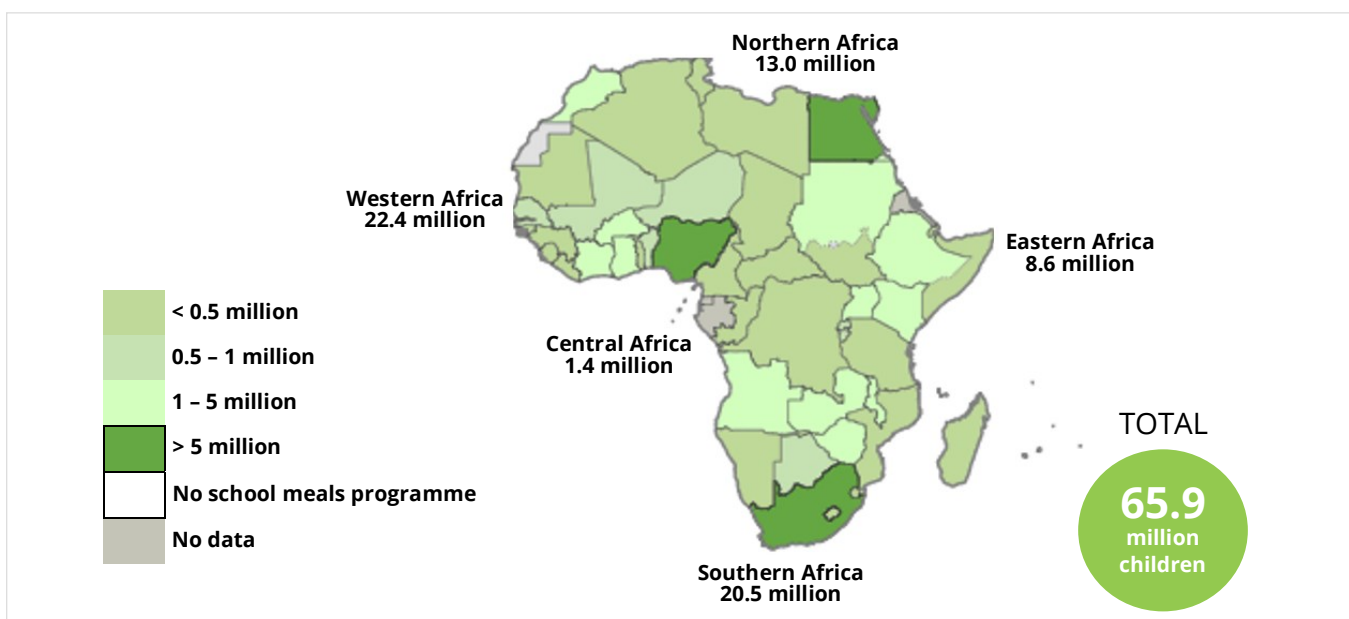
The expansion of HGFS programs across the ECOWAS region has translated into tangible benefits for millions of children. With 22.4 million children in ECOWAS countries receiving school meals, this region leads Africa with the highest number of beneficiaries. In fact, out of the 65.9 million children who received school meals globally in 2022, ECOWAS countries accounted for a significant portion, 34 percent [WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022].

Figure 1: Children receiving school meals in ECOWAS region



Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

Figure 2: Children receiving school meals in Africa



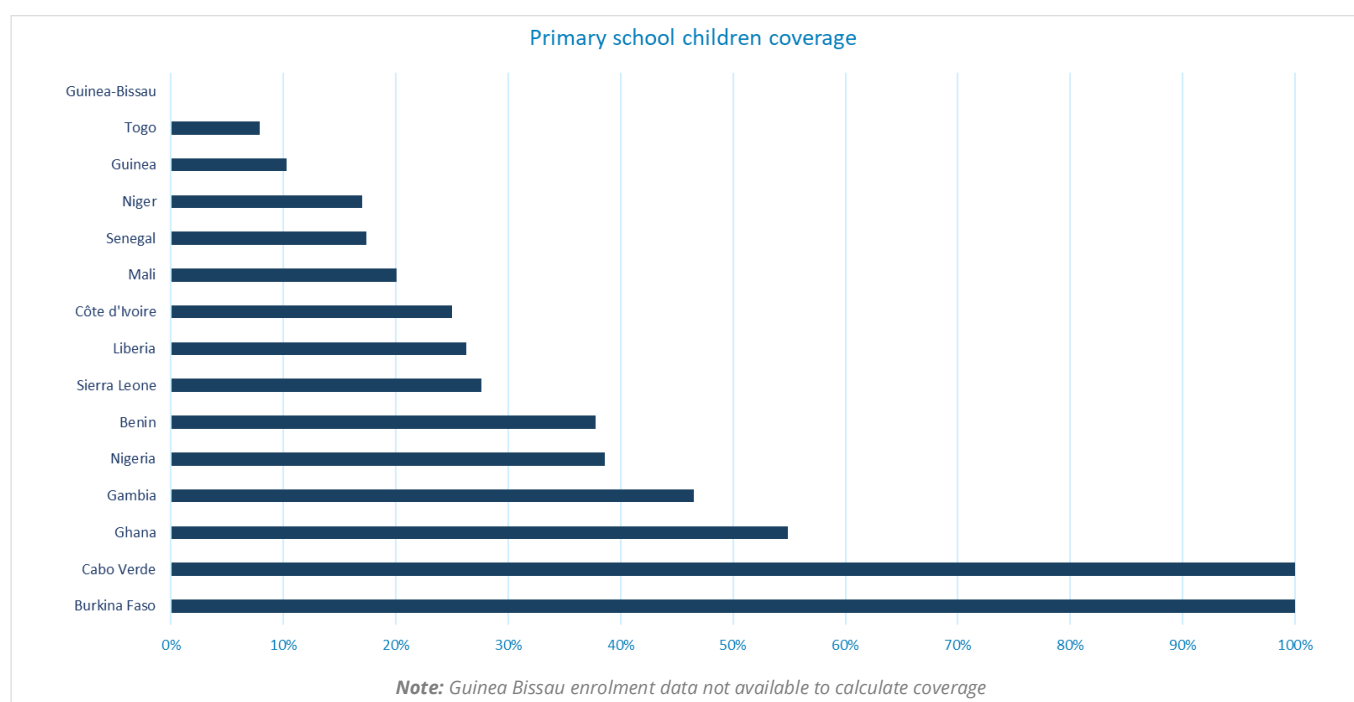
Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

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

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

Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

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



Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

A closer examination of HGSF coverage trends within the ECOWAS region reveals a diverse landscape of progress and challenges:

- Some countries have demonstrated significant improvement in coverage, such as Ghana, which doubled its coverage, and Cape Verde, which experienced a substantial increase.

- Conversely, others have experienced declines or marginal changes in coverage, as seen in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

These variations highlight the diverse challenges and successes encountered in expanding school feeding programme coverage across the region.

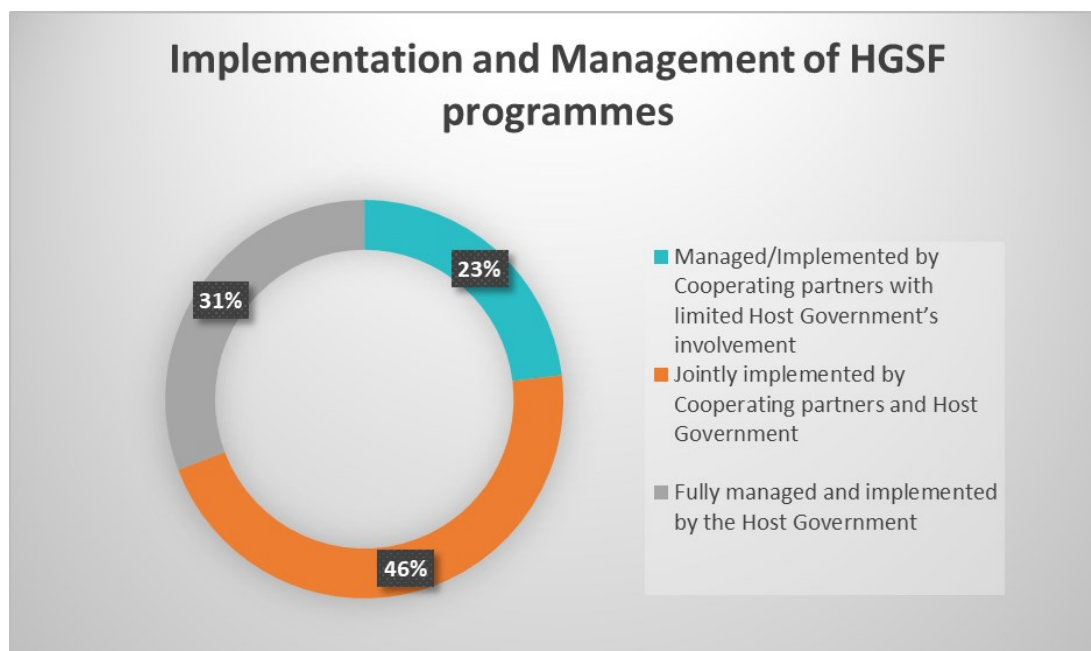
6.2. GOVERNMENT AND PARTNER COLLABORATIONS IN EXPANDING HGSF PROGRAMS

Collaborations between national governments and various partners have been instrumental in the expansion and implementation of HGSF programs across the ECOWAS region. These partnerships emphasize the importance of international cooperation and support in addressing food security and educational challenges. Notably, joint efforts between governments and partner organizations, including

but not limited to the WFP, have facilitated the establishment and scaling up of HGSF initiatives in several countries.

These collaborations underscore the collective commitment to ensuring food security and education access for children, leveraging expertise and resources from both governmental and non-governmental entities. By working together, governments and partners can effectively address the complex challenges associated with implementing HGSF programs and maximize their impact on communities and children across the ECOWAS region.

Figure 5: Survey data on implementation and management of HGSF in West Africa



Source: CERFAM-led Country Survey data (October 2023)

6.3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COUNTRIES WITHIN ECOWAS REGION ACROSS SIX DOMAINS SINCE 2020

In this section, we embark on a comparative analysis of countries within the ECOWAS region across six domains since 2020, the last report date. These domains include:

- Policy and legal frameworks
- Financial capacity
- Coordination and institutional arrangements
- Community participation
- Nutrition-sensitive programming and complementary initiatives
- Data and monitoring systems

Through this comprehensive examination, we aim to elucidate the evolving dynamics, challenges, and best practices within the realm of HGSF, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders committed to advancing education, nutrition, and sustainable development agendas.

6.4. POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

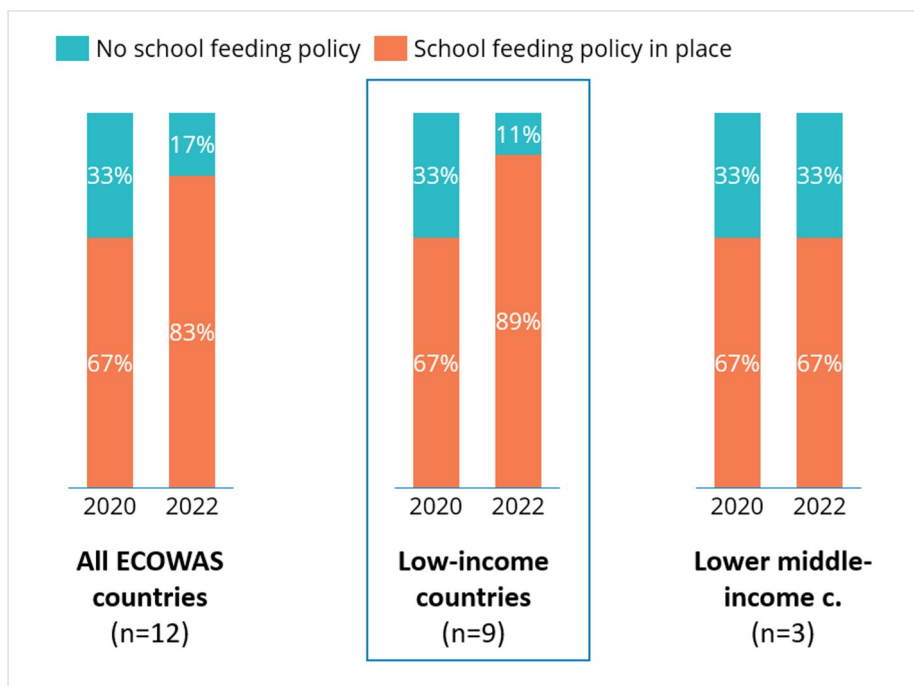
A supportive political environment and strong political will are paramount for the successful implementation of HGSF programs. These elements signal the level of importance governments place on school feeding initiatives, marking a crucial step towards ensuring their sustainability. Since January 2016, at the 26th African Union Summit (Assembly/AU/Dec.589(XXVI)), African Heads of State and Government decided that every 1st of March would be the Africa Day of School Feeding. AUDA-NEPAD, as a development agency of the AU, supported many African governments to include Home-Grown School Feeding into their national policies, strategies, and laws as an important initiative contributing to the eradication of hunger and malnutrition using the CAADP framework (African Union Biennial Report on Homegrown School Feeding 2019-2020).

When governments adopt laws or policies specifically targeting HGSF, it demonstrates their commitment and prioritization, aligning these initiatives with broader national development plans and objectives. According to a recent FAO study (FAO, 2018), about 80 percent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have had experience with school feeding at some level. However, several challenges are encountered at the implementation level, and the transition to HGSF lacks systematic implementation. The policy instruments used to support agricultural development revolve around structured demand, generated through public procurement to open up markets and advance economic development for smallholder farmers (SHF) (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2011).

Incorporating HGSF programs within a legal and policy context, or integrating them into national strategies, clarifies institutional responsibilities, delineates multisectoral coordination mechanisms, and promotes stakeholder participation. Furthermore, it often leads to dedicated budget allocations. An enabling environment, including policies, strategies, and legal frameworks, is required to develop and implement effective HGSF programs and initiatives across Africa ([African Union Biennial Report on Homegrown School Feeding 2019-2020](#)).

Comparative analysis between 2020 and the present reveals notable changes in policy and legal frameworks across African countries. In 2020, Togo, Sao Tome Principe, and Guinea Bissau had enacted Home Grown School Feeding laws, while Ghana and Mali were in the process of revising theirs. Policies on Home Grown School Feeding were present in Cameroon, Chad, Benin, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Senegal, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Gambia, and Mali ([African Union Biennial Report on Homegrown School Feeding 2019-2020](#)).

Figure 6: Existence of school meals policy in ECOWAS region (by income category)

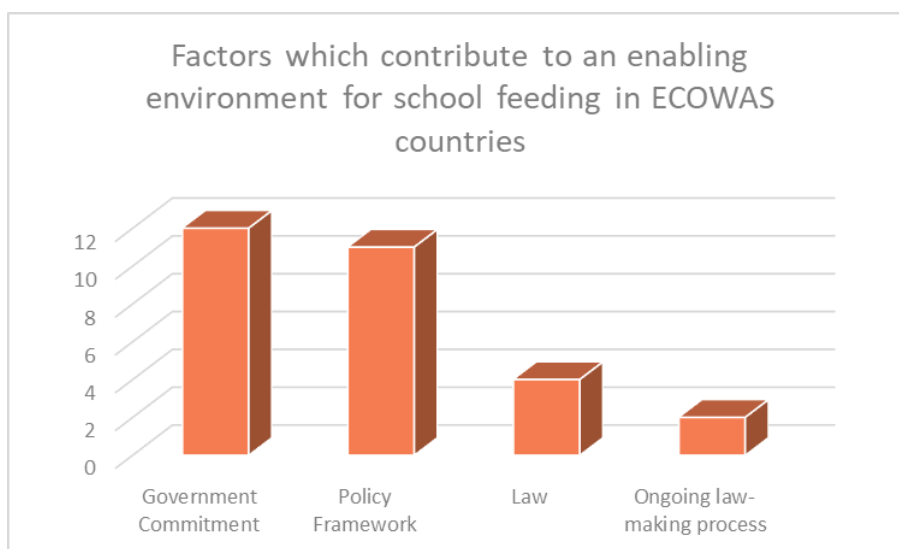


Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

Despite this positive momentum, there exists a notable gap between policy formulation and the enactment of specific school feeding laws. While many countries acknowledge governmental commitment to school feeding, only a few have enacted dedicated laws for school feeding or HGSF. This gap

underscores the need for enhanced efforts to translate policy frameworks into concrete legal statutes, thereby strengthening the enforceability and institutionalization of HGSF initiatives.

Figure 7: Survey results on factors contributing to an enabling school feeding environment in ECOWAS region.



Source: CERFAM-led Country Survey data (October 2023)

Examples from West Africa highlight efforts to fortify legal foundations for school feeding programs:

- Benin: In 2021, Benin advanced its National Integrated School Feeding Programme (PNASI) by initiating the development of a new school feeding law under the leadership of H.E Salimane Karimou, Minister of Nursery and Primary Education. Through collaborative efforts, including inter-ministerial committees and public consultations, the law was successfully adopted in 2023, enhancing programme sustainability.
- Côte d'Ivoire: Aligning with its revised National School Feeding Strategy and National Development Plan (2021-2025), Côte d'Ivoire announced plans in 2022 to formulate a school feeding law. This comprehensive approach focuses on increasing local food production, community involvement, and strategic changes to strengthen the school feeding program, aiming to provide a hot meal to every student by 2025.
- Ghana: Ghana's journey towards validating its School Feeding Bill illustrates an iterative process of policy development informed by cost-benefit analyses and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. The thorough revision process is expected to lead to the eventual enactment of the bill, solidifying the legal basis for the program.
- Sierra Leone: Embracing home-grown school feeding, Sierra Leone adopted a school feeding policy in 2021 with the support of WFP. This policy-driven approach aligns with the government's 'Feed Salone' initiative, aiming to transition to 100 percent HGFSF by scaling up implementation annually, leveraging school feeding as a catalyst for local agricultural development and improved nutrition for schoolchildren.

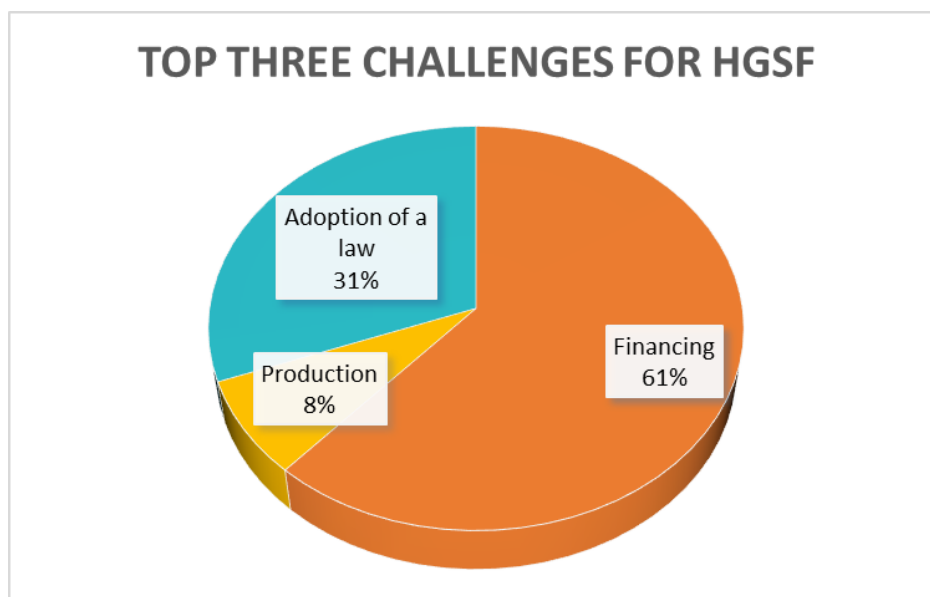
6.5. FINANCIAL CAPACITY

Financial capacity is a cornerstone for the success of HGFSF programs in West Africa, crucial for their quality, extent, and effectiveness. It underpins their ownership and alignment with national and local priorities. While establishing policy and legal frameworks demonstrates initial government support for HGFSF, the true litmus test lies in the allocation of government budgets towards these programs. National budgetary provisions, especially those enshrined within policies or legal frameworks, correlate with broader programme coverage and longevity. Such financial commitments are pivotal in ensuring sustained programme operations, preventing diversion of funds to other pressing needs.

In the last three years (2020-2022), despite facing various global crises, investment in school feeding programs in West Africa has increased significantly. The region saw a rise in investment from \$450 million to \$543 million, with an impressive 84 percent of current investment sourced domestically. Notably, low-income countries boosted their domestic financing for school meals by 7 percent, amounting to \$89 million. This increase in investment reflects a positive trend towards prioritizing HGFSF within national budgets, indicating a growing recognition of its importance for child nutrition and education.

Nonetheless, financing challenges persist and are highlighted as a significant concern by member states (Figure 8). Survey results indicate that 8 of the 13 responding countries identified financing as their foremost challenge in implementing HGFSF. Another four listed it as their second major challenge, and one country as their third. Overall, 35 percent of respondents pinpoint financing as a priority issue needing assistance. These challenges are exacerbated by interrelated global crises, including rampant inflation, increased global debt, and lowered living standards, which complicate the battle against hunger and malnutrition.

Figure 8: Top three HGFSF challenges identified by survey respondents



Source: CERFAM-led Country Survey data (October 2023)

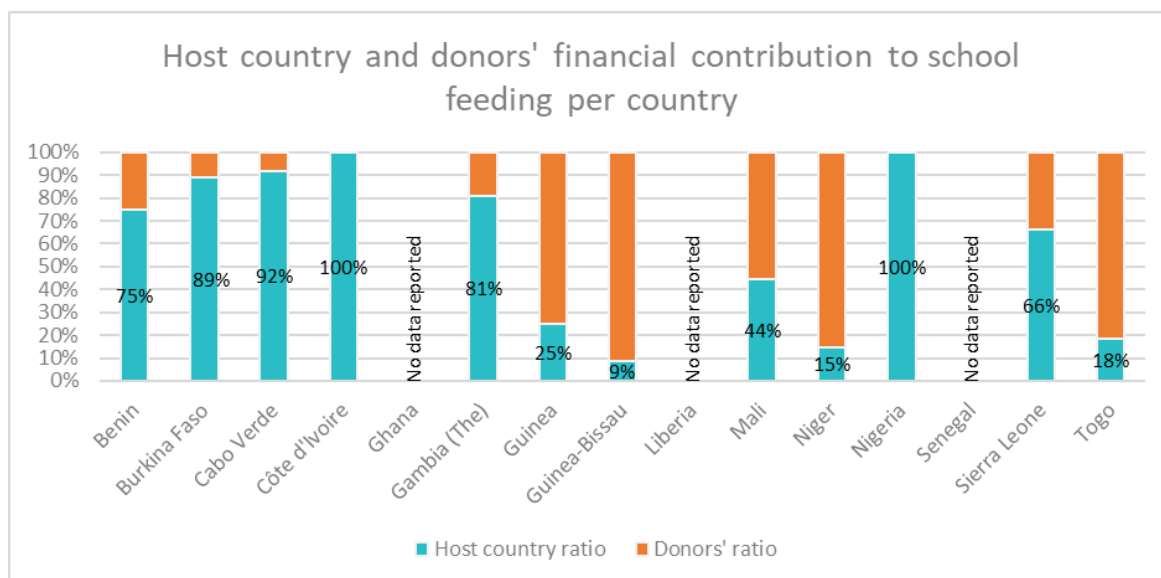
The confluence of these crises has strained the global economy, pushing millions further into poverty and reducing fiscal space for governments to expand social protection initiatives. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic widened the budget deficit to a regional average of -6.4 percent, forcing governments, especially in nations with high pre-existing debt like Cabo Verde (157 percent), Ghana (81.8 percent), and Senegal (73 percent), to borrow significantly. Furthermore, a slowdown in GDP growth was reported in 11 out of 15 West African countries in 2022. Low-income countries also face potential debt distress, with repayments of \$436 million USD between 2022 and 2028.

These financial difficulties imply that West African governments have been unable to create the necessary conditions for the large-scale implementation of HGSF, despite their expressed commitments. For instance, in Sierra Leone, HGSF has emerged as a flagship programme over the past five years, covering 80 percent of the country's schools in the 2023 budget, though still dependent on external donors. Similarly, in Guinea, while government support for

the HGSF model is strong, the country remains heavily reliant on donors due to challenges in securing sustainable funding. The Gambia has increased its budget for HGSF, yet funding remains insufficient. Nearly all countries in the region confront issues of inadequate funding and donor dependency for their school feeding initiatives.

These challenges are further reflected in the GCNF Global survey, which reveals that government funding from low-income countries, including The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Niger, averaged at 24 percent, the lowest among all income groups. Lower-middle-income countries report government contributions of 74 percent. In fact, the reports showed that in low-income countries, most of the funding was coming from international sources – a factor which was much lower in other income categories. Predominantly, funding for HGSF programs is a mix of donor and host-country sources, except for Nigeria and Benin, which are entirely reliant on host country funding, and Sierra Leone, fully funded by external donors.

Figure 9: Ratio of Host country and donors' financial contribution to school feeding per country



Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

In conclusion, while some West African countries demonstrate commendable commitment to HGSF, financial constraints hinder the scale-up and sustainability of these programs. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to mobilize resources effectively and ensure equitable access to nutritious meals for all school children in the region.

6.6. COORDINATION AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

A successful HGSF programme requires policymakers to consider several aspects during the planning and implementation phases (FAO and WFP, 2018). In its most recent study, WFP-CERFAM found that an effective coordination mechanism is key while planning for HGSF programs. Therefore, at the national level, stakeholders must undertake more assessments, ensure that gender

considerations are included in the planning, and establish mechanisms to improve long-term government engagement in the process (CERFAM, 2020).

One of the biggest challenges faced by governments in Africa is the lack of coordination in HGSF among the various stakeholders. An effective HGSF programme requires the involvement of different actors from different sectors to bring their knowledge and expertise in the planning and implementation of the program. In addition, a functioning technical working group, including members from all relevant institutions of the government, strengthens coordination at the institutional level. Further, it is essential that HGSF is integrated into all levels of sectoral policies and frameworks to allow for countries to demonstrate the stark interest and added value of HGSF. This will allow for the technical expertise and capacities to be established and enable clear communication through joint actions, goal planning, and performance measurement through agreed-upon indicators and outputs.

The purpose of effective institutional capacity and coordination is to develop strong institutional frameworks and management and accountability structures. In particular, the identification of an institution mandated and accountable for the implementation of the school feeding programme is essential. This requires a dedicated unit within the identified sectoral institution, which is adequately staffed with a range of skills ranging from food and nutrition, agriculture and rural development, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, and communication.

Examples

In Burkina Faso, the Presidential Initiative "*Assurer à chaque enfant en âge scolaire, au moins un repas équilibré par jour*" aims to provide balanced meals to every school-aged child, showcasing innovative social protection efforts (FAO, 2021). Launched in 2021, the initiative reflects the government's commitment to eradicating hunger through agricultural enhancement and efficient school canteen management.

In Benin, the Presidential School Feeding Monitoring Unit was established to streamline programme execution, working with relevant ministries to oversee management and decision-making (UNICEF, 2020).

Sierra Leone employs a decentralized approach with inter-ministerial committees and technical working group meetings. The Minister of Education's cross-sectoral "Monitoring and Learning" initiative fosters insights into challenges and cooperation areas (IFAD, 2021).

Burkina Faso: Presidential Initiative provides balanced meals to every school-aged child

The initiative targets 9,000,000 children aged 3 to 18 and also indirectly target producers and food processors. Each year, Burkina Faso allocates approximately 19 billion FCFA (approximately USD 31 million) for school feeding procurement. However, there have been resource management challenges and there have been cases where children have not received school meals throughout the year. Despite these challenges, the initiative is already contributing to improving school enrolment as well as school performance. In some schools, enrolment rates went from 30% before the programme to 60% in 2022 while success rates to the Certificate of Elementary Education (CEPE) rose from 29% to 65% in 2022.

The Gambia introduced a dual-tiered coordination system with national and regional committees, recently revitalized by collaboration with the African Development Bank-funded project. This underscores the need for durable coordination solutions and emphasizes the role of all ministries in HGSF programs (World Bank, 2023).

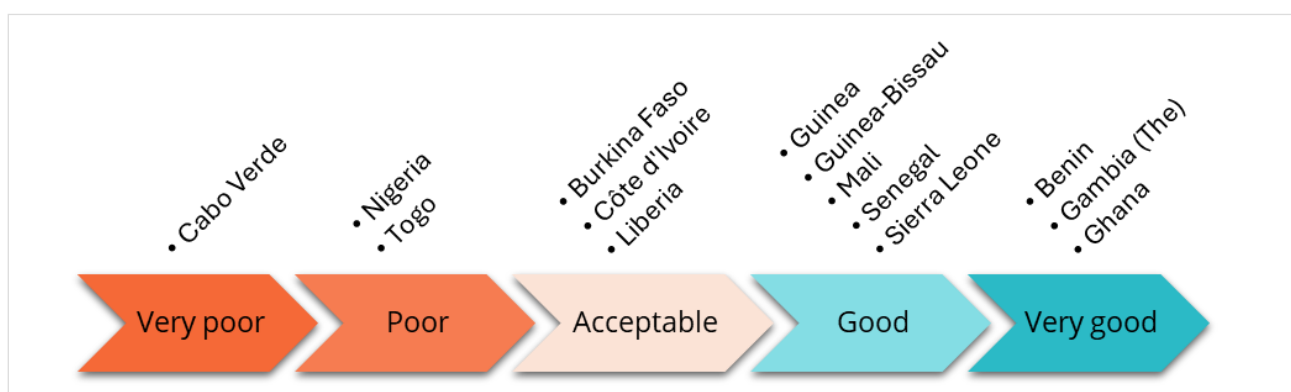
6.7. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation encompasses the involvement of community members in the daily operations and oversight of school feeding programmes. This involvement can range from supplying food commodities and cooking to monitoring, reporting, and making financial or in-kind contributions. Programmes that foster strong community ownership and accountability are more likely to be sustainable and eventually transition towards government ownership.

Additionally, when communities are empowered by and actively participate in these programmes, better outcomes are typically observed.

Across the ECOWAS region, various forms of community involvement exist, each illustrating the role the school and community play within the HGSF framework. Survey data indicate that community participation is generally rated as acceptable or good, with very few countries reporting poor levels of engagement.

Figure 10: Survey responses on level of community participation in countries



In Benin, there is notable community mobilization with members actively participating in all aspects of the school canteen operations. Communities contribute not just by cooking, but also by supplying fresh food from community gardens and making financial contributions. Some community members even organize to provide breakfast for children, recognizing the significant impact of school meals.

The Gambia exhibits a high level of community participation, mandated by the government through the requirement for each school with HGFSF programmes to establish a Food Management Committee (FMC). This committee includes parents, teachers, community members, and elected student representatives, with leadership roles often filled by parents to ensure decision-making directly benefits their children.

This involvement fosters a sense of accountability and ownership, crucial for the sustainability of these programmes.

Senegal's community participation is considered very good, with significant contributions both financial and in-kind from the community. Parents contribute 200 XOF (USD 0.33 cents) per child monthly, ensuring no child is excluded from receiving meals due to financial constraints. Remarkably, kitchen cooks in Senegal volunteer their services, driven by a sense of duty to the children in their community.

In Sierra Leone, the National School Feeding Secretariat within the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSE) promotes community participation at the start of each school year through sensitization efforts. Every school is encouraged to have a School Management Committee to ensure active community involvement, identified as a key success factor.

Guinea Bissau faces a disparity in community participation between urban and rural areas, with more active school management committees in rural or smaller communities. Conversely, in Côte d'Ivoire, community participation is reportedly higher in larger cities like Abidjan, where parents contribute financially each semester, whereas rural communities face challenges in financial or in-kind contributions, compounded by a lack of trust between the community and management.

Survey results indicate that Benin, The Gambia, and Ghana have very good levels of community participation; Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone, report good levels; Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia have acceptable levels; and Nigeria and Togo are noted for having very poor levels of community participation.

6.8. FOOD PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY CHAIN

An essential aspect of HGFSF is bridging the supply side (farmers) with the demand side (schools/children). This involves sourcing, purchasing, processing, and delivering food products through a network comprising suppliers, processors, transporters, and distributors, from the farm directly to the school. The supply chain might incorporate varying degrees of aggregation, processing, and quality control, tailored to the food products' type and diversity. The procurement approaches can vary, including direct purchases from smallholder farmers, cooperatives, local markets, or through third-party operators, employing centralized, decentralized, or hybrid models. Each model, tailored to specific country

contexts and capacities, offers distinct advantages and challenges.

The literature suggests that HGFSF can significantly benefit local food systems, enhancing family farmers' capacity and access to markets, thereby creating increased income-generating opportunities, especially for women and youth (IFPRI, 2017; FAO et al., 2021; Valencia et al., 2019; WFP, 2017). Recent studies emphasize the importance of consolidating available evidence and investing in quantitative analysis to measure the effects on local food systems, smallholders, and communities at large (CIAT, 2023).

A centralized model is often employed for the regular provision of school feeding, typically involving dry, non-perishable staples that can be stored and transported over long distances. This model centralizes procurement at the national level, or, in instances not handled by the government, a single entity may procure large quantities of food, which are then distributed to regional centres and subsequently to schools. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the Ministry of Education's Directorate for School Feeding (DCS) issues an expression of interest to suppliers. The chosen suppliers deliver food to a central location in Abidjan, from where it is transported to regional warehouses before a secondary dispatch to schools. The centralization model offers economies of scale, enhancing bargaining power and ensuring more stable food prices. It facilitates consistent quality and quantity of food products and reduces transaction costs and administrative burdens. Moreover, it minimizes risks of corruption and mismanagement by consolidating procurement and delivery through a single entity. However, this model also limits the involvement of local communities and smallholder farmers, potentially affecting the program's ownership and sustainability due to its top-down approach.

In contrast, a decentralized model allows for procurement at the regional, community, or school level, facilitated by decentralized government structures or directly by school meals committees, which may include teachers and community members. In Nigeria, for example, schools purchase directly from local small-holder farmers in the locality, which significantly reduces transaction costs and ensures that fresh foods can be purchased and delivered to schools. In Nigeria, 150,000 smallholder farmers are benefiting from the program. Prior to the pandemic, 6 million locally sourced eggs and 80 MT (metric tons) of fish were consumed by 9.2 million schoolchildren across the nation every week. Mali, where 99 percent of school feeding programs are implemented through cash-based transfers (CBT) by WFP, the government, and other actors, exemplifies this approach. Communities are expected to manage school feeding activities but often lack the necessary capacity. Thus, decentralized structures of the Ministry of Education, like the Centre d'Animation Pédagogique (CAP), manage cash distribution to schools. SMCs then purchase food from local markets, supporting local agriculture and economy. The CAP and WFP monitor the food purchases and distribution, ensuring programme integrity. Guinea employs a similar approach, using mobile money to provide funds to community committees for local purchases, enhancing the local economy.

Ghana's approach presents a variation of the decentralized model, where the programme is outsourced. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development disburses funds to District Assemblies, which in turn allocate these resources to food caterers responsible for food procurement, preparation, and distribution in schools. Caterers may buy directly from smallholder farmers, cooperatives, or markets. This model generates community jobs, household income, and allows schools to focus solely on educational activities. Preliminary findings from an impact evaluation in Ghana show a 33 percent increase in agricultural sales and a strong increase in household income in interventions where homegrown school feeding was implemented (Aurino et al., 2016). However, delays in fund transfers can impact the timely delivery of quality meals.

The adoption of cash contributions within school feeding programs promotes students' dietary diversification and positively impacts the local economy by creating links between small-scale farmers or retailers and schools. The CBT model for school feeding has shown to be easily transferable to government management. Nevertheless, delayed fund disbursement can lead to meal delivery delays.

Food procurement is increasingly viewed as a means to advance sustainable food systems, enhancing access to healthy foods and impacting consumer behavior. It also develops agricultural value chains, influencing production patterns. While there is a strong desire to procure locally and become self-sufficient, many countries in the region face challenges in food supply and procurement. For instance, in Liberia, issues with food conservation and transformation units, along with insufficient food supply measures, often result in food arriving at schools in inadequate conditions. A food supply assessment in July 2023 revealed that 84 percent of farmers identified the processing stage as the most likely point for food loss, followed by storage.

Survey results and qualitative data collected show that investment in smallholder farmers and cooperatives is crucial, particularly in resolving storage and processing challenges. This includes providing the necessary tools, equipment, and training to enhance their capacity. Moreover, the state of roads and basic infrastructure significantly affects market access and the economic opportunities for farmers, leading to both qualitative and quantitative food losses. Roads and infrastructure, as part of the overall supply chain, emerge as prime candidates for investment to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure food security.

According to the FAO, approximately 1.3 billion tons of food, nearly one-third of the food produced globally for human consumption, is lost or wasted each year. Reducing post-harvest losses is critical for food security. Government investment in storage facilities, such as grain and rice silos, warehouses, and cold storage, could significantly benefit farmers and cooperatives supplying schools or markets, ultimately supporting the goals of HGSF programs.

Supply chain and procurement are vital to the success of HGSF programs, influencing the quality, quantity, and diversity of school meals, as well as the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the efficiency and effectiveness of programme delivery.

6.9. NUTRITION-SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING AND COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES

Nutrition-sensitive programming and complementary initiatives play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of HGSF programs in West Africa. It's imperative that the food provided is not only locally sourced but also nutritious, of high quality, and prepared with strict adherence to food safety measures. This comprehensive approach extends beyond mere food procurement to encompass storage, cooking, serving, and the overall conditions under which these activities occur. Guidelines and tools must be in place to enforce planning and measures that support the uptake of healthy habits, making schools critical platforms for embedding nutrition-sensitive interventions within communities.

The impact of integrating safe, quality, and nutritious foods into HGSF programs is significant for both children and communities across the ECOWAS region. While staples like rice and beans dominate procurement, the inclusion of vegetables and fruits in school meals remains limited. However, initiatives such as school gardens present a multifaceted solution by enriching the food basket with locally sourced, healthy, and nutritious foods. These gardens not only provide micronutrient-rich foods but also serve as educational platforms where children and communities learn about the value of growing and consuming healthy foods.

Senegal serves as a compelling case study, showcasing the positive outcomes of integrating community farms and school gardens into HGSF programs. Supported by Counterpart International and funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), these initiatives have significantly enhanced the procurement of locally grown, nutrient-rich foods like sweet potatoes and mung beans. Moreover, community gardens serve as income-generating activities, enabling schools to purchase fresh, local foods on a necessary scale, thereby addressing storage challenges (Counterpart International).

Similarly, in Benin, innovative projects like the Primary School Goulo-Sodji's large garden have enhanced students' nutritional intake while supporting the operational costs of the school canteen through the sale of fruits harvested from the garden. Togo has strategically positioned HGSF as a cornerstone of its social protection strategy, integrating school gardens and poultry units across more than 100 schools. These initiatives not only introduce nutrient-rich foods into students' diets but also incorporate climate-smart agricultural practices to enhance vegetable production in school gardens.

However, challenges persist in implementing nutrition-sensitive programming across the region. Developing school menus and dietary guidelines, although crucial, faces obstacles in practical implementation due to funding shortages, as seen in countries like Gambia (UNICEF). Nevertheless, efforts to address these challenges are underway, with countries like Ghana prioritizing nutrition education for community households to promote healthy eating habits (Ghana Health Service).

As HGSF programs evolve, there is a growing emphasis on fostering positive behaviors beyond nutrition, including handwashing and deworming, to promote overall child health and well-being. Additionally, schools are emerging as hubs for climate action and adaptation in countries like Sierra Leone and Guinea, where efforts to educate communities about climate change and promote climate-sensitive food preparation methods are underway (World Food Programme).

Ultimately, ensuring the sustainability of HGSF programs hinges on access to energy, particularly in regions like Guinea where the lack of electricity poses challenges to food processing and preservation. Initiatives like the Energizing Home-Grown School Feeding (E-HGSF) project, which integrates renewable energy solutions, represent significant strides towards making HGSF programs more sustainable and environmentally friendly across the region (World Food Programme).

6.10. DATA AND MONITORING SYSTEMS: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are the backbone of successful school meal programs in the ECOWAS region. These frameworks, equipped with standardized measurement indicators, are essential for overseeing every aspect of programme implementation, from food delivery to consumption. By establishing baseline indicators, M&E tools streamline operations, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability, thus driving

Harnessing Waste for a Sustainable Future: The Power of Bio-Digesters in Togo's Schools

Bio-digesters are systems that break down organic waste, such as food scraps and animal manure, into biogas and bio-slurry. Biogas can be used as a clean and renewable fuel for cooking, and bio-slurry can be used as a rich and natural fertilizer for growing crops. It is therefore an environmentally friendly method which can save money and time on firewood and charcoal, both of which are expensive and bad for the environment and health. Bio-digesters can also help improve the quality and quantity of food, by using organic waste as a resource and boosting crop production. It is therefore a useful technology that can support school feeding programmes in Togo, by providing clean energy, organic fertilizer, and environmental education.

Bio-digesters are not yet very common in Togo's school feeding programmes, but some projects are trying to promote their use and benefits.

progress toward programme goals. For starters, the adoption of a mix if not all suggested HGSF Resource Framework - specific outcomes and output indicators for the ECOWAS region will help fill the knowledge gap in HGSF and significantly inform decision making (see table on next page).

Figure 11: Overview of suggested HGSF-specific outcomes, outputs, and indicators.

Outcomes and outcome indicators		Outputs and output indicators	
Outcome: Increased market participation of smallholder farmers with quality and diversified products			
Degree of participation of smallholder farmers in the programme	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Volume and value of food purchased by HGSF programme from smallholder farmers, by commodity 2. Number of smallholder farmers who sold food to the HGSF programme 3. Volumes and values of sales from smallholder farmers to targeted aggregators 4. Number of smallholder farmers who sold food to targeted aggregators 	Schools include food from smallholder farmers in their menus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of schools that include food from smallholder farmers in their menus 2. Numbers of boys and girls who consume food from smallholder farmers through the programme 3. Quantities and shares of food from smallholder farmers provided through school meals 4. Number of schools covered by the programme 5. Numbers of boys and girls covered by the programme 6. Quantities of food provided through school meals
Effects of participation in HGSF on smallholder farmers' production and productivity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Number of smallholder farmers who have increased their agricultural outputs, by commodity 6. Number of farmers who diversified their agricultural production 7. Numbers of farmers who have increased their agricultural productivity (yield/ha), by commodity 8. Number of farmers who have reduced post-harvest losses through improved techniques or participation in post-harvest handling and storage services 9. Number of farmers who have obtained access to credit to increase their production and/or productivity 		Smallholder farmers, including women, are supported in producing quality food surpluses that can be purchased for school feeding programmes
Effects of HGSF participation on smallholder farmers' vulnerability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Diversity of crops and animal products produced 11. Dietary diversity scores and food consumption scores for farmers 12. Coping strategy index of smallholder farmers 13. Share of expenditure on food by households of smallholder farmers 		

Outcomes and outcome indicators		Outputs and output indicators	
Outcome: Access of schoolchildren to fresh and diverse food			
Effects of higher acceptance of HGSF	14. Absenteeism of boys and girls after introduction of HGSF	School-aged children receive school meals	10. Numbers of girls and boys in relevant age groups who received school meals
Effects of greater dietary diversity and quality of HGSF meals	15. Dietary diversity score of children receiving school meals		11. Amounts of food provided by average school meal, by food group (actual versus planned)
	16. Absenteeism of boys and girls because of sickness		12. Macro- and micronutrients provided by an average school meal, as percentages of daily requirements of children in different age groups (actual versus. planned)
		Material investments are made to avoid sources of disease and infection	13. Quantities and kinds of non-food items provided or facilities built/improved
		Schools with HGSF provide adequate, diverse and fresh food	14. Numbers of schools and children with access to improved drinking-water source
			15. Numbers and percentages of schools covered by the HGSF programme that provide meals aligned with nutrition criteria (guidelines and standards)

Source: Home Grown School Feeding Resource Framework, FAO-WFP, 2018

While most countries in the region have some form of data monitoring mechanisms in place, there's a common challenge: the lack of comprehensive data management systems capable of providing real-time insights. This gap impedes efficient programme management and decision-making. Consequently, there's a widespread call for the adoption of sophisticated, data-driven tools to enhance data collection and analysis processes.

In several countries like Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, paper-based tracking systems for monitoring daily attendance are still prevalent. However, these systems suffer from delays, inconsistencies, and transparency issues. To address these challenges, countries need to establish robust M&E frameworks and prioritize digitizing data collection processes.

Efforts undertaken by the School Meals Coalition Data and Monitoring Initiative are crucial in this regard. The initiative aims to support member governments by not only providing advanced monitoring tools but also focusing on building systems, refining processes, and strengthening personnel capacity. This comprehensive approach is aimed at addressing the following key areas:

- **Establishing Agreed Core Indicators:** The initiative seeks to establish a consensus on a core set of indicators with clear methodologies for calculation and reporting. These indicators will improve consistency and comparability of data across countries, enhancing the effectiveness of monitoring efforts.

- **Enhancing Data Capture Processes:** Working closely with governments, the initiative will establish standardized processes for systematically capturing and reporting high-quality data. This effort aims to streamline data collection efforts, reduce duplication of demands on personnel, and ensure the reliability and accuracy of data collected.
- **Developing Dissemination and Communication Strategies:** A robust dissemination and communication strategy will be developed to ensure that practitioners have access to and can fully utilize the information generated through monitoring and evaluation efforts. This strategy will facilitate the effective dissemination of best practices, lessons learned, and actionable insights to relevant stakeholders, promoting knowledge-sharing and capacity building.
- **Creating a Global Database on School Meals:** One of the initiative's key objectives is to establish a single, official, and trusted global database on school meals and related activities. This database will serve as a global public good, systematically collecting, storing, curating, and making accessible timely national data on school meals, as well as school health and nutrition. By centralizing this information, the database will provide valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, enabling evidence-based decision-making and fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing across borders.

Case Study:

Harnessing Data for Change: Transforming School Feeding in Ghana

Introduction

In the heart of Ghana's educational landscape lies a transformative initiative: the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP). This program, birthed in 2005 with just ten beneficiary schools, has burgeoned into a national endeavour, benefiting over 3.8 million pupils by the end of the 2023 academic year. Yet, behind this success story lies a challenge: the need for streamlined data management. This case study delves into the evolution of the GSFP and the pivotal role played by the School Feeding Data and Information Monitoring System in revolutionizing its efficacy and reach.

History of the School Meals Programme in Ghana

The GSFP emerged as a beacon of hope, aiming not only to increase school enrolment and attendance but also to combat hunger and malnutrition. With a focus on utilizing local foodstuffs, the programme has not only boosted domestic food production but has also provided employment opportunities, particularly for women. Milestones include the implementation of Daily Record Forms, the digitization of monitoring tools, and the development of menus tailored to nutritional needs and local food producers.

School Feeding Data and Information Monitoring System

- **Problem Identification:** Data inconsistency and the lack of real-time information posed significant challenges to GSFP's effectiveness. The transition to digitalized tools aimed to address these issues, aligning with the government's broader digitalization agenda.
- **Situation Before the Monitoring System:** Manual data collection at the district level led to delays, inaccuracies, and inefficiencies in data processing and analysis.

Ghana emerges as a leader in the ECOWAS region for its commendable efforts in enhancing data and monitoring systems for school meal programs. While challenges persist, Ghana's proactive approach and dedication to improvement have propelled it to the forefront of innovation in this area.

The case study on Ghana's efforts will provide valuable insights into the country's journey to enhance its data and monitoring systems.

In Guinea Bissau, the introduction of School Connect represents another significant leap forward in data management, streamlining data collection and analysis processes. The tool's real-time dashboards enhance programme management and decision-making, reducing errors and inefficiencies associated with manual reporting.

- **Implementation Process:** The GSFP spearheaded the digitization of monitoring tools, leveraging support from stakeholders like the World Food Programme (WFP). Training sessions equipped key stakeholders with the necessary skills to utilize these tools effectively.
- **Results Achieved:** The monitoring system revolutionized data accuracy and accessibility, facilitating immediate problem resolution and enhancing transparency. It also paved the way for strengthened collaboration between the GSFP, government agencies, and district authorities.
- **Utilization of Results:** The monitoring system provides comprehensive data on various programme metrics, from enrolment to menu adherence, facilitating informed decision-making.
- **Usage of the System:** Government agencies and NGOs utilize this data to inform policy, funding, and programme planning, showcasing its instrumental role in driving impactful change.

Lessons Learned and Areas for Improvement

- **Lessons Learned:** Efficient data collection processes and enhanced data accuracy emerged as key takeaways from the implementation process.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Constant internet provision and GPS tracking are identified as areas for further enhancement to overcome logistical challenges.

Conclusion

The Ghanaian experience underscores the transformative power of data in driving effective social programs. As the GSFP continues its journey, the School Feeding Data and Information Monitoring System stands as a testament to the potential of digital innovation in reshaping education and nutrition landscapes. With a commitment to ongoing improvement, Ghana paves the way for a future where every child has access to not only education but also nourishment and opportunity.

Senegal plans to introduce School Connect in 2024, extending its capabilities to capture community contributions toward school meals. This feature will provide valuable insights into the impact of community involvement, showcasing the quantitative and qualitative benefits of such contributions.

By focusing on these critical areas and adopting a holistic approach that encompasses both tools and capacity-building measures, the School Meals Coalition Data and Monitoring Initiative aims to strengthen the foundation of school meal programs in the ECOWAS region, ultimately improving their impact on the health, nutrition, and well-being of children across member countries. [[WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#)]

7. GLOBAL ADVOCACY AND SOUTH–SOUTH COOPERATION

7.1. SCHOOL MEALS COALITION

The School Meals Coalition, originating from the 2021 Food Systems Summit, stands as a government-led initiative striving to revitalize school meals programs, bolster food and education systems, and drive actions toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In response to diverse global challenges, this coalition has garnered support from 97 countries worldwide, 3 regional bodies, alongside 127 partners, all united in their efforts to confront these crises and ensure every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. Notably, these figures represent the count as of the report date, with ongoing growth anticipated.

Partner-led initiatives are designed to support country-level action, including:

1. **Research:** The Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, with a Secretariat at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, provides the scientific evidence for which programmatic actions to prioritize, based on their impact and value-for-money;
2. **Financing:** The Sustainable Financing Initiative, founded by the Global Education Forum, works with governments and donors to increase and better coordinate domestic and international financing for school feeding programs; and
3. **Data:** The Data and Monitoring Initiative, hosted by WFP, supports the development of a global school meals data base to track and monitor Coalition accomplishments.

The coalition has notably elevated the focus on the wide-ranging benefits of school meals, implementing a robust plan to translate commitments into tangible outcomes. With the backing of the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS, HGSP programs providing free and nutritious meals have been acknowledged as versatile strategies to address immediate global priorities related to food and education crises.

In the West African context, 14 of the 15 ECOWAS countries have joined the School Meals Coalition, demonstrating their collective commitment to enhancing school meal access for children within their territories. Notably, Ghana and Guinea-Bissau marked themselves as the latest ECOWAS members to join the Coalition in 2023, leaving Cabo Verde as the remaining country yet to join. Seven out of the 15 ECOWAS countries, specifically Benin, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, and Togo, have gone further to submit their national commitments. These commitments outline specific plans and objectives each country will pursue to provide children with healthy and nutritious school meals, showcasing their dedication to leveraging school feeding programs as solutions to regional and global challenges.

7.2. SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

South-South and Triangular cooperation provide a platform for countries in the Global South, facing similar challenges or sharing similar contexts, to engage in mutual learning. This approach facilitates the sharing and exchange of good practices and lessons learned. Since 2020, various countries

within the region have participated in study visits under the framework of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), either as visiting nations seeking insights or as host countries offering their expertise.

7.3. SIERRA LEONE'S STUDY VISIT TO KENYA

In 2023, the Government of Sierra Leone embarked on a study visit to Kenya to glean insights from Kenya's successful transition from traditional School Feeding to Home-Grown School Feeding and the steps Kenya has taken toward national ownership of the program. Since 2018, a local non-governmental organization in Kenya, Food 4 Education, has been at the forefront of implementing the school feeding program, taking over from the World Food Programme (WFP) after 38 years of its management. Food 4 Education currently provides 124,000 children with hot, affordable, nutritious meals every school day, with an ambitious target to feed 200,000 learners daily by the end of 2023 and aiming for 1 million learners each day within the next five years. The Government of Sierra Leone, having launched its flagship Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE) in 2018, is keen on accelerating its transition to a Home-Grown School Feeding program. The study tour to Kenya enabled the Sierra Leone delegation to observe firsthand the integral role of smallholder farmers in the supply chain, the management of incoming commodities by schools, and the support of Kenya's school feeding policy in facilitating the Home-Grown Feeding programme through a conducive environment. The visit also provided insights into the technical aspects of how Kenya's Ministry of Education disburses funds for school feeding interventions and the accountability mechanisms for funds received by school administrators. A particularly enlightening aspect of the visit was observing Kenya's centralized kitchen method, where meals are prepared early in the morning and dispatched to schools across the country. This experience offered Sierra Leone valuable perspectives on how to refine and enhance their own school feeding program.

7.4. BURUNDI'S VISIT TO SENEGAL

Following an enlightening study visit to Benin in 2021, led by the First Lady of Burundi, which notably increased the Government of Burundi's commitment to School Feeding, a subsequent visit was made to Senegal in 2023. This visit was framed within the scope of exploring and understanding Home-Grown School Feeding initiatives. Burundi, at this juncture, is in the pilot phase of implementing decentralized local purchasing systems and sought inspiration from Senegal's established model. Since 2014, Senegal has been pioneering a monthly cash transfer system to schools, a mechanism that allows schools to procure supplies directly from approved retailers. This network of around 700 small traders provides a range of staple foods for the school meals, including cereals, flour, pulses, oil, and iodized salt, all integral to the traditional food basket. The purpose of Burundi's study visit extended beyond mere observation. It

aimed at enriching the knowledge base of Burundian policymakers and technical staff on the development and operationalization of school feeding programmes centred around healthy, locally sourced, nutritious products. The delegation delved into Senegal's fortification experiences and broader regional initiatives, gaining insights into the integrated approach to school feeding adopted in Senegal and elsewhere. This approach encompasses a management model characterized by central coordination, decentralized services, dedicated personnel, and a clear chain of

responsibilities, alongside the involvement of various sectors including nutrition, agriculture, and social protection. The visit equipped the Burundian delegation with a deeper understanding of mechanisms to boost local agricultural production, especially the processing and fortification of staple foods at the local level. It also broadened their perspective on strategies to enhance population nutritional status and pinpoint synergies within the school feeding program, thereby laying the groundwork for the potential replication and adaptation of these models in Burundi.



8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The landscape analysis of homegrown school feeding programs reveals profound societal benefits and underscores the potential of the African continent to combat hunger and malnutrition effectively, safeguarding its human capital. Despite notable progress, significant work remains to establish resilient systems. This includes codifying policies into law, diversifying funding sources, improving multisectoral coordination, enhancing regional collaboration, strengthening data-driven decision-making, reducing post-harvest losses, engaging the private sector, and promoting climate-friendly practices. The Home-Grown School Feeding landscape analysis within the ECOWAS region underscores a collective commitment to addressing food insecurity, education access, and broader development goals. Emphasizing sustainability, equity, and local empowerment, HGSF initiatives have shown promise in significantly impacting the lives of millions of children. However, challenges persist, necessitating concerted efforts and strategic interventions for lasting change.

8.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Political Will and Legal Frameworks:

- Governments should initiate HGSF policies, involving broad stakeholder consultations, and prioritize enacting specific laws to ensure accountability and sustained funding.
- Budget allocations for HGSF within legal frameworks should be ensured for programme continuity despite political changes.

b. Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:

- Governments must diversify funding sources beyond donor dependency, exploring innovative revenue mobilization efforts such as general tax mobilization, earmarked taxation, and leveraging financial instruments like SDG Bonds and impact investments.

c. Multisectoral Coordination and Governance:

- HGSF programs should be integrated into sectoral policies, with internal sensitization and establishment of functional coordination mechanisms involving all relevant stakeholders.

d. Regional Coordination and Knowledge Exchange:

- This CERFAM led ECOWAS rSMC/CoP in collaboration with WFP and the Research Consortium would support governments to monitor progress against national commitments. Specific focus will be on the 7 domains of the national commitments, namely, Financing, Policy and Institutional Frameworks, Coordination, Community participation, procurement models, data and monitoring and nutrition sensitivity.

e. Data for Decision-Making:

- Governments should prioritize digital data collection tools, comprehensive training, and adoption of regional indicators for HGSF programs to enhance evidence-based decision-making. Starting with the following:



1. Value of school meal items sourced from smallholder farmers/other local actors.
2. Volume of school meal items sourced from smallholder farmers/ other local actors.
3. Number of new national markets accessed by targeted smallholder farmers due to programme.
4. Proportion of smallholder farmers [and other actors] reporting improved access to credit
5. Proportion of smallholder farmers [and other actors] reporting improved access to inputs
6. Percentage of smallholder farmers [and other actors] reporting increased access to income generating opportunities.

f. Post-Harvest Loss Reduction:

- Develop comprehensive policies and strategies to minimize post-harvest losses, emphasizing capacity building, infrastructure enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration.

g. Private-Sector Engagement:

- Governments should engage the private sector cautiously, ensuring contributions align with nutritional standards and public health goals.

h. Climate-Friendly HGSF Programs:

- Embrace environmentally sustainable practices in HGSF programs, including renewable energy technologies and climate adaptation strategies.

8.2. SECTION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Background and Context:

- Conclusions: Recent developments indicate a shift towards joint implementations between governments and international partners, aiming to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of HGSF programs.
- Recommendations: Invest in capacity building, enhance partnerships, and integrate HGSF into national policies.

b. Factors Influencing HGSF Effectiveness:

- Conclusions: Education and food insecurity challenges persist in West Africa despite efforts to address them; HGSF programs represent a viable solution.
- Recommendations: Increase investments in education, strengthen social protection systems, mitigate climate change impacts, and address underlying factors contributing to conflicts and economic disruptions.

c. Current Landscape Analysis:

- Conclusions: Adoption of HGSF programs reflects a collective commitment to food security and education access; challenges remain in achieving consistent and equitable coverage.
- Recommendations: Strengthen partnerships, conduct further research, share best practices, and explore innovative financing mechanisms.

d. Policy and Legal Frameworks, Financial Capacity, Coordination and Institutional Arrangements, Community Participation:

- Conclusions: Closing gaps in policy enactment, addressing financial challenges, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and fostering community ownership are essential for effective HGSF programme implementation.
- Recommendations: Prioritize legal enactment, sustainable funding mechanisms, enhance coordination mechanisms, and focus on fostering community participation, including diversifying funding sources beyond donor dependency.

e. Procurement Models, Nutrition-sensitive Approach, Data and Monitoring Systems:

- Conclusions: Balanced procurement models, nutrition-sensitive initiatives, and robust data management systems are crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of HGSF programs.
- Recommendations: Explore hybrid procurement models, invest in nutrition-sensitive initiatives, and enhance data management systems.

f. Global Advocacy and South-South Cooperation:

- Conclusions: The School Meals Coalition and South-South Cooperation highlight the importance of global collaboration and knowledge exchange for sustainable school feeding initiatives.
- Recommendations: Encourage continued engagement in the School Meals Coalition, facilitate more opportunities for South-South Cooperation, and strengthen financing and monitoring mechanisms.

By implementing these recommendations, ECOWAS countries can strengthen their HGSF programs, ensuring sustained impact on education, health, nutrition, and local economies while fostering resilience to future challenges.

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