



LEGISLATING CHANGE, FINANCING FUTURES: Advancing ECOWAS Homegrown School Feeding through Commitment, Collaboration, Innovation, and Investment



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Conference Highlights: Building a Brighter Future through Homegrown School Feeding

INTRODUCTION: A COMMITMENT TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The journey towards sustainable education and nutrition initiatives in West Africa advanced significantly since the inaugural ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF). This second HGSF conference gathered 120 technical participants from ECOWAS and non-ECOWAS countries, including Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Mauritania and Sao Tome and Principe, along with partners from various international organizations. The success of this event held from May 21-23, 2024, in Dakar, reaffirmed the commitment of non-ECOWAS member states to advancing HGSF programs. Co-hosted by the World Food Programme (WFP) and supported by major International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the World Bank, the conference provided a platform for aligning national commitments with innovative financing mechanisms and legislative reforms.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: PAVING THE WAY FOR SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FEEDING

The conference aimed to achieve several key objectives:

- 1. Ensure Costed National Commitments and Financing Mechanisms:** A dedicated half-day session focused on ensuring that national commitments to HGSF initiatives are accurately costed and supported by appropriate financing mechanisms. Discussions around evidence from recent publications on the role of IFIs and other financing methods, addressing funding challenges, and aligning national commitments with available funding opportunities.
- 2. Present Best Practices and Institutional Models:** Showcasing successful experiences and innovative approaches, to inspire the adoption of effective strategies among ECOWAS member states and non-ECOWAS governments in the region.
- 3. Support Knowledge Exchange and Monitoring:** Fostering knowledge exchange among West and Central African countries, advocating for knowledge-sharing platforms to facilitate the exchange of best practices and evidence, and for robust monitoring mechanisms to track progress.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OPENING REMARKS: INSIGHTS FROM CONFERENCE PRINCIPALS

Evelyn Etti, WFP Deputy Regional Director

Mrs. Evelyn Etti highlighted the transformative impact of homegrown school feeding programs on regional development. She emphasized how these programs ensure a steady supply of locally produced food to schools, improve nutrition for children, boost local farmers' income, and foster overall economic welfare. "Home-grown school meals offer a promising pathway to provide access to essential social protection systems, aiding vulnerable communities in meeting their basic needs, while fostering sustainable development and reducing poverty," she noted.

Khady Diop Mbodji, Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Senegal

Emphasizing the importance of education and local development, Mrs. Khady Diop Mbodji discussed Senegal's commitment to combat hunger and malnutrition through school meal programs. She highlighted the goal of reaching over 1.4 million children in rural and peri-urban areas within five years. "School meals constitute a powerful means of fighting hunger and malnutrition, helping children, especially those from food-insecure households, to have regular access to healthy and nutritious meals at school, thereby enhancing their health," she stated.

Dr. Nabil Ghalleb, Director, IsDB Regional Hub, Dakar

Dr. Nabil Ghalleb emphasized the economic viability of school meal programs. He underscored their role in supporting local economies by purchasing food from local producers, reducing poverty, and enhancing food security. "The cost-benefit analysis shows that school feeding programs are not only morally right but also economically viable, generating nine dollars of economic returns for every dollar invested in fostering healthier, better-educated children who grow into productive adults," he explained.

Professor Fatou Sow Sarr, ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs

Professor Fatou Sow Sarr stressed the importance of school feeding programs based on local production. She highlighted their potential to reduce poverty, increase school enrollment, generate income, and promote community cohesion, stability, and productivity. "The establishment of Homegrown school feeding programs which are supported by local production has been shown to reduce poverty, increase school enrollment, generate income, and promote community cohesion, stability, and productivity," she remarked.

Massandjé Touré-Litse, ECOWAS Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture

Mrs. Massandjé Touré-Litse emphasized the ECOWAS Commission's ongoing commitment to supporting member states in establishing sustainable school feeding programs. "In addition to the already mobilized 4.5 million euros from the Spanish Cooperation to finance the Support Project for Innovative School Feeding Models in the Member States, the ECOWAS Commission is committed to bringing greater support to Member States in their efforts to set up and operate sustainable school feeding programs," she added.

CONFERENCE THEMES AND SESSIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE AGENDA

The conference agenda covered a wide range of crucial topics, including:

- Financing Challenges and Mechanisms:** Exploring available financing mechanisms to support HGSF programs.
- From Policy to Legislation and Budget Allocations:** Discussing the transition from policy formulation to legislative action and budgetary support.

- **Designing Nutrition-Sensitive HGSF Programs:** Focusing on guidance necessary for creating programs that integrate nutritional sensitive considerations.
- **Leveraging HGSF for Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture:** Highlighting the role of HGSF in promoting sustainable agriculture.
- **Coordination Mechanisms and Addressing Challenges:** Enhancing coordination among multi-stakeholders to tackle existing challenges.
- **Support Offerings from Partners:** Identifying the support needed from partners to help governments meet their national commitments on school meals and HGSF.
- **Knowledge exchange platform and Monitoring Progress:** foster regional collaboration, share best practices, and track progress in HGSF.

SUCCESS OUTCOMES AND NATIONAL COMMITMENTS

The conference concluded with several success outcomes aligned with its objectives:

- **Strong Commitment to HGSF:** The conference highlighted the commitment of ECOWAS member states to HGSF programs, despite COVID-19 challenges, with 22.4 million children receiving school meals, and emphasized plans for financing, legislation, coordination, and nutrition quality.
- **Focus on Legislation and Financing:** The conference emphasizes the importance of robust policy development, sustainable financing, and enhanced collaboration within government sectors and partners.
- **Enhancing Collaboration and Program Quality:** Emphasis was placed on improving the nutrition quality of HGSF programs and fostering multisectoral collaboration. Countries shared best practices and discussed strategies to enhance cooperation between different government sectors and external partners, aiming to strengthen the overall impact and sustainability of HGSF initiatives.

NEXT STEPS: ADVANCING HGSF INITIATIVES

Advance a series of next steps aimed at enhancing HGSF initiatives in the West and Central Africa region:

1. **Financial Mobilization and Sustainability:**
 - **Developing Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:** Governments with support from ECOWAS, WFP and partners will develop sustainable funding mechanisms, assess National School Meals programs using tools like the World Bank and WFP's Healthy SABER, and cost national commitments using Sustainable Financing Initiative's (SFI) costing tools.
 - **Dedicated Budget Lines:** ECOWAS is committed to supporting governments for the inclusion of dedicated budget lines for HGSF within national budgets. ECOWAS has already exemplified this by incorporating dedicated budget lines for HGSF in its annual budget for 2024. Additionally, in 2023, ECOWAS provided \$1 million in support to Cabo Verde for the implementation of its school meal program for the 2023-2024 academic year.

- **Resource Mobilization Programs:** IFIs, the SFI and partners will support governments to institute programs aimed at assisting countries in mobilizing financial resources for HGSF.

2. Advocacy and Political Will:

- **Engaging Political Leaders:** ECOWAS to engage political leaders, including heads of state and first ladies, to champion HGSF and create laws to protect and support school feeding programs.
- **Raising Awareness Among Parliamentarians:** ECOWAS and partners will raise awareness among parliamentarians about the importance of school meals and promote legislative efforts to secure funding and ensure sustainable HGSF programs.
- **Leveraging Networks:** Networks such as the International Parliamentary Network for Education (IPNEd), through the SMC, will be leveraged to advocate for school feeding across West and Central Africa subregion.

3. Support Offering and Action Plans:

- Governments, with support from WFP and ECOWAS, should develop national support plans to identify specific needs and potential partners. They should also create detailed action plans outlining the steps needed to achieve and implement their goals, including timelines, responsible parties, and specific milestones to track progress.

4. Monitoring and Reporting:

- **Agreed HGSF Indicators:** Delegates agreed on a set of HGSF indicators to monitor and report on, using available monitoring and reporting tools and platforms provided by the Data and Monitoring Initiative, in collaboration with CERFAM and ECOWAS.

5. Establishment of the ECOWAS Community of Practice for Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:

- **ECOWAS HGSF Community of Practice (CoP):** A dedicated CoP, led by CERFAM, will be established to foster knowledge exchange, share the latest research evidence, and best practices through webinars and online convenings.
- **Closer Collaboration:** Collaboration between governments and support partners (such as ECOWAS, IFIs, UN agencies, civil society, research institutions, etc.) will be encouraged through the CERFAM led ECOWAS CoP to support HGSF national commitments.
- **CERFAM Platform:** The CERFAM platform will be leveraged for curating and sharing HGSF knowledge (publications, good practices, etc.) and reporting on agreed HGSF indicators and Conference call to action.

UPCOMING MINISTERIAL ENGAGEMENT

Ideally, ECOWAS would include HGSF as an agenda item or a side meeting in the next ECOWAS ministerial statutory meeting or similar gatherings to drive political will among ECOWAS heads of state and parliamentarians to enact school meals legislation and allocate budget lines in national budgets.

Progress Update on "Call to Action" from the Inaugural HGSF Technical Conference, Dakar, October 2023

ECOWAS SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOL MEALS COALITION

Status: Met and Ongoing

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) officially joined the School Meals Coalition (SMC) by signing the declaration of support in January 2024. ECOWAS has actively encouraged member states to join, successfully advocating for Ghana and Guinea-Bissau to sign on this year. Efforts to bring Cape Verde into the coalition continue, underscoring ECOWAS's commitment to expanding the coalition's reach and impact.

DOCUMENTING BEST PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES

Status: Met and Ongoing

ECOWAS, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the SMC Research Consortium, and the Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM), has initiated comprehensive documentation of best practices in Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF). A significant development is the proposed ECOWAS Community of Practice (CoP) for HGSF by CERFAM Director Marc Nene. This initiative aims to foster regional collaboration, share best practices, and track progress in HGSF. The CoP will leverage CERFAM's KEPT knowledge-sharing platform, working closely with ECOWAS, the Research Consortium, and the WFP Regional Bureau. The full launch of this initiative is planned for the second half of 2024.

FILLING EVIDENCE GAPS IN HOMEGROWN SCHOOL FEEDING

Status: Met

In May 2024, ECOWAS and WFP, along with their partners, launched two key publications. The first, "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa - A Landscape Analysis," provides a detailed overview of HGSF in the region, assessing the evolution and impact of these programs amid recent global crises. It compares various country programs, highlights challenges, and offers recommendations for enhancing program effectiveness. The second publication, "Ensuring Sustainable Financing of School Meals in West Africa," explores innovative and collaborative financial solutions to support HGSF programs. These efforts, supported by contributions from CERFAM, the Research Consortium, and major financial institutions like the World Bank, African Development Bank, and Islamic Development Bank, aim to secure sustainable funding for HGSF.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCING OF HOMEGROWN SCHOOL FEEDING

Status: Met

A half-day session at the May 2024 conference focused on sustainable financing for HGSF programs. Participants, including representatives from international financial institutions (IFIs), the SMC Sustainable Financing Initiative, and the private sector, discussed various financing mechanisms and best practices. The session generated innovative ideas to address funding gaps and promote sustainability, establishing partnerships to support effective school feeding programs across the ECOWAS region.

2024 MINISTERIAL MEETING AND TECHNICAL CONFERENCE

Status: Unmet but Under Development

Plans for a 2024 Ministerial Meeting are progressing as we explore leveraging the ECOWAS Statutory Ministerial Meetings or similar events to advocate for political support from Heads of States and Ministers.

Meanwhile, ECOWAS and WFP presented the HGSF agenda at the annual Africa Day of School Feeding event on March 1, 2024, in Burundi. Attendees included the ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, Professor Fatou Sow Sarr, WFP RBD Deputy Regional Director, Evelyn Etti, and seven ministers from the ECOWAS region. This event highlighted the regional commitment to advancing HGSF initiatives.

Such efforts build upon the 2023 ECOWAS HGSF technical conference, the SMC ministerial meeting in Paris, and ministerial engagements with the Africa Day of School Feeding event to maintain regional leadership on HGSF.

Key Findings from the Homegrown School Feeding in West Africa - Landscape Analysis

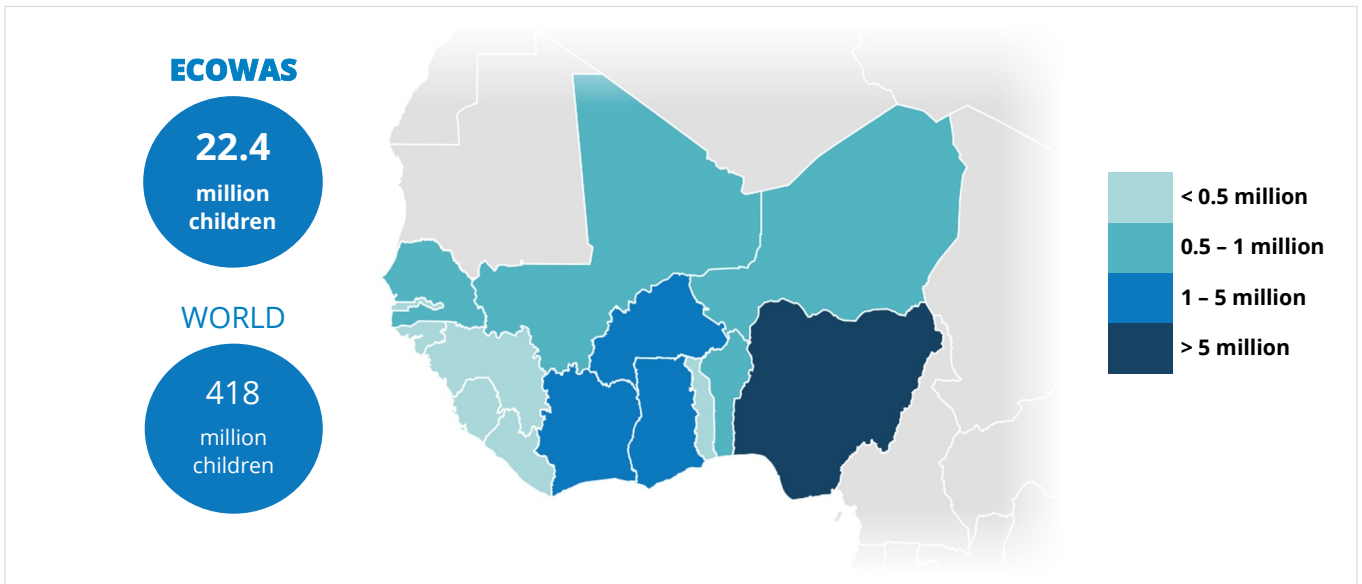
INTRODUCTION

Presented by Marc Nene, Director of CERFAM, the recent publication titled "Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) in West Africa: A Landscape Analysis" offers a comprehensive evaluation of the HGSF programs across the ECOWAS region. The analysis highlights significant advancements, persistent challenges, and actionable recommendations for enhancing the impact and sustainability of these programs. The findings underscore the importance of locally sourced nutritious meals in improving health, nutrition, education, and agricultural outcomes.

STEADFAST COMMITMENT TO HGSF

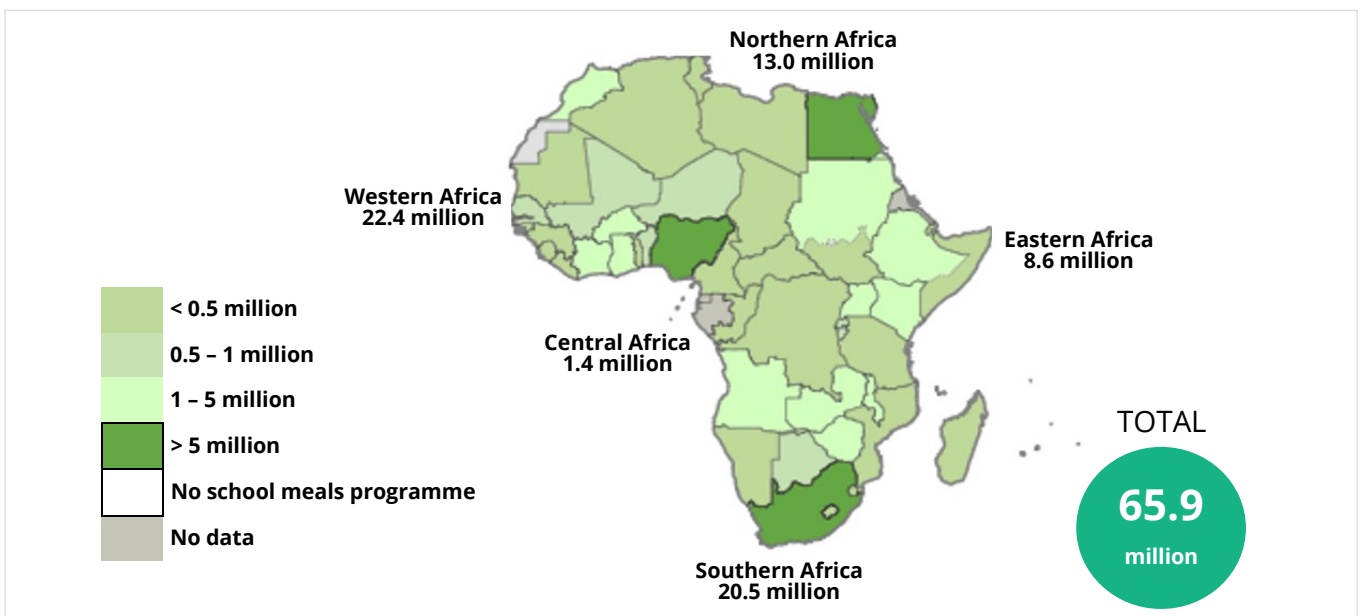
One of the most notable findings is the widespread adoption of HGSF programs across all 15 ECOWAS countries. Countries like Benin, Mali, and Sierra Leone have incorporated HGSF initiatives into their national strategies, reflecting a strong regional commitment to addressing food security and education. Despite global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic disruptions from the Russia-Ukraine war, ECOWAS countries have maintained their dedication to these programs. Currently, 22.4 million children benefit from school meals, the highest coverage in Africa.

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

JOINT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

The report highlights an increase in joint implementation efforts between governments and cooperating partners, which have been instrumental in expanding HGSF programs. This collaboration showcases a strong government commitment to these initiatives. To sustain this momentum, the report recommends investing in capacity building, enhancing partnerships, and integrating HGSF into national policies.

REGIONAL COVERAGE AMIDST CRISES

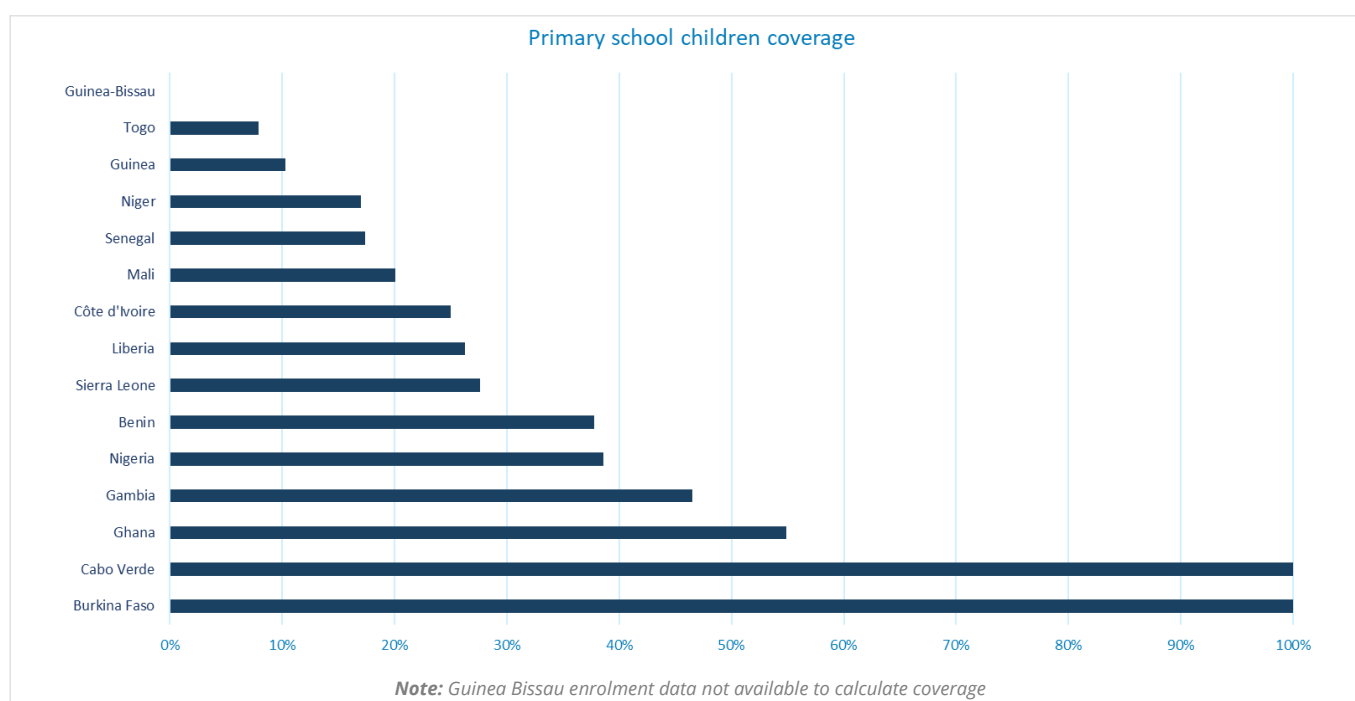
The analysis reveals varying trends in HGSF coverage across different countries. For instance, Ghana has doubled its coverage, and Cape Verde has seen a substantial increase. Conversely, Sierra Leone experienced a notable decline, and Senegal and Burkina Faso saw slight decreases. These variations highlight the diverse challenges and successes encountered in expanding school feeding programs, emphasizing the need for context-specific adaptations.

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)



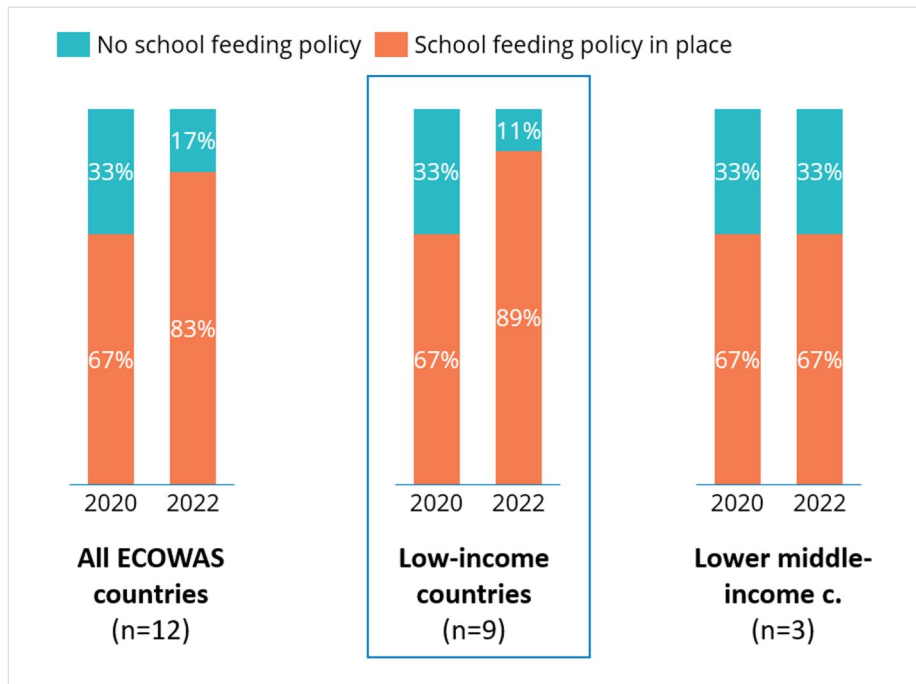
Source: WFP State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 based on GCNF 2021 survey data

POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Since the last assessment in 2020, there have been significant changes in the policy and legal frameworks surrounding HGSF programs. While policy adoption is prevalent, challenges persist in translating these policies into effective legal frameworks. The report calls for broad

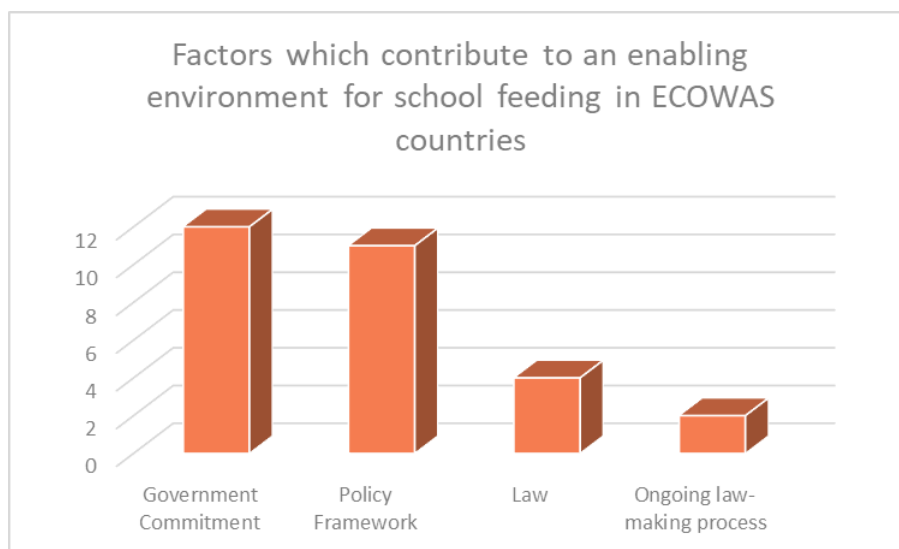
stakeholder consultations and the enactment of specific laws to ensure accountability and sustained funding. It also emphasizes the importance of budget allocations within legal frameworks to ensure program continuity despite political changes.

Figure 5: 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

Figure 6: Survey results on factors contributing to an enabling school feeding environment in ECOWAS region.



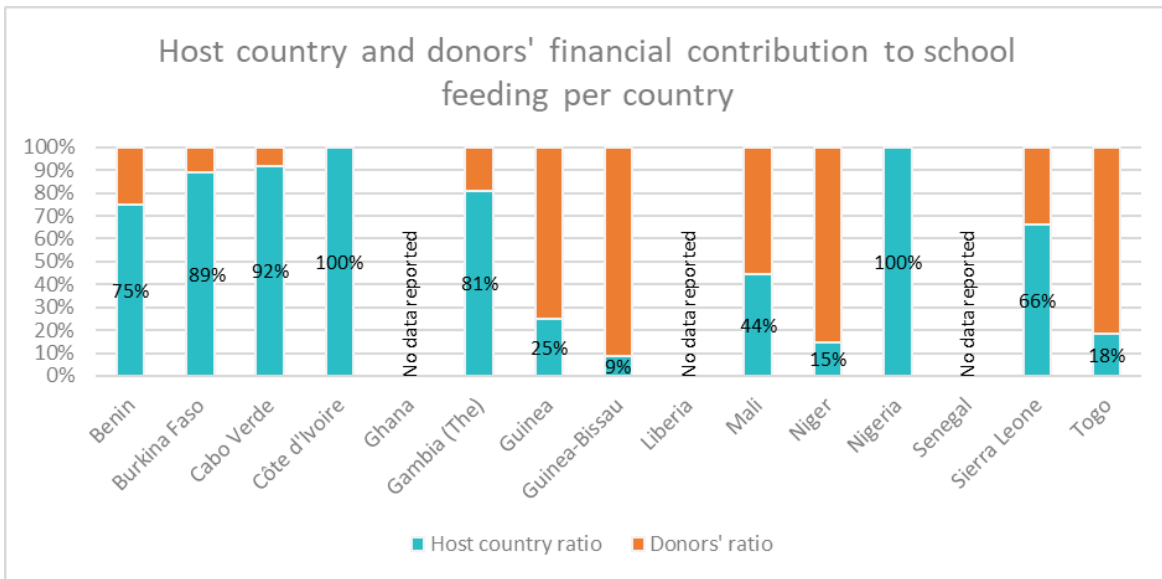
Source: CERFAM-led Country Survey data (October 2023)

FINANCIAL CAPACITY

Financial capacity is crucial for the success of HGSF programs. The report notes a significant increase in investment in school feeding programs in West Africa, from \$450 million to \$543 million between 2020 and 2022, with 84% of current investment sourced domestically. However,

financial constraints still hinder the scale-up and sustainability of these programs. The report recommends diversifying funding sources through innovative revenue mobilization efforts, such as general tax mobilization and leveraging financial instruments like SDG Bonds and impact investments.

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

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation has shown significant improvement since 2020, with many countries falling within the acceptable to very good range. This indicates a strong sense of accountability and ownership from the community, which is crucial for the sustainability of HGSF programs. Community involvement encompasses various activities, including supplying food commodities, cooking, monitoring, and making financial or in-kind contributions.

NUTRITION-SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING AND COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES

The report underscores the importance of providing locally sourced, nutritious food. Countries like Senegal, Benin, and Togo serve as case studies showcasing the positive outcomes of integrating community farms and school gardens into HGSF programs. However, challenges remain in developing school menus and dietary guidelines due to funding shortages. Staples like rice and beans dominate procurement, while the inclusion of vegetables and fruits in school meals is limited.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are essential for evidence-based decision-making. The report highlights the need to establish specific indicators for HGSF programs to ensure targeted interventions, achieve desired outcomes, and allocate resources efficiently. Investing in robust data management systems and capacity building for data-driven analysis can enhance program accountability, transparency, and impact assessment.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of HGSF programs, the report makes several key recommendations:

- 1. Capacity Building and Partnerships:** Invest in capacity building, enhance partnerships, and integrate HGSF into national policies.
- 2. Legal and Financial Frameworks:** Prioritize legal enactment, ensure sustainable funding mechanisms, and foster community participation. Diversify funding sources beyond donor dependency.
- 3. Program Integration:** Integrate HGSF programs into sectoral policies, establish functional coordination mechanisms, and explore hybrid procurement models.
- 4. Data Management:** Invest in nutrition-sensitive initiatives and enhance data management systems.
- 5. Regional Collaboration:** Establish a Regional School Feeding Coalition (rSMC) or ECOWAS Community of Practice (CoP) to facilitate information exchange, share good practices, and strengthen collaboration among member states.

CONCLUSION

The landscape analysis of HGSF programs in West Africa provides valuable insights into the current state and future direction of these initiatives. By addressing the identified gaps and challenges, and through continued collaboration and shared insights, stakeholders can pave the way for impactful and sustainable HGSF programs that benefit children and communities, contributing to a brighter future for generations to come.

Key Findings from the “Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa: A Collaborative Effort by International Financial Institutions and Innovative and Sustainable Financing Schemes” publication

This publication was presented by Kevin Watkins, senior research lead at the Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI) of the School Meals Coalition, which is led by the Learning Generation Initiative at the Education Development Center (EDC). The key findings discussed below underscore the importance of investing in Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs, the critical role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in supporting these initiatives, and the policy implications for sustainable development in West Africa.

KEY FINDINGS

Importance of Investing in HGSF

HGSF programs are pivotal in addressing several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), especially given the high levels of under-nutrition among children, cognitive impairments linked to stunting, low school enrollment and high dropout rates, and significant gender and wealth-based inequalities in learning. Post-COVID-19 learning setbacks further exacerbate these challenges. HGSF offers a unique opportunity to simultaneously tackle food security, education, and sustainable agriculture.

In SSA, HGSF is integral to policy frameworks and legislation, with countries like Nigeria, Benin, Rwanda, and Kenya leading large-scale programs. These programs are prioritized due to their potential to improve food diversity and program quality when procurement is localized. This localization helps address the dual challenges of food insecurity and rural poverty, especially among children.

The Role of IFIs and Funding Mechanisms

Adequate and predictable financing is crucial for the success of HGSF programs. Governments in Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Middle-Income Countries (MICs) allocate approximately \$3 to \$4 billion annually to school feeding, translating to about \$42 per child in 2021. However, to ensure a quality program, a minimum investment of \$70 per child is necessary. This financing gap underscores the need for innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms.

IFIs play a vital role in bridging this gap. The Sustainable Financing Initiative explores several financing options, including:

- 1. Domestic Resource Mobilization:** This involves tax mobilization measures such as closing tax exemptions (e.g., corporate and personal property taxes). For example, Bolivia uses a carbon tax to fund its school feeding program, a model that could be replicated in oil-producing countries like Senegal.
- 2. Earmarked Taxes:** Specific taxes on products like hydrocarbons, VAT, or 'sin taxes' can provide dedicated funding streams for HGSF programs.
- 3. Climate Finance:** Leveraging funds from initiatives like the Green Climate Fund to support sustainable agricultural practices linked to school feeding.

- 4. Aid and Development Finance:** Current aid levels, approximately \$280 million, are insufficient. Increased contributions from international donors and innovative mechanisms like debt swap programs could provide necessary funding.

CHALLENGES AND TRADE-OFFS

Implementing HGSF programs involves navigating several challenges and trade-offs:

- **Budget Constraints:** Balancing constrained budgets with the extensive needs in education, health, social, and economic infrastructure.
- **Pricing Dilemmas:** Ensuring fair prices for farmers while keeping school feeding affordable.
- **Local vs. Imported Procurement:** Balancing the benefits of local procurement with the efficiency of imports.

Evidence from countries like Brazil, where 30% of procurement is reserved for smallholder farmers, highlights the potential of HGSF. However, outcomes depend heavily on supply chain efficiency and procurement models. In Ghana, for example, no significant effect on rural incomes was observed, underscoring the variability in program impact based on local contexts.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize the benefits of HGSF, the following policy recommendations are essential:

- 1. Enhanced Investment in Infrastructure:** Supporting smallholder farmers requires investment in storage, transportation, and broader agricultural infrastructure.
- 2. Long-term Strategies:** Developing medium-to-long-term strategies to increase smallholder productivity and ensure sustainability.
- 3. Support from Regional Institutions:** Institutions like the African Development Bank (AfDB) can provide crucial financing and technical support to scale HGSF programs effectively.

CONCLUSION

HGSF programs play a vital role in addressing the education and learning crisis in SSA, offering win-win opportunities for improving child nutrition and supporting local farmers. However, these benefits are not automatic and require significant investment and strategic planning. The involvement of IFIs and the exploration of innovative financing mechanisms are critical to overcoming current challenges and ensuring the sustainability and success of HGSF programs. By leveraging diverse funding sources and enhancing infrastructure, governments can create resilient and effective school feeding programs that contribute to broader developmental goals.

Conference Session Insights: Key Takeaways and Next Steps

► Country HGSF Financing Challenges

Panelists from Cameroon, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Mauritania discussed financial challenges and best practices in sustaining and scaling Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs.

BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS AND ALLOCATION

Countries: Cameroon, The Gambia, Mauritania

CHALLENGES:

- **Cameroon:** Difficulty securing financial resources within the Ministry of Basic Education.
- **The Gambia:** Challenges in creating and maintaining a dedicated budget line due to tight fiscal space.
- **Mauritania:** Initial reliance on donor funding, difficulty integrating into the state budget.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Cameroon:** Emphasis on international support and partnerships; working towards a formal policy.
- **The Gambia:** Interministerial committee for raising resources; considering innovative funding like oil revenues and SDG bonds.
- **Mauritania:** Developed a national policy and budget line; engaged local communities and stakeholders.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Country: Guinea Bissau

CHALLENGES:

- **Guinea Bissau:** Political instability and frequent cabinet changes disrupt funding consistency.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Commitment to partner support and community contributions despite political challenges.

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Countries: Guinea Bissau, Mauritania

CHALLENGES:

- **Guinea Bissau:** Financial constraints limit effective participation.
- **Mauritania:** Mobilizing local communities for support.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Guinea Bissau:** Seeks external support and community contributions.

- **Mauritania:** Engages stakeholders to support canteens and promotes local food production.

POLICY AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Countries: Cameroon, Mauritania

CHALLENGES:

- **Cameroon:** Lacks formal policy for funding HGSF programs.
- **Mauritania:** Needed a national policy and budget line.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Cameroon:** Leverage policy best practices from other countries.
- **Mauritania:** Established a national policy and budget line, increasing coverage and reach.

CONCLUSION

The session highlighted common financial challenges in sustaining HGSF programs, such as budgetary constraints, political instability, community engagement issues, and policy development. Sharing best practices can enhance program sustainability across the region.

NEXT STEPS

Transitioning to the next panel on financing mechanisms from international financial institutions and innovative schemes, it was crucial to consider each country's unique needs. Insights from this session inform strategic approaches for securing and sustaining financial resources necessary for HGSF programs. The next session explored solutions for overcoming financial challenges, paving the way for more sustainable and effective school feeding initiatives.

► Financing Mechanisms for HGSF Programs

Panel 2 featured representatives from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), donor partners (Fondation Grameen Crédit Agricole and Dubai Cares), and the Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI) of the School Meals Coalition. They discussed financing mechanisms for sustaining and scaling Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs, highlighting priorities and showcasing models from the ECOWAS region.

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIS)

Key IFIs: IsDB, World Bank, AfDB

SUPPORT MECHANISMS:

- Financial assistance
- Technical expertise
- Knowledge sharing

EXAMPLES:

- **IsDB and World Bank:** Partners in the School Meals Coalition, providing funding and guidance.
- **AfDB:** Offers loans, grants, and technical support, focusing on poverty alleviation and sustainable growth.

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (AFDB)

Example:

- **Multi-Sectoral Approach for Stunting Reduction Project (MASReP) in Ethiopia:** Improves access to nutrition services, targeting high-stunting areas.

ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK (ISDB)

Example:

- **Support to School Feeding in Benin:** Partnership with WFP ensuring daily meals for 80,000 children.
- **Gambia:** Developing a national roadmap for school feeding.

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Example:

- **Healthy-SABER in Togo:** Evaluated school health and nutrition policy, supporting HGSF initiatives and complementary health services like deworming.

DUBAI CARES/FONDATION GRAMEEN CRÉDIT AGRICOLE

Example:

- **Senegal:** Diagnostics of rice and milk value chains, developing investment roadmaps with WFP.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCING INITIATIVE (SFI)

Example:

- **Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin, Cameroon:** Assisting in identifying costs and creating financing strategies.

EXAMPLES OF IFI-FUNDED PROJECTS IN ECOWAS REGION

AfDB in Burkina Faso:

- **Outcomes:** Improved student health, academic performance, and community cohesion.

World Bank in Togo:

- **Outcomes:** Enhanced teaching quality, reduced repetition rates, improved management capacity.

IsDB in Benin:

- **Outcomes:** Functional canteens, improved school completion rates, reduced malnutrition.

IsDB in Senegal:

- **Outcomes:** Infrastructure improvements, strengthened canteens, enhanced value chains.

CONCLUSION

IFIs play a crucial role in advancing HGSF programs in the ECOWAS region by providing financial resources, technical expertise, and advocacy. Integrated and innovative financing schemes, aligned with ECOWAS' broader development objectives, are essential for sustainable impact.

NEXT STEPS

- Leverage insights from IFI-funded projects to develop tailored strategies for countries in ECOWAS and non-ECOWAS countries.
- Align HGSF programs with regional development strategies.
- Explore innovative and sustainable financing mechanisms for long-term sustainability of school feeding initiatives.

For more detailed information, refer to the financing publication linked [here](#).



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► Moving from Policy to Laws and Budget Allocations

Panel discussion with representatives from Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Benin explored the transition from school feeding policies to effective implementation, highlighting the inclusion of key groups like teachers' unions and parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The session focused on experiences, best practices, and strategies for securing national budget allocations for school feeding programs.

TOGO: ESTABLISHING A MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH

Progress:

- Reaches 1,250 schools with a dedicated budget line for school feeding.
- Established a multi-sectoral committee involving finance, education, agriculture, social affairs, and grassroots development ministries.

Key Activities:

- **Certification of Vendors and Stakeholders:** Ensuring compliance with standards.
- **Quarterly Meetings:** Reviewing program progress, farmer support, legal compliance, and funding.
- **Securing Funding:** Sourcing financial support from government and private sector.
- **Community Engagement:** Monitoring and encouraging local involvement.

Impact:

- A cohesive effort and integrated approach have ensured successful program implementation.

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE: FORMALIZING SUSTAINABILITY

Journey:

- Transitioned from a WFP-initiated program in 2012 to a fully government-operated initiative by 2015.
- Covers all school children from kindergarten to middle school.

Key Strategies:

- **National Law for School Feeding (2013):** Formalized commitment and established a directorate within the Ministry of Education, allocating about 2.5% of the national budget.
- **Innovative Funding Mechanisms:** Taxing imported cement to generate funds.
- **Support for Staff:** Salaries for cooks and educators managing school canteens.
- **Educational Integration:** School gardens incorporated into the curriculum as learning tools.

Impact:

- Legal frameworks and innovative funding ensure long-term sustainability of school feeding programs.

BENIN: EXPANDING COVERAGE AND ENGAGING THE DIASPORA

Progress:

- Integrated school feeding program covers 75% of schools, reaching 1.3 million children across 5,709 schools.
- Plans to expand coverage to 85% by 2025 and 100% in rural areas.

Key Strategies:

- **Government Vision:** Commitment to providing hot and nutritious meals.
- **Diaspora Engagement:** Involvement of the Beninese diaspora in funding efforts.
- **Legal and Financial Framework:** School feeding law adopted in 2022 institutionalizes program funding, management, and supply mechanisms.

Impact:

- Legal backing and diaspora engagement enhance program reach and impact.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND BEST PRACTICES

1. Political Will, Legal Frameworks, and ECOWAS Engagement:

- Establishing supportive political environments, enacting specific laws, and engaging ECOWAS heads of state and parliamentarians to advocate for laws and budget allocations for HGSF are critical for program sustainability.

2. Multi-Sectoral Committees:

- Involving multiple ministries and stakeholders ensures coordinated and comprehensive program implementation.

3. Innovative Funding Mechanisms:

- Leveraging taxes and other sources can provide steady financial support.

4. Community and Diaspora Engagement:

- Encouraging local and diaspora involvement enhances program support and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Benin underscore the importance of political will, legal frameworks, multi-sectoral collaboration, innovative funding mechanisms, and community engagement in transitioning from policy to law. By adopting these best practices, other countries in the region can enhance the sustainability and impact of their school feeding programs.

NEXT STEPS

- **Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Engage ECOWAS and Non-ECOWAS Leaders:** Encourage the enactment of specific laws and advocate for budget allocations for HGSF in national budgets.
- **Enhance Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** Foster partnerships among various ministries and stakeholders.
- **Explore Innovative Funding:** Identify and implement innovative funding mechanisms.
- **Engage Communities and Diasporas:** Promote active involvement from local communities and diasporas.



► Integrating Nutrition into School Feeding Programs

This session combined a presentation on the importance of integrating nutrition into school feeding programs with a panel discussion featuring representatives from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Cape Verde. The session emphasized the benefits of nutrition integration, shared country experiences, and provided guidance for effective implementation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Improving Children's Health and Well-being

- **Reducing Malnutrition:** School canteens provide balanced meals, reducing malnutrition and its harmful effects.
- **Physical and Cognitive Development:** Good nutrition is crucial for physical and cognitive growth, enhancing concentration and school performance.

Promoting Education and Academic Success

- **Reducing Absenteeism:** Nutritious school meals encourage regular attendance, decreasing absenteeism and increasing retention.
- **Improving Academic Performance:** Well-nourished children are more alert and focused, leading to better academic outcomes.

Supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- **SDG 2 – Zero Hunger:** Nutritious school meals contribute directly to eradicating hunger.
- **SDG 4 – Quality Education:** Adequate nutrition supports quality education and helps children achieve their full potential.

Strengthening Local Food Systems

- **Supporting Local Farmers:** School canteens that source products locally, benefit smallholder farmers and boost the local economy.
- **Promoting Sustainable Agriculture:** Using local and seasonal produce encourages sustainable agricultural practices and promotes food sovereignty.

Nutrition Education and Behavioral Change

- **Including Nutrition Education:** School feeding programs can teach children the importance of healthy eating.
- **Adopting Healthy Eating Habits:** Educated children are more likely to maintain healthy eating habits, positively influencing their families and communities.

Reducing Inequalities

- **Access to Nutritious Food:** Free or subsidized school meals provide nutritious food to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing health and education inequalities.
- **Promoting Gender Equality:** Ensuring good nutrition supports girls' education, reducing gender inequalities and early marriages.

BEST PRACTICES FOR NUTRITION-SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING

Guide for Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

- **Importance in WFP's Strategic Plan:** Nutrition is central, with two strategic objectives related to it. Integrating nutrition is a priority across all activities.
- **Key Requirements:**
 - **Secondary Nutritional Objectives:** Clear nutritional objectives, outcomes, and indicators.
 - **Comprehensive Analysis:** Based on a thorough analysis of the nutritional and gender situation, targeting vulnerable groups.
 - **Deliberate Nutrition Actions:** Include specific nutrition actions and delivery platforms to achieve nutritional goals.
 - **Address Gender Inequalities:** Tackle gender inequalities and nutritional knowledge gaps.
 - **Alignment with National Plans:** Align programs with national nutrition plans and support partnerships and political engagement.

Making School Meal Programs Nutrition-Sensitive

- **Secondary Nutritional Objectives:** Clearly define nutritional objectives in program design.
- **Address Nutritional Gaps:** Plan to meet nutritional needs, covering 30% of energy needs and 50-70% of micronutrient needs.
- **Implement Nutrition Actions:** Use school feeding programs to deliver complementary nutrition actions (e.g., deworming, supplementation).
- **Include Nutrition Education:** Integrate nutrition education and behavioral change messages into school feeding programs. School gardens can support these activities.
- **Alignment with National Plans:** Ensure programs align with national plans and operate within a multisectoral framework.

Criteria for Developing Menus for HGSF Programs

- **Program Objectives:** Define clear goals.
- **Nutritional Needs:** Address the nutritional needs of target beneficiaries.
- **Food Habits and Traditions:** Consider dietary habits and cultural preferences.

- **National Dietary Guidelines:** Follow national dietary guidelines.
- **Locally Produced Foods:** Utilize locally produced foods, considering seasonality and market prices.
- **Food Safety and Quality:** Ensure proper storage and handling to maintain food safety and quality.
- **Preparation Constraints:** Address preparation limitations and vitamin retention.

Advocacy Messages

- **Formalizing Nutrition Education:** Governments are encouraged to include nutrition education in school curricula to promote good nutritional practices among children, their families, and communities.
- **Quality of Meals:** Provide diverse, nutritious school meals that meet recommended proportions (30% of energy needs and 50-70% of micronutrient needs).

Panel Discussion Takeaways from Various Countries

- **Côte d'Ivoire:** Discussed fortifying local rice and millet, involving women in cocoa processing. The project reduced malnutrition and plans to scale up local production despite funding challenges.
- **Ghana:** The Rockefeller Program improved school meals through rice fortification by introducing parboiled unpolished rice, requiring children's sensitization.
- **Mali:** The Nutriti-school Initiative pilot project in 39 schools respected local dietary traditions, including guides for teachers and posters for cooks.
- **Cape Verde:** Showcased diverse and optimized school menus considering local preferences, seasonality, and infrastructure.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Key Conclusions

- **Integrating Nutrition is Essential:** School feeding programs must integrate nutrition to improve children's health, academic performance, and support sustainable development.
- **Local and Sustainable Sourcing:** Strengthening local food systems and promoting sustainable agriculture are vital for program success.
- **Education and Behavioral Change:** Nutrition education should be a core component of school feeding programs to promote long-term healthy eating habits.

Next Steps

- **Develop Clear Nutritional Objectives:** Programs should have well-defined nutritional goals, outcomes, and indicators.
- **Ensure Comprehensive Analysis:** Conduct thorough nutritional and gender analyses to target vulnerable groups effectively.
- **Include Specific Nutrition Actions:** Incorporate deliberate nutrition actions and delivery platforms.
- **Address Gender Inequalities:** Tackle gender-related nutritional gaps.
- **Align with National Plans:** Ensure programs align with national nutrition plans and support multisectoral collaboration.
- **Advocate for Nutrition Education:** Governments should formalize nutrition education in school curricula.



► Leveraging HGSF to promote Sustainable Agriculture

This session combined a presentation on leveraging Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) to promote sustainable agriculture with a working session where each country developed their scenarios. The discussion emphasized the critical intersection between school meals and local agriculture, highlighting the HGSF model's potential to transform food systems in West Africa.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Nexus Between School Meals and Agriculture

- **Transforming Food Systems:** HGSF programs provide reliable markets for smallholder farmers, crucial for regions where 57% of the population cannot access nutritious food and 10% rely on food aid.
- **Beyond Education:** The benefits of HGSF extend to local agriculture, social protection, health, and nutrition, significantly impacting local value chains.

Positive Impacts on Local Agriculture

- **Enhanced Productivity:** Local sourcing through HGSF programs provides stable demand for smallholder farmers, improving their market access.
- **Incorporation of Nutritious Local Products:** Examples include Liberia's cassava-based Gari and Senegal's pilot introduction of fonio in school menus, which enhance food security and support local farmers.

Integrated School Farms: A Holistic Approach

- **"Going Beyond School Gardens" Model:** Proposed by the World Food Programme (WFP), this model uses arable land allocated to schools for food production, including cereals, legumes, horticulture, poultry, dairy, and fish farming.
- **Reinvestment of Proceeds:** Income from commercial activities on these farms sustains the program, pays staff, and transitions to clean cooking methods.

Advantages of Integrated School Farms

- **Organization of Producers:** Local sourcing encourages collaboration among smallholder farmers, promoting efficient farming practices.
- **Stable Market for Farmers:** Supplying directly to school canteens stabilizes farmers' income.
- **Generation of Surplus:** Surplus produce can be sold in other markets, providing additional income opportunities.
- **Small to Medium-Scale Processing:** Farmers can process their produce into nutritious food products, adding value and increasing marketability.
- **Income for Essential Purchases:** Additional income reduces the financial burden on parents to sustain school feeding programs.
- **Introduction of Sustainable Practices:** School farms promote environmental stewardship and agricultural innovation through sustainable practices and agro-food technologies.

Case Study: Impact on Rice Imports

- **Local Production vs. Imports:** From 2019 to 2023, 242,000 tons of rice were imported at a cost of \$105 million. Local production of this volume would have benefited 40,000 small producers annually, requiring the cultivation of 83,000 hectares.
- **Economic Impact:** Shifting to local production would significantly boost local agriculture and food security.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **HGSF as a Catalyst:** The HGSF model is a powerful strategy to transform food systems, promote sustainable agriculture, enhance food security, and generate economic benefits for smallholder farmers.
- **Integrated Approach:** Incorporating Integrated School Farms and local sourcing not only improves nutrition but also supports local economies and sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** HGSF contributes directly to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) by providing nutritious meals and supporting local food systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Key Conclusions

- **Critical Intersection:** The integration of school meals and local agriculture through HGSF programs is crucial for transforming food systems in West Africa.
- **Local Sourcing Benefits:** Reliable markets for smallholder farmers, improved food security, and enhanced agricultural productivity are significant benefits of the HGSF model.
- **Holistic Models:** Integrated School Farms represent a comprehensive approach to leveraging school feeding programs for broader agricultural and economic benefits.

Next Steps

- **Develop Country Scenarios:** Each country should develop specific scenarios to implement and scale HGSF programs, considering local contexts and resources.
- **Promote Sustainable Practices:** Encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and agro-food technologies through school farms.
- **Strengthen Local Markets:** Enhance market access for smallholder farmers by linking them to school feeding programs.
- **Advocate for Policy Support:** Engage heads of state and parliamentarians to advocate for policies and budget allocations supporting HGSF and sustainable agriculture.
- **Monitor and Evaluate:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the impact of HGSF programs on local agriculture and food security.

► Enhancing Multi-Sectoral Coordination for HGSF Programs

This session aimed to explore and identify the existing mechanisms, challenges, and best practices in multi-sectoral coordination for Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs across various African countries. The discussions underscored the critical importance of robust coordination among different sectors and stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of HGSF programs.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Existing Mechanisms

1. Board of Directors and Executive Secretariats:

- **Benin:** The Board of Directors of the National Agency for Food and Nutrition includes representatives from Education, Health, Finance, Social Affairs, Development, Decentralization, and Agriculture.
- **Burkina Faso:** The Executive Secretariat of the National Council for Nutrition, Food, and Early Childhood Development oversees a national multisectoral plan involving all technical ministries linked to the school feeding program.

2. Inter-Ministerial and Steering Committees:

- **The Gambia:** High-level consultations amongst permanent secretaries from key ministries and the Office of the Vice President ensure alignment and strategic oversight.
- **Ghana:** Various committees at strategic and technical levels, including inter-ministerial committees, facilitate regular communication and collaboration among ministries.

3. Decentralized Coordination:

- **Mali and Mauritania:** These countries have established regional and departmental coordination committees that ensure effective implementation at local levels.
- **Niger:** Coordination involves central and decentralized committees, including local educational and community leaders, to adapt the program to regional contexts.

Challenges in Multi-Sectoral Coordination

1. Representation and Participation:

- Key stakeholders are not consistently represented in coordination frameworks, leading to gaps in oversight and implementation.
- Meetings of coordination bodies are often irregular, and some committees are dormant.

2. Resource Constraints:

- Insufficient financial and logistical resources impede the effective functioning of coordination mechanisms.
- Challenges in securing sustainable funding and aligning stakeholder interests with HGSF program goals persist.

3. Communication and Collaboration:

- Regular communication and collaboration among stakeholders are limited, weakening the overall coordination efforts.
- Weak institutional anchoring and low commitment levels from some actors further exacerbate these challenges.

Proposed Solutions

1. Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:

- Enhance the functionality of inter-ministerial committees by establishing clear roles, responsibilities, and regular meeting schedules.
- Develop integrated action plans and secure dedicated budget lines for school feeding within relevant ministries to ensure sustainable funding.

2. Capacity Building and Community Engagement:

- Provide targeted training programs for local farmers, school administrators, and other stakeholders to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- Foster a sense of ownership among local communities by involving them in decision-making processes and establishing community-based monitoring committees.

3. Leveraging Technology and Public-Private Partnerships:

- Use technology to streamline logistics and monitoring, such as implementing digital tracking systems for food deliveries and using mobile applications for real-time data collection.
- Engage private sector actors through public-private partnerships, offering incentives for businesses to support HGSF programs.

4. Advocacy and Policy Support:

- Conduct advocacy campaigns to highlight the importance of HGSF programs in national development and garner political and public support.

- Conduct advocacy campaigns to highlight the importance of HGSF programs in national development and garner political and public support.
- Push for the development and enactment of specific policies and legislation that support HGSF programs, such as a national school feeding law.

5. Revitalizing Coordination Committees:

- Relaunch and revitalize dormant coordination committees to improve and maintain alignment of stakeholder interests and goals.
- Increase budgetary resources and strengthen collaboration strategies between government and organizations involved in HGSF.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Multi-Sectoral Coordination is Critical:** Effective coordination among various sectors and stakeholders is crucial for the success and sustainability of HGSF programs.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Strengthening institutional frameworks and ensuring regular communication and collaboration can address many existing challenges.
- **Community and Private Sector Engagement:** Engaging local communities and the private sector can enhance resource mobilization and program support.
- **Policy Support:** Strong advocacy and supportive policies are essential for the long-term sustainability of HGSF programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Key Conclusions

- **Need for Robust Coordination:** Effective multi-sectoral coordination is fundamental to the success of HGSF programs.
- **Overcoming Challenges:** Addressing representation, resource constraints, and communication issues can significantly improve coordination efforts.
- **Leveraging Resources:** Technology, public-private partnerships, and community engagement are vital resources for enhancing HGSF programs.

Next Steps

- **Enhance Coordination Frameworks:** Establish clear roles and responsibilities within inter-ministerial committees and ensure regular meetings and communication.
- **Capacity Building:** Implement targeted training programs for all stakeholders involved in HGSF programs.
- **Promote Technology Use:** Adopt digital tracking and real-time data collection systems to improve logistics and monitoring.
- **Foster Partnerships:** Develop public-private partnerships to support and sustain HGSF programs.
- **Advocate for Policies:** Conduct advocacy campaigns to support the development of policies and legislation that promote HGSF programs.
- **Revitalize Committees:** Relaunch dormant coordination committees and ensure they have adequate resources and support to function effectively.

By addressing these key areas, countries can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their HGSF programs, ensuring better outcomes for children and communities.

Support Offerings to Governments

Out of the 20 countries that participated in the conference, 19 have joined the School Meals Coalition (SMC), and 13 have submitted their national commitments for School Meals Programs. These countries are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sao Tome, and Togo. These commitments are crucial for advancing the school meals program agenda not only within individual countries but also at regional and global levels. They outline the efforts each country will undertake, with support from various stakeholders, to expand coverage and enhance the quality of school meal programs. These commitments also demonstrate the advocacy work needed to influence other governments to prioritize school feeding and make sustainable investments in the program.

The national commitments are organized into six categories:

- **Policy Commitments:** Prioritizing national school meals programs in national and sectoral plans, policies, strategies, laws, or other legal frameworks.
- **Financing Commitments:** Allocating budgets for national school feeding programs and supporting countries with limited resources through donor assistance.
- **Institutional Commitments:** Strengthening institutional capacities and coordination skills to lead and deliver school meal programs at all levels.
- **Program Design and Coverage Commitments:** Enhancing the quality of national programs, procuring food locally, linking school feeding to health and nutrition measures, improving nutrition standards, supporting local communities, strengthening monitoring, and fostering technical cooperation, including South-South triangular cooperation.

- **Evidence and Data Generation Commitments:** Producing case studies and data, based on agreed upon indicators on school health and nutrition to inform policy and decision-making.
- **Advocacy and Partnerships Commitments:** Ensuring the school feeding agenda is included in global forums and supported at the national level by various stakeholders. This includes raising awareness in conferences and identifying a national champion to represent the country in Coalition ministerial meetings every two years.

During the conference, country delegations were asked to identify the support their governments will need from partners such as the World Food Programme (WFP), other UN agencies, International Financing Institutions (IFIs), donors, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and civil society to implement their national commitments. They also considered which partners can be best suited to providing the support.

For each national commitment, the required support activities and the partners that can provide them are outlined in each national support plan. These support plans are dynamic documents that may be continuously updated based on new partners offerings of support or the identification of additional support activities and partners needed.

Knowledge Exchange Platforms and Monitoring Progress

The conference highlighted the significant need for robust knowledge exchange platforms and effective monitoring mechanisms to enhance the outcomes of HGSF initiatives. Marc Nene, Director of the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM), emphasized the critical role of a regional School Meals Coalition (SMC), mirroring the global SMC but at the ECOWAS regional level; essentially an ECOWAS Community of Practice (CoP) that will coordinate and align with ECOWAS, WFP and the SMC initiatives, particularly the Research Consortium, the Sustainable Financing Initiative and the Data and Monitoring Initiative to advance the SMC goals and goals and outcomes of this conference at a regional level. At the start of the session on knowledge sharing and monitoring of progress, a presentation by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) provided key updates on their global survey and upcoming forum, both integral to monitoring school meals data and facilitating knowledge exchanges.

GLOBAL CHILD NUTRITION FOUNDATION (GCNF) PRESENTATION

GCNF, a nonprofit US-based organization, works to ensure that governments and partners have the knowledge to increase the coverage of school meals. Key highlights from their presentation included:

- **Global Survey and Forum:** The ongoing global survey and the upcoming forum in Japan at the end of the year are pivotal for gathering and sharing data on school meals programs.
- **Funding and Partnerships:** GCNF receives funds from donors, primarily from the US government and the Rockefeller Foundation. They collaborate closely with the World Food Programme (WFP), the forum's co-organizer, as well as with CRS and the Centre of Excellence in Brazil.
- **Survey Structure:** The survey structure is inspired by the SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) framework. This year's questionnaire uniquely addresses food systems as well.
- **Participation and Data Collection:** The survey follows a two-year cycle, and the current data collection for the 2023-2024 period is ongoing. In the previous 2021-2022 period, multiple programs within the same country were noted.
- **Current Progress:** As of now, data collection is 80% complete for ECOWAS countries, with a call to action for the remaining countries to submit their questionnaires.
- **Upcoming Forum:** The next GCNF forum will be held in Osaka, Japan, from December 9-12, 2024, under the theme "School Meals in the Era of Food Systems Transformation".

ECOWAS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP)

Following the GCNF presentation, Marc Nene, Director of the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM), introduced the ECOWAS Community of Practice for Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF). This collaborative initiative is being developed with ECOWAS, the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, and the WFP Regional Bureau, to facilitate dialogue among countries, fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and addressing common challenges collectively.

Objectives of the ECOWAS CoP:

1. **Dissemination of Good Practices:** The CoP will identify and promote scalable good practices among states with similar challenges, encouraging the adoption and adaptation of these practices into national action plans.
2. **Knowledge Exchange:** By hosting frequent webinars, showcasing knowledge products, and highlighting successful country case studies, the platform will enable member states to learn from each other's experiences and collectively advance HGSF initiatives.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing specific monitoring indicators for HGSF is crucial for evidence-based program adjustments. The platform will facilitate data accuracy and accountability through clear monitoring mechanisms.
4. **Policy Advocacy:** The CoP will advocate for policy dialogue and advocacy efforts at national and regional levels, aiding informed decision-making and resource allocation to prioritize HGSF.
5. **Institutional Capacity Building:** Through technical assistance and knowledge exchange activities, the platform will strengthen institutional capacity, ensuring effective and sustainable HGSF programs.
6. **Financial Sustainability:** The CoP will assess member states' commitment to implementing HGSF programs, identifying implementation gaps due to limited resources, and facilitating donor-country matching.

Features of the ECOWAS CoP:

- **Good Practice Dissemination:** Documenting and sharing successful HGSF practices, including institutional models, menu creation mechanisms, and policy frameworks.
- **Knowledge Exchange Forum:** Hosting webinars and showcasing knowledge products to facilitate regular communication and learning among member states.
- **Monitoring:** Establishing and tracking clear indicators specific to HGSF to evaluate impact and ensure accountability.
- **Financing Assurance and Coordination:** Providing up-to-date information on national expenditure, donor funding, and financial requirements for HGSF initiatives.

PLENARY EXERCISE ON HGSF INDICATORS

Following Marc Nene's presentation, a plenary exercise was conducted using the Mentimeter application to gather inputs on the key indicators needed to monitor HGSF programs. The lack of agreed-upon indicators has been a major challenge in assessing, measuring, and improving these programs. The audience's inputs were analyzed and categorized based on common themes to identify the top indicators to track going forward.

Indicators Identified and Methodology:

The indicators were categorized into six main themes: Financial and Budget Indicators, Participation and Inclusion Indicators, Nutritional and Food Quality Indicators, Local Procurement and Contribution Indicators, Community and Capacity Building Indicators, and Student and School Indicators. The frequency of each indicator within these categories was counted to identify the most commonly proposed indicators.

Top 7 Indicators to Track:

- 1. Nutritional Quality of School Meals Provided: Assessing the nutritional value and diversity of school meals to ensure they meet health standards.**
- 2. Amount of National Budget Invested in HGSF: Monitoring the financial commitment of governments towards HGSF programs.**
- 3. Proportion of Local Products Purchased from Women Suppliers: Evaluating the inclusivity and support for female smallholder farmers within the HGSF supply chain.**
- 4. Number of Female Smallholder Farmers Linked to HGSF: Tracking the involvement of female smallholders in providing food for school feeding programs.**
- 5. Capacity Building for Small Producers and Actors Involved in the Process: Measuring the effectiveness of training and capacity-building initiatives for local producers.**
- 6. Value of School Meals Sourced from Smallholder Farmers/Other Local Actors: Quantifying the economic impact on local economies by sourcing school meals from smallholder farmers.**
- 7. Volume of School Meals Items Sourced from Smallholder Farmers/Local Actors: Tracking the quantity of food items procured from local producers.**

These indicators are crucial for assessing the overall effectiveness, sustainability, and inclusivity of the HGSF program. The implementation and tracking of these indicators by governments, with support from CERFAM and ECOWAS through the regional SMC/ECOWAS CoP, will ensure a more structured and evidence-based approach to improving HGSF initiatives across the region.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The conference underscored the commitment of ECOWAS and Non-ECOWAS member states to HGSF programs, emphasizing the need for robust policy development, sustainable financing, and enhanced collaboration within government sectors and partners. Key conclusions included the critical role of multi-sectoral coordination, the importance of integrating nutrition into HGSF programs, and the necessity for effective knowledge exchange and monitoring mechanisms.

FINANCING

The conference highlighted common financial challenges in sustaining HGSF programs, such as budgetary constraints, political instability, community engagement issues, and policy development. Sharing best practices can enhance program sustainability across the ECOWAS region.

ENHANCING MULTI-SECTORAL COORDINATION

Effective coordination among various sectors and stakeholders is crucial for the success and sustainability of HGSF programs. Strengthening institutional frameworks, ensuring regular communication, and fostering multi-sectoral collaboration are essential steps to improve coordination efforts.

INTEGRATING NUTRITION

The conference emphasized the importance of designing nutrition-sensitive HGSF programs, focusing on enhancing the nutritional quality of school meals to improve child health and educational outcomes.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND MONITORING PLATFORMS

The significant need for robust knowledge exchange platforms and effective monitoring mechanisms was highlighted. The establishment of the ECOWAS Community of Practice (CoP) for HGSF aims to foster regional collaboration, share best practices, and track progress.

WAY FORWARD AND CALL TO ACTION

1. Establish an ECOWAS Community of Practice (CoP) for HGSF

- **Objective:** Foster knowledge exchange, share best practices, and facilitate collaboration among member states.
- **Action:** ECOWAS to lead the establishment of a dedicated CoP, leveraging platforms like CERFAM for curating and sharing HGSF knowledge and reporting on agreed indicators.

2. Strengthen Political Will and Advocacy

- **Objective:** Secure political and public support for HGSF programs.
- **Action:** ECOWAS to engage political leaders, including heads of state and parliamentarians, to champion HGSF and enact supportive legislation. Utilize networks like the International Parliamentary Network for Education (IPNEd) to advocate for school feeding across the subregion.

3. Support Offering and Action Plans

- **Objective:** Enable governments to effectively identify their needs and partners to support national commitments, and develop detailed action plans.
- **Action:** Governments, with support from WFP and ECOWAS, should develop national support plans to identify specific needs and potential partners. They should also create detailed action plans outlining the steps needed to achieve and implement their goals, including timelines, responsible parties, and specific milestones to track progress.

4. Develop Sustainable Funding Mechanisms

- **Objective:** Ensure sustainable funding for HGSF programs.
- **Action:** Governments, with support from ECOWAS, WFP, and partners, to develop sustainable funding mechanisms, assess national school meals programs using tools like the World Bank and WFP's Healthy SABER, and cost national commitments using Sustainable Financing Initiative's (SFI) costing tools. Advocate for the inclusion of dedicated budget lines for HGSF within national budgets.

5. Enhance Capacity Building and Community Engagement

- **Objective:** Improve the skills and knowledge of local farmers, school administrators, and other stakeholders.
- **Action:** Governments with support from WFP and partners should implement targeted training programs and foster a sense of ownership among local communities by involving them in decision-making processes and establishing community-based monitoring committees.

6. Leverage Technology

- **Objective:** Streamline logistics and monitoring of HGSF programs.
- **Action:** The SMC's Data and Monitoring Initiative in collaboration with CERFAM and partners should adopt digital tracking and real-time data collection systems to improve logistics and monitoring.

CONCLUSION

The ECOWAS Regional Technical Conference on Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) reaffirmed the commitment of member states as well as non-member states, to advancing HGSF programs. By establishing an ECOWAS Community of Practice, strengthening political will and advocacy, developing sustainable funding mechanisms, enhancing capacity building and community engagement, and leveraging technology and SMART action plans and with adequate support from partners, we can overcome existing challenges and ensure the success of HGSF initiatives across the region. The next steps outlined will pave the way for a brighter future for children and communities in West and Central Africa through sustainable school feeding programs.





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Nutrition, Health and Education for Every Child



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