



THE GAMBIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS ON SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

How Partners plan to support government commitments

INTRODUCTION

The Gambia's national commitments to the School Meals Coalition were signed in 2023. In order to support the recovery from the pandemic and meet the Sustainable Development Goals, the government has stated its strong resolve to expand the Home-Grown feeding programme. This is because the country recognizes the essential role that school meals play in improving children's learning and transforming food systems.

Partners are committed to strengthening their support to the government to achieve the goals set forth in its national commitments. To this end, they are taking a multisectoral approach and working with both national organizations and decentralized state structures as well as local actors.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the services that WFP and various partners—International Financial Institutions, donors, United Nations agencies, non-government organizations, the private sector, etc.—can offer to assist the government in carrying out its commitments.

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A. CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL FEEDING IN THE GAMBIA

1. Policy framework

The school feeding program in The Gambia is well-integrated into the national policy landscape. It is included in key strategic documents such as the Education Sector Policy, Nutrition Policy, and the Gambia National Agriculture Investment Plan (GNAIP). The national validated school feeding policy, first developed in 2017 and later enhanced in 2020, aligns with agriculture development and a more comprehensive school health and nutrition approach. This robust policy framework emphasizes the role of school feeding as a crucial education and social protection intervention, highlighting its significance in national development agendas.

2. Financing framework

The financing of school feeding in The Gambia is supported by both government and donor funding. The government has established a budget line for school feeding, with funding that has grown steadily from **GMD 30M in 2019 to GMD 162.5M (USD 2.4M) in 2024**, covering two regions. Additionally, multi-year donor funding has been secured from initiatives such as FASDEP, Enveloped-A, GAFSP, and the McGovern-Dole program. Despite these efforts, over 50% of schools, particularly in urban areas, are still not benefiting from the program, indicating a need for expanded financial support to ensure comprehensive coverage.

3. Institutional framework/coordination commitments

The institutional framework for school feeding in The Gambia includes a national School Feeding Unit that coordinates all aspects of the program. There are also school feeding focal points at regional education directorates. However, there remain challenges with inadequate staff skills, resources, and competencies at various levels, which impact the full implementation of the program. Efforts by WFP to build capacity through secondment of program policy officer to the government school feeding unit are ongoing.

Strong partnerships are in place with agencies like UNICEF, WFP, CRS, and MRC, particularly in implementing complementary programs such as WASH, micronutrient supplementation, and deworming. However, the inter-sectoral coordination mechanism, although established, has largely remained dormant since 2017. Renewed discussions are underway to reactivate these mechanisms to ensure holistic and effective program delivery.

4. Program design and coverage

The school feeding program in The Gambia is based on comprehensive needs assessments, identifying appropriate target groups and criteria based on poverty, vulnerability, food security, and nutrition issues. The current implementation approach includes diverse food modalities and baskets, incorporating micronutrient fortification and deworming, tailored to local contexts and preferences. The community decentralized model uses a nine-commodity food basket designed to provide diverse nutritional values.

- The decentralized local procurement is emphasized, supported by feasibility studies and national cost assessments. Decentralized procurement has involved communities and market dynamics are considered in planning food distribution. A cash-based transfer system to schools under communities' leadership has helped maintain supplier confidence and streamline food supply and payment processes.

5. Evidence and data generation

Efforts to integrate school feeding indicators into the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) M&E system are ongoing. Currently, ad hoc monitoring at the regional level is conducted by implementing partners in close collaboration with MoBSE. Despite these efforts, there is a need for a more resourced and functional monitoring and evaluation system to ensure comprehensive data collection, implementation feedback, and program adjustments based on evidence.

An impact evaluation has already been conducted by WFP and DIME using child data. Efforts are ongoing to explore the possibility of assessing the program's impact on farmers.

6. Advocacy and partnerships

Advocacy for school feeding in The Gambia involves collaboration between government, international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector. Key partners include Action Aid, CRS, and Child Fund, with private sector involvement in the rice value chain for school supply. Community engagement is crucial, with local leadership positions provided in school feeding management and decision-making processes at decentralized levels. Parents and Mothers' clubs play a leading role in local procurement and resource management.

The advocacy efforts emphasize the importance of school feeding in improving educational outcomes, nutritional status, and supporting local agricultural development. Continuous advocacy and partnership-building are being explored to expand program coverage and enhance its impact on the targeted communities.

B. THE GAMBIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

1. Policy Framework

- ▶ Develop a coherent policy to support implementation of the commitments.

2. Financing framework

- ▶ Create a fiscal space to maintain an incremental school feeding budget line that will always adequately support all vulnerable children at any given time.
- ▶ Scale-up HGSF programme to cover all public schools in the Gambia by 2030.

3. Institutional framework/Coordination

- ▶ The mandate and authority, technical and logistic capacities of SAFMU to be strengthened and the unit transformed to a full standalone SF government Authority or Agency or a full Directorate at a minimum.
- ▶ Continuous improvement of approaches through a collaborative peer-to-peer network for sharing best practices and lessons learned.

4. Program design and coverage

- ▶ Adopt a broad-based multisectoral approach for the implementation of home-grown school feeding programme and create a very strong linkage between the production/supply side (Ministry of Agriculture) and demand/school meals delivery side (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education) while endeavoring to support and enhance capacities to deliver on both sides of the spectrum.

- ▶ Re-introduce regular deworming under the school feeding programme to intensify the nutritional health of children through the national home-grown school feeding programme.
- ▶ Support balance and sustainable diet with food items borne through organic process on school farms and gardens and iron fortified rice in all school meals.
- ▶ Continue to strengthen the imperative link between food safety, food quality and nutritional standards in the whole society and for the education of mothers, children, and adolescents.
- ▶ Community roles.
- ▶ Through proper and adequate targeting approach, empower mother's clubs to scale-up in reaching more vulnerable children with daily nutritious school meals.
- ▶ Empower mothers' clubs and other relevant stakeholders to effectively implement home grown school feeding programmes through robust and family farming systems.

5. Evidence and data generation

- ▶ Continuous improvement of approaches, through collaborative peer-to-peer network for cooperative learning and sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

C. HOW PARTNERS PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GAMBIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

Commitments pillars	Commitments	Partners' support actions
1. Policy Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop a coherent policy to support implementation of the commitments. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The draft has been developed by a World Food Programme consultant. WFP will support the finalization of the School Health and Nutrition Policy. 2. CRS and other partners will be involved in the review and validation process. 3. Conduct a comprehensive review of the national School Health and Nutrition policy.
2. Financing Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create a fiscal space to maintain an incremental school feeding budget line that will always adequately support all vulnerable children at any given time. ▶ Scale-up HGSF programme to cover all public schools in the Gambia by 2030. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identification of funding opportunities and develop joint proposals with international financial institutions (IFIs) and the private sector to finance the School Health and Nutrition Program. Potential partners include World bank, AFDB, ISDB, Jah Oil, QCell, Africell, Comium, and various banks. 2. Development of a costed hand over plan 3. Support to government in the development of a long-term resource mobilization strategy included in the hand over plan.
3. Institutional framework/ coordination commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The mandate and authority, technical and logistic capacities of SAFMU to be strengthened and the unit transformed to a full standalone School Feeding government Authority or Agency or a full Directorate at a minimum. ▶ Continuous improvement of our approaches through a collaborative peer-to-peer network for sharing best practices and lessons learned. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Office set-up and equipment. 2. Training of the staff. 3. Revitalize the national steering/ Establishment of National School Feeding Task Force. 4. Continue coordination with SMC. 5. Support government to strengthen School level management and accountability structures.
4. Program design and coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Adopt a broad-based multisectoral approach for the implementation of home-grown school feeding programme and create a very strong linkage between the production/ supply side (Ministry of Agriculture) and demand/school meals delivery side (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education) while endeavoring to support and enhance capacities to deliver on both sides of the spectrum. ▶ Re-introduce regular deworming under the school feeding programme to intensify the nutritional health of children through the national home-grown school feeding programme. ▶ Support balance and sustainable diet with food items borne through organic process on school farms and gardens and iron fortified rice in all school meals. ▶ Continue to strengthen the imperative link food safety, food quality and nutritional standards in the whole society and for the education of mothers, children, and adolescents. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sensitization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Continue sensitizing smallholder farmers on best practices and market opportunities. 2. Procurement Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Further develop and refine the decentralized local procurement model to enhance efficiency and inclusivity. 3. Farmer Cooperatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop and provide ongoing support for farmer cooperatives to boost collective bargaining and market access. 4. Stakeholder Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Organize regular field visits for stakeholders to observe program impacts firsthand. 5. Infrastructure Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Advance school feeding infrastructure under the GAFSp project. ▶ Equip schools with energy-saving cooking devices to promote sustainability. 6. Local Government Involvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Engage local governments, including councils and municipalities, actively and regularly in community consultations to discuss support and track progress. 7. Nutritional Enhancements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Support research aimed at enhancing the nutritional value of the HGSF food basket. ▶ Provide bi-annual deworming tablets and vitamin-A supplementation under the GAFSp. ▶ Introduce and promote the cultivation of bio-fortified crops in school and community gardens. <p><i>(more on page 5)</i></p>

Commitments pillars	Commitments	Partners' support actions
	<p>Community roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Empower mother's clubs to scale-up in reaching more vulnerable children with daily nutritious school meals, Through proper and adequate targeting approach. ▶ Empower mothers' clubs and other relevant stakeholders to effectively implement home grown school feeding programmes through robust and family farming systems. 	<p>8. Food Fortification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP will encourage the adoption of fortified rice in school meals. ▶ Promote and support the production of organic manure in school and women's gardens <p>9. Health Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP will support school health education through peer health groups, focusing on practical health knowledge and preventative care. <p>10. Monitoring framework: WFP will design School Feeding M&E System integrated in the MOBSE monitoring system.</p> <p>CRS: Provision of daily school meals to promote the inclusion of local commodities in school feeding and also to boost the local economy by increasing farmer/producers' revenues.</p> <p>School feeding Infrastructural development.</p> <p>Community Roles: Support for Women Smallholder Farmers by WFP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide production inputs and training on commodity value chain development to increase women's participation in aggregation. ▶ Enhance on-ground transportation logistics to facilitate market access. ▶ Offer training in group business management and financial inclusion through micro-credit institutions.
<p>5. Evidence and data generation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Continuous improvement of approaches, through collaborative peer-to-peer network for cooperative learning and sharing of best practices and lessons learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ An impact evaluation has already been conducted using child data. WFP is exploring the possibility of assessing the program's impact on farmers. ▶ Documentation of best practices in Homegrown School Feeding of the Gambia for learning and sharing through south-south cooperation by WFP.
<p>6. Advocacy and partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Scale up home grown school feeding to cover all public schools in The Gambia by the year 2030. 	<p>WFP will Develop an advocacy strategy for National Assembly members and HGFSF champions among influential figures, such as the First Lady:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ National Stakeholder Sensitization Workshop. ▶ Sensitization of National Assembly Members. ▶ Sensitization of the executive. ▶ Establishment of subcommittee on School Feeding at the level of the Food security Council. ▶ Sensitization campaigns for the public, local communities using traditional communicators/artists. ▶ Advocacy and engagement with development partners, private sector, and NGOs. ▶ Identify HGFSF champions. ▶ Engage influential media figures in advocacy.