Strengthening Home-Grown School Feeding in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Landscape Analysis

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ACRONYMS

ANAN: Agence Nationale de l'Alimentation et de la Nutrition – National Agency for Food and Nutrition in Benin

AU: African Union

CERFAM: Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition

CV: Commodity Voucher

DEBS: District Education Board Secretariat

ECCD: Early Childhood Care and Development

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GCNF: Global Child Nutrition Foundation

GMSANE: The Multisectoral Group on School Food and Nutrition in Senegal

HGSF: Home-Grown School Feeding

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

MoGE: Zambian Ministry of General Education

MT: Metric Ton

NAB: Namibian Agronomic Board

NEPAD: New Partnership for Africa's Development

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

PTA: Parent Teacher Association

SABER: Systems Approach for Better Education Results (World Bank)

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SHF: Smallholder Farmer

SLTS: School-Led Total Sanitation (Campaigns)

SMC: School Meals Coalition

UN: United Nations

WASH: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

WFP: The United Nations World Food Programme

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Aggregator: An intermediary entity or organization that collects agricultural products from multiple smallholder farmers (SHFs) and consolidates them for sale or distribution, often to schools or government programmes. Aggregators help streamline procurement and improve market access for small-scale producers.

Baseline Review: An initial assessment conducted at the start of a programme to establish reference data on key indicators. This provides a point of comparison for measuring progress and impact over time.

Climate-Smart Agriculture: Techniques that increase agricultural productivity and resilience while reducing greenhouse gas emissions; includes practices like crop diversification, water conservation, and soil management.

Commodity Voucher (CV): A procurement mechanism where schools or communities receive vouchers to exchange for locally sourced food, often directly from smallholder cooperatives.

Culturally Relevant Menus: School meal plans that reflect local dietary preferences, promote food acceptability, and support local agricultural products.

Decentralized Procurement: A procurement model in which food purchasing authority is transferred to local governments, schools, or community actors to better align supply with demand and improve responsiveness.

Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF): School feeding model that provides safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholders to children in schools.[1]

Indigenous Crops: Locally adapted plant species (e.g., baobab, millet, sorghum) with high nutritional value and cultural relevance.

Last-Mile Logistics: The final stage of the supply chain, focusing on the delivery of goods (such as food) from distribution centers to end users (e.g., schools). Efficient last-mile logistics are crucial for timely and safe food delivery, especially in rural or hard-to-reach areas.

Nutrition-Sensitive Programming: Interventions that address the underlying causes of malnutrition by linking school meals with local agriculture, nutrition education, and health initiatives, such as deworming and hygiene promotion.

[1] "Home Grown School Feeding Resource Framework. Synopsis", The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), March 2017, https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000038421

Protected Budget Line: A designated and ring-fenced allocation in national or subnational budgets that ensures consistent funding for school feeding programmes.

Smallholder Farmers (SHFs): Small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers who manage areas varying from less than one hectare to 10 hectares.[2]

Value Chain: The full sequence of activities involved in moving food from production to consumption. In the context of HGSF, this includes farming, aggregation, procurement, transportation, storage, preparation, and the final delivery of meals to students in schools.

[2] "Family Farming Knowledge Platform", The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/273864/ (Accessed May 10, 2025)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The landscape analysis of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), developed in collaboration with the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM) in Côte d'Ivoire, documents innovative practices emerging in HGSF programmes across 12 countries. Building on a comparative review, the analysis explores how countries are implementing and scaling HGSF, with a focus on strengthening local food systems, improving nutrition outcomes, and advancing social protection. Particular attention was given to identifying and capturing innovations that offer promising pathways for enhancing impact and sustainability. The analysis draws on secondary research, 61 stakeholder interviews, and field visits to **Benin**, **The Gambia**, and **Zambia** to offer a regional perspective on successes and challenges.

The report is organized around seven key dimensions of HGSF implementation: 1) Policy and Enabling Environment; 2) Innovative Financing and Sustainability; 3) HGSF Value Chain and Procurement; 4) Community Engagement; 5) Nutrition-Sensitive Programming; 6) Innovative Approaches; and 7) Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E).

Findings indicate that HGSF is gaining institutional traction, with increasing integration into national development plans and budget lines. Yet challenges remain in financing sustainability, digital monitoring, and smallholder farmer (SHF) inclusion. Innovative tools - such as digital procurement, school gardens, and climate-smart technologies - are helping address logistics and nutritional gaps. However, SHFs continue to face barriers including limited market access, input constraints, and insufficient institutional support.

The study's key recommendations include:

- A rights-based framing of HGSF - as a legal entitlement rather than a discretionary service - can drive government accountability, reduce exclusion, and reinforce program longevity. **Clarifying the distinction between HGSF and traditional school feeding** is key to enforcing local procurement standards and ensuring cross-sectoral coordination. Embedding **multi-stakeholder steering committees** within legal frameworks further promotes alignment, transparency, and continuity

- Long-term financial sustainability depends on **embedding protected budget lines into national policy and planning frameworks.** Coupled with decentralized financing structures, this approach improves alignment with local delivery needs. Introducing **risk-mitigation strategies** - such as timely payment systems and diversified funding sources - can reduce financial strain on implementing partners and strengthen resilience across the value chain

- Optimizing the HGSF value chain requires a coordinated **focus on decentralized procurement, rural infrastructure, and SHFs inclusion.** Decentralized procurement

systems, when supported by clear policies and adequate capacity, can align local supply with school meal demand, improving efficiency and reinforcing local food systems. Strengthening **last-mile logistics**, particularly in transport and storage, is essential to reduce spoilage and delivery delays. At the same time, SHFs need reliable access to markets, inputs, and institutional support to contribute sustainably to HGSF

- **Community ownership** is reinforced when roles are clearly defined and modest incentives recognize local contributions, particularly from women. Embedding these responsibilities in school-level planning and budgeting enhances accountability and program continuity. School gardens, when integrated into national strategies, offer a practical platform for engagement, agricultural education, and localized food production

- Maximizing the nutritional impact of HGSF requires culturally relevant, safe, and educationally integrated approaches. Prioritizing **indigenous foods** and **involving communities in menu planning** ensures meals are locally accepted, nutritionally diverse, and supportive of smallholder markets. Embedding **nutrition education** into school curricula further reinforces healthy behaviors and extends impact beyond the classroom. At the same time, **food safety standards** and adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene **(WASH)** infrastructure are critical to promote student well-being.

- **Innovation** in HGSF can be advanced through the formal inclusion of **school-based production** - via school gardens - in national policies, the expanded use of **digital procurement tools** that align school demand with SHFs supply, and targeted investment in **climate-resilient solutions**. These approaches support cost-effective delivery models, improve dietary diversity, and strengthen local adaptation to environmental and fiscal shocks

- **Reliable data systems** are essential to guide program improvement. Incremental investments in digital infrastructure, participatory monitoring, and structured evaluations can improve responsiveness, foster local accountability, and support evidence-based program design.

As a far-reaching and powerful social safety net for school-age children in Sub-Saharan Africa, HGSF holds transformative potential. When embedded within national systems, it delivers wide-ranging returns - from improved educational outcomes and child nutrition to strengthened rural livelihoods, local economies, and community resilience. This report offers practical, evidence-based guidance to inform and support policymakers, practitioners, and school feeding stakeholders across the continent. By drawing on country experiences and emerging good practices, it provides a roadmap for advancing HGSF as a multi-sectoral investment in human capital, food security, and inclusive development.

Disclaimer: All photographs included in this report depicting children or adults were taken with their informed consent or captured by official WFP photographers during country visits.

KEY FINDINGS

Policy and Enabling Environment

- There is political will to implement HGSF programmes; however, these programmes are not always differentiated from general school feeding at the policy level.
- Multi-sector coordination is a key enabler of HGSF success. Steering committees and working groups bridge gaps, create synergies, and facilitate knowledge transfers.

Innovative Financing and Sustainability

- Protected budget lines demonstrate programme ownership, attract investment, and ensure programme continuity even as fiscal or political circumstances change.
- Innovative or hybrid financing, which utilizes unique funding sources, such as development bonds, or embraces public-private partnerships increases programme longevity and reduces dependency.

HGSF Value Chain and Procurement

- Decentralized procurement ensures alignment between food supply and school demand. It can also reduce transport costs and improve programme responsiveness.
- SHFs are the linchpin of home-grown school feeding. Successful programmes provide them with technical assistance and ensure market access.

Community Engagement

- Community engagement improves HGSF programme outcomes by leveraging local knowledge and resources. It is, however, often informal or uneven across regions.
- Many programmes do not compensate volunteers. Modest in-kind or income-based incentives can formalize and sustain community engagement.

Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

- Culturally relevant menus anchored in indigenous foods align school meals to community preferences, while promoting dietary diversity and supporting local food systems.
- Embedding nutrition education in school curricula and strengthening WASH infrastructure contribute to a learning environment that supports child development and fosters broader community well-being.

Innovative Approaches

- School-based production units (school gardens) help overcome logistical challenges, diversify meals, and teach students agricultural skills.
- Digital procurement tools that align demand and supply are gaining traction in the region and have proven effective in bridging gaps between schools and SHFs.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

- M&E is a growth area for HGSF programmes. Several countries still use paper-based M&E systems, which often lack comprehensive and easily accessible data.
- Emphasis remains largely on educational outcomes and food monitoring, with limited but growing efforts to incorporate holistic evaluations of nutrition and community livelihoods through external assessments like SABER and FAO/WFP's evaluations.

INTRODUCTION

HGSF programmes deliver nutritious, safe, and varied school meals, using locally sourced food. This focus on locally sourced food differentiates HGSF programmes from traditional school feeding, and it places HGSF programmes at the intersection of economic, educational, and nutritional interventions. HGSF programmes mandate local procurement, with the goal of establishing new agricultural markets, integrating supply chains, and strengthening food systems in the communities where they operate.[3] They improve upon traditional school feeding models, because they generate economic returns alongside social benefits. They also encourage community and local government participation, enhancing sustainability.

Bulungu Primary School, Zambia

School feeding programmes have gained traction as a tool to address food insecurity and enhance school retention. For at least two decades, the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has guided countries towards adopting HGSF programmes.[4] By 2022, more than 40 African Union (AU) member-states had implemented HGSF programmes, compared to just 12 two decades earlier.[5] An estimated 65.4 schoolchildren were receiving meals from general and home-grown school feeding programmes as of the same time.[6] The increase in coverage has been matched by significant increases in budgetary allocations for school feeding, with West African countries nearly doubling spending since

[3] "Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d082f20d-a9b4-4a3e-9574-3551ef74043e/content.
[4] "Guidelines for the Design and Implementation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes in Africa," AU New Partnership for Africa's Development, February 2022, https://www.nepad.org/publication/guidelines-design-and-implementation-of-home-grown-school-feeding-programmes
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

2013.[7] As of May 2025, 40 African countries had joined the School Meals Coalition (SMC), and many had committed to prioritizing local procurement.[8]

There is an emerging consensus that successful HGSF programmes enhance social protection, improve education, health, and nutrition outcomes, and support local agricultural markets. However, successful HGSF programmes vary widely. Key elements–how "home-grown" is defined, how much food must be sourced locally, and how programmes should be integrated into national systems–differ across existing literature. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) contends that HGSF programmes should go beyond simply purchasing local commodities and provide direct assistance to SHFs.[9] Brazil, home of the world's most advanced school feeding programme, mandates that local commodities be procured from domestic family farmers and rural enterprises, with priority given to those producing organic or ecological products.[10] This is a notable distinction from other programmes, where procurement from within the broader region–but outside the country–may still be considered "home-grown."

This report adopts the CERFAM definition, which centers on two core objectives.[11]

1. Providing safe, diverse, and nutritious food.
2. Sourcing locally produced food from farmers and/or markets.

The first objective promotes adherence to food safety and quality standards, supports dietary diversification, and encourages nutrition education. The second links local SHFs to schools and strengthens their capacities, thereby contributing to rural development. In the context of this study, programmes were deemed "home-grown" even if only a portion of food was locally sourced, so long as they were designed to support SHFs and local food markets.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The landscape analysis identifies innovative approaches, tools, techniques, and processes among HGSF programmes. It highlights lessons learned from multiple case studies and provides actionable recommendations to strengthen future programming. It will ultimately contribute to a repository of country case studies and good practices, a resource that will support practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders in replicating good practices, designing HGSF interventions, and successfully implementing HGSF programmes.

[7] Ibid.
[8] "Member Countries," School Meals Coalition, accessed May 9, 2025, https://schoolmealscoalition.org/about/member-countries.
[9] "FAO Knowledge Repository," Food and Agriculture Organization, accessed May 9, 2025, https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/8700c275-fd9f-4b87-a176-50e08c5fcf13.
[10] Emilie Sidaner, Daniel Balaban, and Luciene Burlandy, "The Brazilian School Feeding Programme: An Example of an Integrated Programme in Support of Food and Nutrition Security," *Public Health Nutrition* 16, no. 6 (2012).
[11] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West and Central Africa," World Food Programme, April 7, 2021, https://www.wfp.org/publications/home-grown-school-feeding-west-and-central-africa-2020.

This report examines seven analytic dimensions, selected based on their relevance to HGSF programme implementation and their use in prior studies on the topic.[12] These dimensions are strong indicators of HGSF programme effectiveness, impact, and scalability. Effective HGSF programmes typically involve at least one - and usually more - of these dimensions

- **Policy and Enabling Environment:** Strong policy frameworks demonstrate government commitment and can thus streamline inter-ministerial coordination and programme execution.[13] They anchor HGSF within national development agendas, enabling long-term planning. In weak policy and enabling environments, programmes may be fragmented, underfunded, and/or vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities.

- **Financing:** Independent, sufficient, and sustainable financing ensures the long-term stability of HGSF programmes. Government financing and programme ownership promote accountability and transparency, while helping scale successful initiatives. Donations and external assistance remain an outsized role in certain programmes.

- **Value Chain:** This refers to the full set of interconnected activities that link local food production to school meal consumption. It includes planning, agricultural production, procurement, wholesaling, transportation, storage, food preparation, and distribution. HGSF value chains include a wide variety of stakeholders, who collaborate to ensure that food reaches schools efficiently and safely.

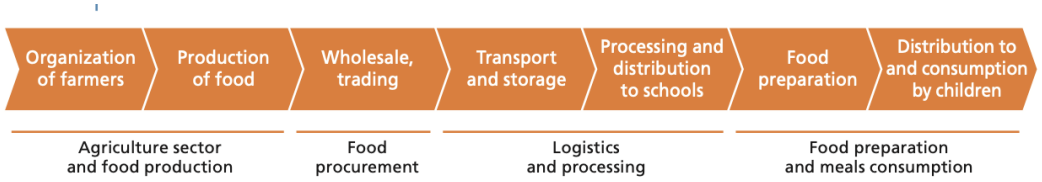


Figure 1: A sample HGSF value chain.[14]

- **Community Engagement:** A high degree of community engagement empowers stakeholders, ensures that HGSF programmes align with local priorities, and improves outcomes. HGSF programmes rely on local food procurement, which stabilizes markets and boosts local agricultural economies. They also fill a nutritional gap during the school day, promoting attendance and reducing the feeding burden on families.

- **Nutrition-Sensitive Programming:** This refers to interventions that address root causes of malnutrition by linking school meals with local agricultural production, nutrition

[12] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.
[13] "The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022," World Food Programme, 2022, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000147725/download/?_ga=2.134341169.1523067868.1744318070-1204912079.1738099657.
[14] "Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d082f20d-a9b4-4a3e-9574-3551ef74043e/content.

education, and health-centric interventions.[15] It incorporates additional components, such as nutrition and behavioral change.[16] Nutrition-sensitive programmes may include deworming, handwashing, and gender sensitive activities.

- **Innovative Approaches:** This refers to the modifications that implementers make to ensure that HGSF programmes address the unique needs of the communities in which they operate. Innovative approaches can include the use of digital tools or the embrace of climate-resilient practices. They can also encompass social innovations, such as the cultivation of school gardens or knowledge transfers.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Robust monitoring and evaluation helps implementers evaluate HGSF programme performance and address programme deficits in real-time. It also enables implementers to produce a business case and articulate the value proposition of programmes to prospective donors. Successful programmes collect data on implementation, as well as economic, educational, and nutritional outcomes.

The scope of this report is limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. It focuses on twelve countries, though it periodically references others. These countries each have HGSF programmes, and they were selected to ensure geographic diversity and variation in economic development.

- Southern Africa: Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia, Zambia
- West Africa: Benin, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria
- East Africa: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

A mixed-methods approach - combining secondary research, stakeholder interviews, and field visits - was used to identify trends and good practices in HGSF**.** A total of 61 stakeholder interviews - 46 in-country and 15 remote - contributed significantly to the findings.

The analysis draws on grey literature published within the last decade, as thematic studies of HGSF programmes only appeared in earnest during the late 2010s.[17] It relies on secondary sources from organizations including but not limited to: the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Data from the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) and the School Meals Coalition (SMC) is also referenced. A smaller subset of academic literature complemented these sources.

[15] Kathryn Ogden et al., "What Does Nutrition Sensitive Programming Mean for WFP?" ENN Online, September 14, 2017, https://www.ennonline.net/fex/55/en/what-does-nutrition-sensitive-programming-mean-wfp#:~:text=WFP%20can%20make%20a%20significant,malnutrition%20in%20all%20its%20forms.
[16] "Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection Programs Within Food Systems," Food and Agriculture Organization, September 2021, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/bc95d265-6885-487e-a5f7-69c49837f82a/content.
[17] Arlene Mitchell, "Remarks for Arlene Mitchell, Senior Programme Officer for Agricultural Development," April 6, 2009, International food Aid Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/ifac09_arlene_mitchell_0406.pdf.

Fifteen remote interviews assessed the state of HGSF programmes, and they supplemented data from secondary source research and field visits. Interviewees possessed thematic expertise and institutional relevance. They included WFP offices, academic experts and researchers, and private sector actors. Interviews followed a semi-scripted format, guided by a questionnaire containing key research questions and diagnostic indicators for each of the seven dimensions of analysis. The questionnaire was informed by both FAO's Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework and CERFAM's Landscape Analysis of HGSF in West Africa. This format allowed for open-ended conversation with interviewees, which gave participants the opportunity to provide candid feedback and to highlight perceived successes and challenges. A full list of remote interviews is available in *Annex A*, while an interview questionnaire is available in *Annex C*.

This report also incorporates data derived from field visits to **Benin, The Gambia,** and **Zambia**, three countries with successful HGSF programmes that could serve as regional models. Field visits began in each country's seat of government, liaising with government officials and UN Agencies, and NGO personnel. They also included farm and school visits, in which researchers observed school feedings, toured school facilities, and interviewed community-members. Forty-six field interviews surveyed a broad range of HGSF stakeholders, ranging from government officials to non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel, school officials, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), farmers, aggregators, community members, and private businesses. Field Interviews followed the same semi-scripted questionnaire, with slight adaptations based on the interlocutor. This generated standardized, comparable data across all dimensions of analysis and helped highlight good practices. A full list of field interviews is available in *Annex B.*

This combined approach - drawing from grey literature, stakeholder insights, and field observations - provided a robust foundation for the landscape analysis. The following sections apply this evidence to all seven dimensions of analysis, beginning with the policy and enabling environment.

Policy and Enabling Environment

POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Sub-Saharan African countries recognize the value of home-grown school feeding, and it has gradually become one of the most widely adopted and politically supported social protection programmes. Countries have adopted varying policies for HGSF implementation, based on the legal, political, and regulatory context in which they operate. These policies subsequently play a key role in programme success and long-term viability.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Anchoring HGSF programmes in legal, policy, and institutional frameworks.** This increases the probability that programmes will remain a nationally protected priority. This can be achieved by including HGSF programmes in national development strategies, drafting HGSF policies, setting clear constitutional or legislative mandates, and/or creating conducive public procurement regulatory frameworks. The latter helps formalize support for SHF integration by devising preferential procurement schemes, local sourcing targets, and agricultural extension services.

- **Promoting multi-sector coordination and other methods of stakeholder engagement.** This is a recurring feature of effective HGSF programmes. Bodies like steering committees and working groups bridge gaps between policy and effective implementation. They also create synergies and ensure alignment across the education, agriculture, health, and finance sectors. This, in turn, facilitates joint planning, resource mobilization, and problem-solving.

- **Embracing decentralization as a means of better serving communities.** This drives programme responsiveness and local participation, ensuring that programmes actively meet the needs of the communities that they aim to serve. Strong community buy-in, enabled by decentralized policies, helps translate national-level commitments into local action, while avoiding common implementation pitfalls.

Southern Africa: Policy and Enabling Environment

In Southern Africa, HGSF programmes benefit from strong political support and favorable policy environments. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) adopted a Food and Nutrition Strategy in 2015, and it introduced specific School Nutrition Guidelines in 2021. SADC's nutrition guidelines established a framework for member-states to reference while designing school feeding and HGSF programmes.[18]

Mutually reinforcing policies institutionalize HGSF programmes, positioning them as a viable long-term response to countries' educational, economic, health, and nutritional needs. **Zambia** has taken the most comprehensive step in this direction by integrating home-grown

[18] "Regional School Nutrition Guidelines for Member States," Southern African Development Community, May 2021, https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2022-07/Regional_School_Nutrition_Guidelines_for_SADC_Member_States.pdf.

school feeding into its Eighth National Development Plan. This plan enshrined food security as a government priority and promoted multi-sector integration. **Zambia's** National Strategy on Home-Grown School Meals expands upon these goals. It is arguably the most structured policy framework in the region, and it frames HGSF as a linchpin of integrated development–bridging education, nutrition, agricultural development, and community resilience. **Namibia** and **Lesotho** have also taken measures to institutionalize home-grown school feeding, though neither has a dedicated HGSF policy. Each country has embedded HGSF principles within broader school feeding policies by setting local procurement targets–75 percent in the former, 80 percent in the latter–and devising strategies to involve SHFs in the school feeding process.[19], [20] **Namibia's** National School Feeding Policy and National School Feeding Implementation Plan, as well as **Lesotho's** Food and Nutrition Policy, explicitly link school feeding to market development.[21], [22]

Formal coordination helps HGSF implementers set common objectives, mobilize and deconflict resources, and ultimately collaborate. **Zambia's** 2020 Food and Nutrition Act No. 3 mandates the National Food and Nutrition Commission to coordinate and lead national nutrition efforts, enabling more robust HGSF programme management. Zambia also established a School Health and Nutrition Directorate within its Ministry of General Education (MoGE), whose purpose is to oversee its HGSF programme. This facilitated inter-ministerial coordination and helped secure dedicated funding.[23] **Namibia** and **Zambia** have each levered inclusive multi-sector steering committees, which include representatives from governments, the private sector, NGOs, and academia. These bodies ensure policy coherence, fill implementation gaps, and improve programme implementation.[24]
Lesotho's Food and Nutrition Policy codifies school meals as a national priority, and it tasks the Ministry of Training and Education with promoting local agricultural production.[25] **Lesotho** uses this and other cross-mandated policy roles to break down the sectoral silos that typically hinder inter-ministerial coordination. It also plans to establish a high-level, multi-sector school feeding steering committee chaired by the Principal Secretary of Education and Training and composed of representatives from different ministries.[26]

West Africa: Policy and Enabling Environment

West Africa leads Sub-Saharan Africa in HGSF coverage, owing to its strong policy and enabling environment.[27] All 15 ECOWAS member-states have integrated HGSF programmes

[19] "Namibia School Feeding Policy 2019," Republic of Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, 2020, https://www.nafsan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2019-School-Feeding-Policy-PRINT-2019.pdf.
[20] "Revised National School Feeding Policy," Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), April 2014.
[21] "Namibia School Feeding Implementation Action Plan 2019-2024," Republic of Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, 2020, https://www.nafsan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2019-SFP-Implementation-Action-Plan-2019-2024.pdf.
[22] "Kingdom of Lesotho," The Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2021, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Lesotho_2021_03_10.pdf.
[23] World Food Programme Country Office – Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[24] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[25] "Lesotho Food and Nutrition Policy 2016-2025," Lesotho Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, 2016, https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/les209966.pdf.
[26] "Lesotho School Meals Coalition Commitments 2023," School Meals Coalition, 2023, https://schoolmealscoalition.org/sites/default/files/attachments/files/LSO_Commitments.pdf.
[27] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.

into their respective national policies, and several–including **Benin, Burkina Faso,** and **Cameroon**–have stand-alone HGSF policies.[28]

HGSF programmes that are enshrined in national policy documents are typically more enduring, locally legitimate, and transparent. **Guinea-Bissau's** 2019 School Canteen Law established a dedicated government structure within the Ministry of Education to oversee its school feeding programme, improving accountability and management. This, in turn, improved food distribution and school record-keeping.[29] The law introduced streamlined systems and ensured accurate tracking of food distributed and consumed, addressing previous inconsistencies. These improvements in policy and outcomes also garnered greater investments from both the Bissau-Guinean government and external donors.[30]

However, there remains a gap between political will and legal codification, and many countries have thus shifted focus towards strengthening legislation. In 2025, **Ghana**, **The Gambia**, and **Mali** were each drafting HGSF-specific policies, reflecting a recognition that political will must be channeled into policies to ensure accountability and scalability. Similarly, **Benin** has pledged to guarantee funding for HGSF programmes in its constitution, providing a framework for the programmes to withstand political changes.

Ministry of Agriculture, The Gambia

Coordination bodies also play an important role in aligning efforts, building government capacity, and facilitating local ownership of HGSF programmes. **Senegal**'s Multi Stakeholder Group for School Food and Nutrition (GMSANE) promotes synergy among governing bodies through internal capacity-building. GMSANE organizes workshops for government officials and local implementers, which cover topics like nutrition, procurement, and quality control.[31] Coordinated capacity-building helps implementers set goals and facilitates knowledge transfer among different ministries. In 2023, **Benin** established the National Agency for Food and Nutrition (ANAN), which leads inter-ministerial and multi-sector coordination for home-grown school feeding. Critically, it also serves as the government's focal point for facilitating

[28] "Empowering the Future," School Meals Coalition, October 2023, https://schoolmealscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/ECOWASReport1023.pdf?utm.
[29] "Guinea-Bissau Schools Improve Food Program," Catholic Relief Services, Last modified January 7, 2022. https://www.crs.org/stories/guinea-bissau-schools-improve-food-program.
[30] "Guinea-Bissau," World Food Programme, accessed April 6, 2025, https://www.wfp.org/countries/guinea-bissau.
[31] "Senegal School Feeding Program Report," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, October 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Senegal_2024_Report_R1.pdf.

the transfer of the programme from the WFP to national control.[32] Cohesive programme implementation, enabled by inter-ministerial collaboration, supports effective HGSF implementation and promotes governmental ownership.

East Africa: Policy and Enabling Environment

East African countries acknowledge that school feeding in general, and home-grown school feeding in particular, can advance national education, economic development, health, and nutrition objectives. In 2021, the AU, FAO, and WFP implemented sustainable and local nutrition pilot programmes in **Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda,** and **Uganda**.[33]

Most East African governments have integrated home-grown school feeding into broader development strategies and policy frameworks but lack dedicated, stand-alone HGSF policies. **Sudan**, for example, operates HGSF programmes in five states–but has no discrete HGSF policy.[34] **Kenya's** National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy commits to providing at least one nutritious meal to pre-primary and primary students per day.[35] This is reinforced by policies that direct school feeding programmes and recognize school meals as a social safety net.[36] **Burundi** anchors its commitments within a National School Feeding Policy, which explicitly names home-grown school feeding as its largest social protection intervention but says little else about it.[37] **Ethiopia's** 2021 National School Feeding Strategy includes a plan to improve educational achievement through health and nutrition interventions.[38] This strategy does not explicitly reference home-grown school feeding. The absence of specific policies in each of these countries undermines HGSF programmes. Policies that fail to differentiate between general and home-grown school feeding are ambiguous and do not obligate countries to prioritize local procurement.

Local procurement is often framed as a secondary objective of national school feeding policies. As of mid-2025, only **Kenya** clearly defines home-grown school feeding and explicitly outlines its intent to transition from general to home-grown school feeding.[39] In **Burundi** and **Ethiopia**, HGSF programmes are situated within broader school feeding and nutrition frameworks, which emphasize the need for governments to bolster local agricultural production but contain no firm obligations. **Ethiopia** has federal procurement laws, which explicitly prioritize sourcing from local producers through preferential

[32] World Food Programme Country Office – Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[33] "Home-Grown School Feeding Cluster," African Union, accessed May 9, 2025, https://centrodeexcelencia.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CESA-SF-Cluster-Instruments-EN.pdf.
[34] "Sudan Annual Country Report 2023," World Food Programme, accessed May 9, 2025, https://www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report?operation_id=SD02&year=2023.
[35] "National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (2017–2022)," Republic of Kenya, accessed April 10, 2025, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000070917/download/?_ga=2.231671711.1422602692.1572868286-1384454322.1547214121.
[36] Ibid.
[37] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.58070954.1852972307.1743964917-1971846641.1740471935.
[38] Samson Mideksa et al., "School Feeding in Ethiopia: A Scoping Review," *BMC Public Health* 24 (2024).
[39] "National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (2017–2022)," Republic of Kenya, accessed April 10, 2025, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000070917/download/?_ga=2.231671711.1422602692.1572868286-1384454322.1547214121.

procurement schemes, administrative adjustments, and other legal tools.[40] This integrates and prioritizes SHFs in public supply chains, promoting home-grown school feeding.

Multi-sector coordination would strengthen HGSF policy, programmes, and implementation; however, coordination is uneven across the region. In **Sudan**, for example, WFP and the Ministry of Education jointly implement HGSF programmes, and there is little evidence of inter-ministerial coordination. As of mid-2025, **Burundi's** Ministry of Education was attempting to formally integrate the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health into HGSF implementation.[41] **Ethiopia** is distinguished by its strong collaboration among the federal and regional government.[42] One of Ethiopia's most reputable HGSF programmes is in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, where regional officials collaborate with the federal government to ensure smooth implementation. **Kenya** offers another strong example of how to operationalize coordination among a wide range of stakeholders. Its National School Meals and Nutrition Programme includes a framework for coordination among ministries, development partners, local officials, and community-level actors.[43] It also established a School Health, Nutrition, and Meals Coordination Unit within the Ministry of Education, tasked with overseeing inter-ministerial dialogue, budgeting, and capacity-building in school meal management.[44]

[40] Luana Swensson, "Aligning Public Procurement Rules and Practices to Support the Implementation of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) Initiatives," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/66dbfb94-2764-467f-8d59-7a58027c32e2/content.
[41] World Food Programme Country Office – Burundi, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[42] "Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP's USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme's Support in Afar and Oromia Regions in Ethiopia (2019 to 2024)," World Food Programme, February 2023, https://www.wfp.org/publications/ethiopia-food-education-and-child-nutrition-2019-24-evaluations.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

Innovative Financing and Sustainability

INNOVATIVE FINANCING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sub-Saharan Africa is a diverse financing landscape. The extent to which countries fund HGSF programmes differs according to national income levels, institutional capacity, and extent of external assistance. Most countries in Southern, West, and East Africa have a dedicated budget line for school feeding, within which home-grown school feeding falls. Some countries–including **Benin**, **Kenya, Nigeria,** and **Zambia** - committed substantial resources to general and home-grown school feeding, including protected budget lines.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Establishing protected budget lines.** This demonstrates greater programme ownership and contributes to home-grown school feeding's long-term viability. Budget lines ensure stability and scale, attracting investment from public and private partners. Countries that embed home-grown school feeding within national budgets and planning frameworks are also better positioned to defend and expand these programmes, particularly in times of fiscal constraint or crisis.

- **Institutionalizing yearly growth in national HGSF contributions**. This signals a country's commitment to home-grown school feeding and creates a pathway toward full government ownership. Donor support is instrumental in maintaining HGSF, yet it can also lead to dependency. These initiatives can mitigate that risk.

- **Employing hybrid financing models, which engage local actors such as aggregators, caterers, or farmer cooperatives.** When paired with mechanisms that ensure transparent pricing and timely payment, this can stimulate local markets, improve meal quality, and reinforce community ownership. Practices such as regionally negotiated prices, decentralized procurement, and aggregator-led sourcing aligns school feeding with local food systems while diversifying financing.

Southern Africa: Innovative Financing and Sustainability

Financing varies widely across Southern Africa. Some countries, including **Zambia**, self-finance a large portion of their HGSF programmes, whereas others require donor support.

To this end, only some countries have codified home-grown school feeding within their school feeding budgets. In **Zambia** and **Madagascar**, general and home-grown school feeding each receive a unique budget line, along with formal commitments to funding increases.[45] **Zambia's** national HGSF budget grew from approximately $7.1 million in 2019 to approximately $17.8 million in 2024, representing a 151 percent increase.[46, 47]

[45] "Madagascar Alimentation Scolaire," The World Bank, 2014, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/571751467994628823/pdf/100076-FRENCH-WP-ADD-SERIES-PUBLIC-SABER-School-Feeding-Madagascar.pdf.
[46] Zambian Ministry of Education, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[47] Zambian National Nutrition Commission, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

Namibia and **Lesotho**, on the other hand, fund HGSF programmes as a subset of their broader school feeding budgets, relegating these programmes to a more uncertain financial environment. **Namibia's** government funds 99 percent of school feeding but only 30 percent of the country's nascent HGSF programme.[48, 49] **Lesotho** funds approximately 82 percent of its school feeding budget, with the remainder coming from external assistance or the private sector, but not all of its school feeding is "home-grown."[50] **Lesotho's** government has proposed raising the maximum cost per school meal from $0.19 to $0.44, suggesting that it is willing and able to increase its school feeding budget.[51]

Despite budget increases, East African countries experience persistent financial challenges, including funding shortfalls and payment delays, undermining HGSF programme effectiveness. **Zambia** has increased its HGSF budget dramatically since 2019; however, the current allocation only covers 60 percent of the school year.[52] No such statistic has been calculated for other countries in the region, but interviews suggest that funding may be insufficient.

Additionally, local procurement challenges reduce HGSF programmes' cost efficiency. In **Namibia**, only 57 percent of schoolchildren receive meals from the school feeding programme, despite a relatively high degree of government investment. This is attributable to underfunded transport logistics for arid, remote, and rural areas.[53, 54] Procurement is thus a key component of financing and executing HGSF interventions. In comparison, **Zambia** factors in transportation logistics costs into its HGSF budget and distribution to district educational boards.[55] This has increased the effectiveness of **Zambia**'s HGSF programme and helped it to withstand a drought that destroyed 1 million hectares of maize in 2024.[56]

West Africa: Innovative Financing and Sustainability

In 2024, nearly all West African countries dedicated a portion of their annual budget to school feeding. Regional investment in school feeding programmes grew from $450 million to $543 million between 2020 and 2022.[57] HGSF programmes exist as a portion of countries' general school feeding budgets and, of seventeen West African countries that have HGSF programmes, only **Liberia** lacked a dedicated budget line for school feeding.[58]

[48] "Republic of Namibia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Namibia_2024_Report_R3.pdf.
[49] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[50] "Kingdom of Lesotho," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Lesotho_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[51] "Revised National School Feeding Policy," Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), April 2014.
[52] Ibid.
[53] "Republic of Namibia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Namibia_2024_Report_R3.pdf.
[54] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[55] Zambian Ministry of Education, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[56] World Food Programme Country Office - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[57] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.
[58] "Republic of Liberia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, September 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Liberia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.

The amount of money that countries dedicate to HGSF programmes varies, depending on the size of these initiatives relative to general school feeding, the number of students, and the financial resources available. For example, **The Gambia's** HGSF programme spends about $0.12 per child per day, whereas **Ghana** spends an estimated $0.90 per child per day.[59, 60]

Maize Cooperative, Benin

Most West African countries remain unable to independently finance national HGSF programmes. As of mid-2025, only **Nigeria** independently funded 100 percent of its HGSF programme, closely followed by **Benin**, which independently funded 95 percent of its programme.[61, 62] Some countries deal with budgetary constraints by targeting regions where school enrollment and retention rates are lower and gender disparities in education are greater, judging from the results of a 2024 GCNF survey on school meal programmes.

West African countries supplement their respective national budgets with assistance from donors and international financial institutions.[63] In fact, on average, external assistance accounts for 76 percent of general school feeding funding in West Africa's low-income countries.[64] **Sierra Leone's** HGSF programme is entirely dependent on external assistance.[65] External assistance provides a windfall for HGSF programmes. It improves HGSF coverage and outcomes, especially in low-income countries. In **Burkina Faso**, the School Meals with Local Produce for Intelligent Nutrition Project–funded by the African Development Bank and the Japanese Government–established school gardens across three regions.[66] An initial investment of $990,000 generated more than 25 tons of produce for schools.[67]

[59] Gambian School Agriculture & Feeding Management Unit, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[60] World Food Programme Regional Bureau – Dakar, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[61] Ibid.
[62] World Food Programme Country Office – Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[63] "Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158980/download/?_ga=2.65230568.757740819.1743973199-1204912079.1738099657.
[64] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.
[65] Ibid.
[66] "Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158980/download/?_ga=2.65230568.757740819.1743973199-1204912079.1738099657.
[67] Ibid.

This model of shared fiscal responsibility also encompasses risks. It can be difficult to transfer full responsibility to the host-nation after a donor intervenes. In **The Gambia**, for instance, WFP assesses that it cannot hand over the HGSF programme at current funding levels.[68, 69, 70] WFP's Country Office in **Ghana** also cited insufficient funding as its greatest challenge.[71] Its payments to vendors are sometimes inconsistent or late. **Ghana** reimburses caterers at a fixed rate at the end of the school term, forcing caterers to pre-finance school meals.[72] These small businesses absorb financial risk on the state's behalf, with the expectation of compensation. However, reimbursement is often delayed, compromising their ability to deliver adequate meals.[73] The World Bank granted Ghana loans, but both funding and timeliness of vendor payment remains an issue.[74]

Benin: Alternative Financing Mechanisms & Leveraging the Private Sector

Benin pioneered the use of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Green Bonds. An SDG Green Bond is a debt instrument whose proceeds exclusively finance projects aligned with UN SDGs. The $500 million bond partially funds Benin's HGSF programme.[75]

This type of bond increases reliance on external financing; however, it also attracts a broader investor base, enabling the Beninois government to secure more favorable borrowing terms with other lenders. The use of SDG Green Bonds is an innovative approach to secure reliable and large-scale funding, especially when a country intends to expand or upgrade its HGSF programmes. By securing dedicated, long-term financing, Benin can ensure programme continuity, even during periods of diminished donor support.

Secondly, Benin's National Food and Nutrition Agency (ANAN) has partnered with *Moov,* a mobile payment service. This partnership creates accounts and facilitates cash-based transfers, ensuring fiscal transparency.[76] Schools accounts are restricted to transfers to pre-approved suppliers.[77] Participating schools directly receive government funds and then use these funds to pay suppliers.[78] Direct access to funds enhances efficiency, transparency, and accountability, while simplifying accounting. Timely payments also benefit SHFs, who might otherwise face unstable livelihoods due to delays.[79] SHFs can use timely cash transfers to invest in production and plan their supply.

Benin has also initiated private-public partnerships to enable innovation and garner additional technical assistance. The government of Benin, Sodexo, and WFP have established the Model Equipment Support Project (PAEEM). It links home-grown school

[68] Gambian School Agriculture & Feeding Management Unit, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[69] Gambian Ministry of Agriculture, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[70] Gambian Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[71] World Food Programme Country Office – Ghana, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Embassy of the Netherlands in Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[76] Benin National Food and Nutrition Agency (ANAN), in conversation with the author, March 2025.
[77] MOOV Africa – Cotonou Office, in conversation with the author, March 2025.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Public Primary School of Dohouime, Benin, in conversation with the author, March 2025

feeding to women's empowerment by supporting school feeding-related income generating activities, providing vocational training, and securing access to food processing equipment. The programme has received a $250,000 allocation to build 30 maize mills and 14 cassava transformation units. It also aims to train 280 women on these tools and to directly link them to schools, thereby creating a stable market.

East Africa: Innovative Financing and Sustainability

Within East Africa, **Burundi, Ethiopia,** and **Kenya** each fund a portion of their respective HGSF programmes. Home-grown school feeding is often conflated with general school feeding. As a result, few HSGF programmes have their own protected budget lines.

For example, **Kenya** has a specific home-grown school feeding budget line, which accounts for 60 percent of HGSF programme funds.[80] By contrast, **Burundi** only has a budget line for general school feeding, even though it funds 90 percent of domestic school feeding.[81] The same is true of **Ethiopia**, even though it funds 60 percent of domestic school feeding.[82] In both **Burundi** and **Ethiopia,** external assistance accounts for the rest of school feeding budgets. Finally, **Sudan**'s HGSF programme is primarily funded by WFP.[83]

Kenya increased its budgetary commitment to HGSF programmes from $29 million to $40 million during the 2023-2024 academic year.[84] **Burundi** also raised its annual contribution to home-grown school feeding. It allocated $6 million to HGSF programmes in 2023, representing a 164 percent increase from previous years.[85] **Burundi** also tested different procurement models and concluded that commodity voucher programmes, focused on local procurement, cost $5 fewer per child per year than more centralized systems.[86] Decentralized procurement may be more feasible for financially constrained countries.

Across East Africa, insufficient funding prevents HGSF programmes from achieving their full potential. In **Kenya**, inadequate funding led to a reduction in the number of feeding days during the 2020-2021 school year. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that school enrollment had increased relative to the previous year, while budgets stagnated.[87] As school enrollment increases, national budgets will need to expand to meet rising demand.

[80] "Republic of Kenya," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024 https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kenya_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[81] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024 https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf
[82] "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Ethiopia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[83] World Food Programme Country Office - Sudan, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[84] Joyce Kamau, Milka Wanhoji, and Pamela Raburu, "School Meals Case Study: Kenya," School Meals Coalition, October 2024, https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4673394/1/Kamau_etal_2024_School_Meals_Case_Study_Kenya.pdf.
[85] "Status of the School Canteen in Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, accessed April 7, 2025, https://gcnf.org/status-of-the-school-canteen-in-burundi/.
[86] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.161517500.1209280113.1743865049-548498655.1695307431.
[87] Ibid.

External assistance remains a linchpin of East Africa HGSF programmes. In **Sudan**, CARE and other NGOs help finance and implement HGSF programmes.[88] As of mid-2025, **Burundi** worked with NGOs, such as World Vision and Education Cannot Wait, to finance its HGSF programme. In 2024, **Kenya** established similar partnerships with the Rockefeller Foundation, Novo Nordisk Foundation, and Grundfos Foundation. One notable feature across the region is the limited role played by the private sector, which faces barriers to participation.

Despite funding challenges, HGSF programmes clearly boost local economies. In **Ethiopia**, for example, a money study indicates that each $1 invested in school meals generates $5 in return.[89] WFP's recent evaluation of **Burundi'**s HGSF programme demonstrates that school meals programmes increase local farmers and cooperatives revenues.[90] Furthermore, the mobilization of emergency resources in crisis-affected contexts like **Sudan** and parts of **Ethiopia** mitigate poverty and hunger, while sustaining local economic activity.

[88] "Sudan," *CARE*, accessed April 23, 2025, https://www.care.org/our-work/where-we-work/sudan/.
[89] "Investing in School Based Programs," World Food Programme, accessed April 7, 2025, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158791/download/?_ga=2.10622524.921616601.1743795283-2096465619.1734540665.
[90] Ibid.

Value Chain and Procurement

HGSF VALUE CHAIN AND PROCUREMENT

Home-grown school feeding value chains are highly context-specific, designed to reflect the unique nutritional needs, agricultural capacities, and market realities of the communities they serve. They range from centralized models, reliant on national food reserves, to fully decentralized models, in which schools purchase food directly from SHFs. There are also hybrid systems that combine local produce like vegetables and centrally supplied staples like grains and cereals. Some countries contract farmer cooperatives or local caterers as intermediaries, while others permit schools to buy directly.[91]

HGSF programmes aim to provide reliable markets for local SHFs, while enriching school menus with diverse and nutritious food. Strong community engagement helps to build local support systems within the communities that HGSF programmes serve. Cross-cutting bottlenecks persist, including limited rural infrastructure, high transport and storage costs, and payment delays, all of which present logistical challenges.[92]

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Decentralizing procurement.** This ensures alignment between local food supply and school food demand, particularly in areas with complex markets. By empowering local institutions to purchase directly from producers, HGSF programmes can reduce transport costs, promote efficient payment, and ensure rapid responses to evolving ground conditions. Decentralized procurement can also add complexity to programme oversight and increase reliance on local infrastructure - challenges that can be mitigated through robust coordination mechanisms, clear accountability frameworks, and targeted investments in local capacity and logistics systems.

- **Training SHFs and linking SHFs to school markets.** This enhances food security, improves farmer livelihoods, and ultimately contributes to programme success. Common approaches include but are not limited to: providing training on crop diversification, connecting SHFs with aggregators and/or farmer cooperatives, and monitoring for fair pricing and procurement arrangements.

- **Investing in transportation and storage.** This makes HGSF programmes more efficient and reliable. HGSF programmes that invest in cold and dry storage, transport subsidies or vehicles that can traverse rural roads, and school-based infrastructure – such as kitchens and stockrooms – minimize food waste and increase school feeding consistency. Investments are particularly impactful in hard-to-reach areas, where food spoilage and delays would otherwise be common.

[91] Sata Giunti et al., “Impact Evaluation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes: Methodological Guidelines,” Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3b804efa-2b2c-4594-89d5-59b20a2d9b70/content.
[92] Ayala Wineman et al., “School Meal Programs in Africa: Regional Results From the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (2022).

- **Promoting meaningful community involvement.** This leverages local expertise and social support networks, ultimately bolstering HGSF programmes. Involving local actors in food preparation, transport, and meal planning builds ownership, improves accountability, and increases meals' cultural relevance. Community engagement fills operational gaps and enhances HGSF programme sustainability.

Southern Africa: HGSF Value Chain and Procurement

Different topographies, policy environments, and economic conditions have given rise to different HGSF value chains across Southern Africa, which each fit local context.

Decentralized procurement systems maintain economies of scale, while also promoting local sourcing. **Zambia's** main HGSF programme relies on decentralized aggregation to the district-level. Aggregators bulk purchase commodities from local farmer cooperatives, then supply them to district-level education offices. From there, District Education Board Secretariats (DEBS) contract private suppliers to deliver food to schools. This model, in which commodities are purchased for entire districts, ensures enough supplies, while also ensuring that SHFs profit by selling their produce to aggregators. It also addresses quality control and farmer exploitation, as the Ministry of Agriculture provides parallel SHFs training on food safety and quality, fair pricing, and planning.

Decentralized procurement has not been adopted by all countries. For instance, **Namibia** and **Lesotho**, employ hybrid centralized-decentralized models. In **Namibia**, most schools employ an "integrated food system model," in which school-based production units - such as vegetable gardens - complement government-provided rations and, in some cases, generate income through the sale of surplus produce.[93] The remaining 29 schools procure commodities from SHFs using government-provided funds.[94] **Lesotho** also adopts a hybrid model. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture collaborate to map SHFs; yet procurement occurs in districts or localities. Also in **Lesotho**, WFP is piloting HGSF programmes targeting Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) that engage private businesses to serve as aggregators and deliver food directly to schools.[95] For hybrid procurement to scale and succeed long-term, implementers must accurately map supply and demand, enabling farmers to align production with school needs.

Procurement is more efficient when implementers clearly assign roles and responsibilities, avoid duplication, and use short supply chains. **Zambia's** decentralized procurement strategy exemplifies this finding. Decentralizing procurement to the district-level shortened supply chains and reducing the number of intermediaries. This, in turn, lowered transportation costs, sped up deliveries, and improved programme responsiveness to local needs. As of mid-2025, **Zambia** planned to further decentralize procurement by empowering schools to directly manage procurement. The MoGE's introduction of district-level School

[93] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[94] Ibid.
[95] World Food Programme. "WFP and Government of Lesotho Launch Innovative Technology to Enhance Governance." Last modified June 1, 2023. https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-and-government-lesotho-launch-innovative-technology-enhance-governance.

Health and Nutrition Directorates reinforces local oversight and accountability, strengthening the overall efficiency of the HGSF value chain.[96]

National farmer registries are a critical component of HGSF value chains, as they link SHFs to schools. In many South African countries, only registered farmers can join cooperatives and participate in the HGSF value chain. **Namibia's** Agronomic Board (NAB) collaborates with WFP to facilitate farmer registration, while **Lesotho's** Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security only established a formal registry system in 2022.[97]

Beyond registration, targeted training also strengthens SHF involvement in HGSF value chains. In **Zambia,** District Agricultural Coordinators work with the MoGE and WFP to provide SHFs with training on cost-benefit analyses, investments, and climate resilience.[98] In **Madagascar,** the Ministry of National Education and WFP perform a similar function; they have successfully integrated more than 20,000 SHFs into HGSF value chains.[99]

Not all initiatives to link SHFs to HGSF value chains are equally successful. Agricultural input subsidies often fail to effectively reach SHFs due to limited credit access, geographic isolation, and exclusion from farmer registries. In **Lesotho** and **Zambia**, subsidy programmes have struggled to ensure SHFs access. **Lesotho's** blanket subsidy and **Zambia's** Farmer Input Support Programme each historically favored larger-scale farmers. **Zambia** has addressed this issue by introducing an e-voucher system. The e-voucher system enables SHFs to obtain subsidized agricultural inputs from pre-approved dealers in their communities. This has increased SHF participation in HGSF programmes, encouraged crop diversification, and aligned subsidies with the needs of smaller producers.[100]

Transport is a persistent obstacle to the effective implementation of HGSF programmes. In **Namibia**, national HGSF funds do not cover transport costs, which fall instead on SHFs. This inadvertently stymies school efforts to procure food, as many SHFs lack vehicles that can transport cover significant distances at reasonable costs.[101] In mid-2025, **Lesotho** was piloting a HGSF programme that employed private vendors to aggregate and deliver food to schools. However, schools are far apart from each other and vendors still struggle to deliver food on time.[102] **Zambia** funds transportation at a fixed rate. As fuel prices fluctuate, transport may become prohibitively costly, undermining the initiative's objectives and prompting delays. Linking SHFs to local aggregators and schools has the potential to help minimize transport costs and make supply chains cheaper, shorter, and more reliable.[103]

[96] Ibid.
[97] "Establishment of a Lesotho National Farmer Registry and Electronic Voucher Management System," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6d8f3e32-ba27-42df-81ce-a3f2fd64d6ee/content.
[98] World Food Programme Country Office – Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025
[99] World Food Programme Country Office – Madagascar, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[100] "Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP)," Zambian Ministry of Agriculture, Accessed March 24, 2025, https://www.agriculture.gov.zm/fisp/#:~:text=The%20primary%20aim%20of%20FISP,and%20distribution%20of%20these%20inputs.
[101] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[102] World Food Programme Country Office – Lesotho, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[103] World Food Programme Field Office – Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

Across Southern Africa, access to storage facilities varies. Where HGSF programmes have access to both cold and dry storage, school meals are more nutritious and diverse. **Zambia** acknowledges this, and its Constituency Development Fund actively encourages districts and schools to utilize its funding to improve storage facilities. This includes upgrading classrooms, which often double as storage spaces and feeding rooms, and building dedicated storage rooms.[104] In **Namibia**, funding shortfalls restrict the government's ability to provide storage infrastructure. This frequently results in mismatches between the quantity of food schools require and what is available.[105]

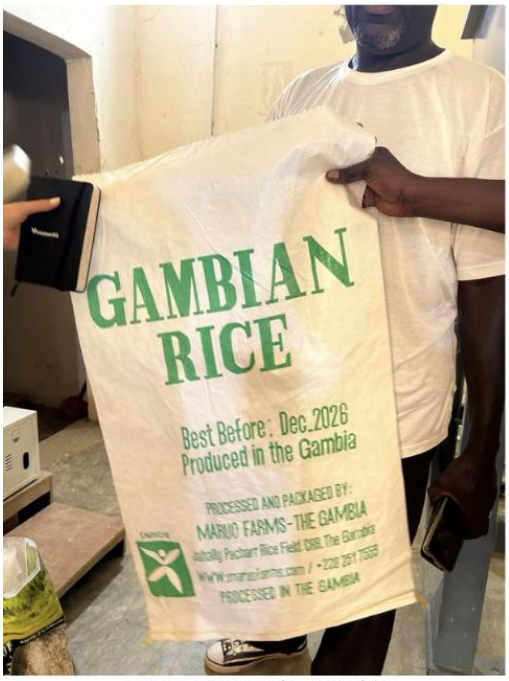
Grow Bags Farming, Bulungu Primary School, Zambia

West Africa: HGSF Value Chain and Procurement

Across West Africa, most HGSF implementers encourage local procurement. Nevertheless, HGSF programmes still encounter gaps in local supply, bottlenecks in linking SHFs to school markets, and financing challenges that affect the supply chain. Community engagement is a strength, with parents and local groups playing key roles in programme implementation.

SHFs are one of the primary beneficiaries of HGSF interventions. In **Nigeria**, 40 percent of SHFs participating in the school feeding supply chain are food secure, compared to only 20

[104] World Food Programme Country Office – Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[105] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, February 2025.



Maruo Farms, The Gambia

percent of non-participants[106] Similarly, an assessment of **Senegal's** HGSF programme found that SHFs within 10 kilometers of participating schools experienced significant increases in local crop output and earned income.[107] **The Gambia's** HGSF programme's reliance on aggregators created a unique support system for SHFs, as aggregators re-invest profits in subsidiary farms. They provide SHFs with tools, seeds, and technical knowledge about how to employ irrigation systems, machinery, or other technology to boost productivity.[108] The Gambian Ministry of Agriculture supplements these informal arrangements by providing SHFs targeted technical support such as training on crop planning and post-harvest handling.[109] These interventions have enabled many West African SHFs to effectively realize the benefits of HGSF, increasing their production capabilities, income, and food security.

In some contexts, farm-to-school linkages are emerging but not yet consistently embedded. **Benin** set ambitious local procurement targets, yet SHFs struggle to overcome low yields, seasonal variability, and lack of access to finance or storage that all limit their ability to supply schools[110] In practice, some countries are reliant on traders or imported staples to offset local production shortfalls. This was true during COVID-19, which strained local supply chains and increased the need for external assistance. Overall, ensuring that SHFs are adequately supported to participate in and benefit from HGSF remains a critical challenge.

Although procurement models vary widely across West Africa, many well-performing programmes are both efficient and inclusive. Strong HGSF programmes improve efficiency by decentralizing procurement to the local level. **Nigeria,** for example, transfers funds to local governments who then engage more than 100,000 SHFs, injecting money directly into local economies.[111] **The Gambia** created school bank accounts and distributed programme funds to the local level. This has increased SHF participation, while ensuring efficient and timely payment.[112] These examples suggest that empowering local actors with purchasing authority not only improves efficiency but also deepens SHF inclusion.

[106] Adebayo Ogunniyi et al., "Impact of Homegrown School Feeding Program on Smallholders' Farmer Household Food Security in Northeastern Nigeria," *Foods* 12, no. 12 (2023): 2408.
[107] "Ex-Ante Evaluation of Home-Grown School feeding in Senegal – General Equilibrium Models of Different Food Procurement Modalities," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d10baaa4-50ab-4a94-af92-5bc3a13dc89b/content.
[108] Gambian Farmers and Aggregators, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[109] Gambian Ministry of Agriculture, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[110] "Benin, Integrated National School Feeding Programme (PNASI) 2017–2021," World Food Programme, August 18, 2022, https://www.wfp.org/publications/benin-integrated-national-school-feeding-programme-pnasi-2017-2021-joint-evaluation.
[111] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://schoolfeeding.araa.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/HGSFinWestAfrica-Alandscapeanalysis-May31.pdf.
[112] Gambian Farmers and Aggregators, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

HGSF programmes with more centralized procurement processes can experience bottlenecks. **Ghana's** innovative caterer model allowed it to quickly scale the programme to about 85 percent of public basic schools. However, chronic payment delays from central authorities force caterers to buy food on credit at higher prices, import international products, and even occasionally halt feeding.[113] This unreliability has also discouraged SHF participation, as they cannot incur the risk of producing without consistent payment[114] These challenges highlight that, while centralized models can enable rapid scale-up, they risk undermining programme efficiency, especially if payment systems are unreliable.

Food distribution systems also vary widely across the region. **Benin** contracts local private transporters to deliver food to schools and employs youth to help move food from markets to canteens.[115] In **The Gambia**, WFP recently distributed 3-wheel cargo tricycles to aggregators to facilitate food deliveries in hard-to-reach areas.[116] However, difficult road conditions and delivery delays remain a challenge to regional HGSF programmes, particularly during the rainy season when roads flood. Innovative solutions, such as more resilient transport vehicles, contingency stocks in schools, and more robust delivery tracking are being implemented to minimize transportation disruptions.

The Gambia: Integration of Smallholder Farmers

The Gambia's decentralized supply chain fosters a unique relationship between aggregators and SHFs that has helped both benefit from HGSF programmes.

Some aggregators reinvest their profits from HGSF programmes to buy machinery and inputs–including more productive seeds, herbicides, and fertilizer–for the farmers with whom they work. They then allow farmers to pay for these goods using in-kind, using the produce they grow. As a result, farmers can produce more, and aggregators can increase their sales, improving both the availability of products in the market and profits.[117]

An example is Awa, an aggregator in Boiram. Last season, she noticed that schools needed to increase rice purchases, so she bought and stored a supply of rice seeds in her dry storage (pictured) that she will sell to the SHFs with whom she partners to help increase rice production for the next season.[118]

A larger aggregator, Maruo Farms, in the Bantang region used its resources to buy additional machinery (pictured) to help farmers with planting and harvesting. The farmers exchange in-kind payments of rice to rent the machinery, decreasing their labor costs, boosting their production, and increasing their profits. Maruo Farms has gone a step

[113] Biniam Bedasso et al., "Feeding Ghana's Future: Navigating Challenges for Sustainable School Feeding in Ghana," *Center for Global Development*, August 15, 2023, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/feeding-ghanas-future-navigating-challenges-sustainable-school-feeding-ghana.
[114] Julia Liguori et al., "Nutritional Quality and Diversity in Ghana's School Feeding Programme," *BMC Nutrition* 10, no. 127 (2024).
[115] "Benin: National Integrated School Feeding Program (PNASI) 2021," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, accessed April 7, 2025, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Benin_2021_FINAL.pdf.
[116] World Food Programme Country Office – Gambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[117] World Food Programme Country Office – Gambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[118] Gambian Farmers and Aggregators, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

further by investing in post-harvest processing and rice fortification, streamlining the supply chain so schools can purchase the final product directly.[119]

While this symbiotic relationship benefits both aggregators and SHFs, it also strengthens schools and local economies by improving access to high demand crops like rice and boosting household spending through increased farmer incomes.

East Africa: HGSF Value Chain and Procurement

In East Africa, HGSF value chains are marked by varying levels of government involvement, local production capacity, decentralization, and community engagement. How implementers choose to source food, link farms to schools, and manage the complex logistics of each stage of the value chain have shapes whether HGSF programmes succeed.

The extent to which procurement is localized determines the impact and sustainability of HGSF programmes. **Burundi** provides a clear example. In 2022, the country's efforts to increase local purchasing prompted it to transition from a centralized procurement system to a decentralized commodity voucher (CV) model. As of mid-2025, 30 percent of Burundian schools were piloting the CV model and procuring food directly from local smallholder cooperatives.[120] The CV model enables farmer cooperatives to deliver food directly to schools, replacing a centralized approach in which WFP and its implementing partners were responsible for procurement and delivery.[121] Introducing a decentralized procurement model has increased the frequency of food distribution, translating into more consistent meal provision for students, cost savings in transport, stronger local ownership, reduced stock-outs for canteens, and higher revenues for local producers, advancing HGSF programmes' goal of serving as a reliable market for SHFs.

On the other hand, decentralization can limit scalability when local supply chains are weak and unable to process or store food, enforce quality controls, ensure nutritional diversity, and align local production to school demand. For example, under **Burundi's** CV model, maize is often replaced with rice due to limited ability to ensure quality control, manage aflatoxin contamination, and mill what is produced.[122] Unlike maize, rice does not require processing and is less susceptible to post-harvest loss, making it a more practical–albeit less nutritious–alternative.[123] It is important to note that **Burundi's** procurement effectiveness is tied to external factors, such as contract negotiations, import bans, and policy shifts. This contributes to a fragile supply chain and variable procurement timelines.

The same trade-offs regarding decentralized procurement are evident in **Ethiopia** and **Kenya**. **Ethiopia** employs a partially decentralized procurement model, in which WFP

[119] Ibid.
[120] World Food Programme Country Office – Burundi, in discussion with the author, March 2025
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.161517500.1209280113.1743865049-548498655.1695307431.

transfers funds to local education bureaus that purchase food directly from farmer cooperatives. This model has facilitated the procurement of 2,600 metric tons of locally grown food; but depends on WFP for coordination and implementation.[124] This dependence, combined with limited infrastructure and logistical challenges in sourcing fresh produce, has prompted **Ethiopia** to consider shifting procurement responsibilities further downstream to individual schools.[125] **Kenya** already employs a fully decentralized model and provides funds directly to schools. This allows for flexible, locally responsive procurement, while maintaining alignment with national dietary and programme standards.[126]

Across East Africa, SHF participation in the HGSF value chain is constrained by structural issues. As of mid-2025, neither **Burundi**, **Ethiopia**, or **Kenya** national farmer registry, making it difficult to systematically target or support SHFs for inclusion in HGSF programmes. In **Ethiopia**, requirements to align with national procurement laws that prioritize small and micro-enterprises have created opportunities for inclusive sourcing, but complex public procurement procedures still restrict meaningful farmer participation.[127] It's evident that procurement models across the region must be highly context specific.

These varied approaches to constructing HGSF value chains highlight that, while decentralization can enhance responsiveness, inclusion, and local ownership, its effectiveness ultimately depends on context-specific implementation, adequate infrastructure, and strong coordination mechanisms.

[124] "Ethiopia Annual Country Report 2023," World Food Programme, 2024, https://www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report?operation_id=ET02&year=2023.
[125] Ervin Prifti, "Baseline Assessment of Home-Grown School Feeding in Ethiopia," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a5ade987-c35c-4f88-8b49-e12d38540566/content.
[126] "School Meals Success in Kenya," World Food Programme USA, accessed May 9, 2025, https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/school-meals-success-in-kenya/.
[127] "Assessment of Ethiopia's Public Procurement System," World Bank, 2021, https://www.mapsinitiative.org/assessments/ET-MAPS-volume-I.pdf.

Community Engagement

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a critical component of HGSF programmes in SSA. Communities contribute knowledge, labor, materials, and/or oversight, ensuring programme success. The degree of community involvement varies, as does the degree of formalization, but community members routinely participate in school meal preparation, school garden maintenance, and school infrastructure improvement. This enhances local ownership and social cohesion, particularly when community governance structures, such as food management committees or parent associations, are in place to guide decision-making. Despite its significant impact, most participation remains unpaid or minimally compensated, making it somewhat difficult to ensure consistent engagement.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Integrating community members for local oversight and accountability**. This leverages local knowledge to govern HGSF programmes' day-to-day operations. Food management committees, composed of parents, teachers, and traditional leaders, provide communities with a voice in local affairs, strengthen transparency, and encourage shared ownership of menu planning, procurement, and distribution.

- **Providing volunteers with in-kind or modest income-based incentives.** This can sustain community engagement and reduce volunteer fatigue. Some HGSF programmes offer food baskets, stipends, or shared harvest profits to compensate volunteer cooks and school garden contributors. Volunteers appreciate these gestures and providing them improves consistency and equity in community engagement, especially among local women who bear the brunt of unpaid labor.

Southern Africa: Community Engagement

While the type of involvement varies across Southern Africa, successful models often rely on strong community engagement, with local members contributing to HGSF programmes by volunteering for meal preparation, participating in school gardens, operating school canteens etc. In addition to the direct benefit offered to community children, HGSF programmes strengthen local ownership and increase social cohesion, allowing the benefits to extend beyond meals.

Across Southern Africa, the success of HGSF programmes often hinges on informal community engagement, even in the absence of formal compensation mechanisms. In **Zambia,** cooking is done on a rotational voluntary basis by volunteers, but in some schools, paid staff such as teachers or security guards help to prepare meals. In more remote areas, parents and farmers contribute time and labor in exchange for small food baskets or income from garden harvests.[128] Additionally, older student prefects are required to assist in the operation of meal times by helping organize their younger classmates to ensure that meal

[128] World Food Programme Country Office – Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

times remain organized.[129] The community's reception of HGSF programmes has been positive, as parents and local leaders emphasize the reliability and diversity of school meals as essential for children's well-being.[130] Furthermore, authorities in **Zambia** report that the HGSF programmes have increased school attendance, boosted academic performance, and created new markets for SHFs.[131, 132, 133] Nonetheless, challenges persist, particularly in urban areas where school gardens are vulnerable to theft or subjected to vandalism, which highlights the need for community sensitization efforts.[134]

Maimwene Primary School Community Meeting, Zambia

Community engagement in this region often extends beyond unpaid cooking to include providing schools with essential materials. In **Lesotho**, ECCD caregivers double as teachers and cooks, also supplying firewood and water.[135] In **Namibia**, community involvement is mainly centered around cooking, typically organized on a rotational, voluntary basis. In some cases, volunteers receive one bag of maize per month as compensation. Notably, 90 percent of volunteers are mothers of enrolled children, highlighting a strong connection between parental involvement and school participation. In Namibian schools participating in the school garden HGSF programme, the volunteer model has been flagged as unsustainable, with community members - including mothers, fathers, and students - raising concerns over the lack of compensation for their efforts in both cooking and garden maintenance.[136] **Madagascar's** approach stands out as communities are contributing by constructing natural

[129] Ibid.
[130] Primary Schools of the Mumbwa Area, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[131] Zambian Ministry of Education, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[132] Zambian Ministry of Agriculture, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[133] Zambian Office of the Vice-President, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[134] Ibid.
[135] World Food Program Country Office – Lesotho, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[136] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

storage facilities to protect produce and dry goods in addition to volunteering their labor to prepare meals.[137] In **Madagascar**, community involvement goes further: residents have constructed natural storage facilities for produce and dry goods, while local committees (FEFFIs), made up of elected community members, manage school canteens, enforce basic nutrition standards (e.g., including vegetables in every meal), and source food locally. According to the Director of Basic Education and Early Childhood, this model has boosted enrollment and retention while lowering per-child costs without compromising meal quality.[138] These examples show that when communities are empowered and supported, their involvement can significantly enhance the sustainability, quality, and impact of HGSF programmes - though long-term success depends on addressing the burden of unpaid labor.

West Africa: Community Engagement

In West Africa, communities are highly engaged in HGSF implementation, according to a 2024 CERFAM survey.[139] Community members often serve as school cooks, participate in programme oversight, and even make financial or in-kind contributions to HGSF programmes.

Stakeholders in **Benin** consider community engagement an integral part of HGSF programme success. Each school possesses a food management committee, composed of parents, school administrators, teachers, and traditional leaders.[140] Members of the food management committee are elected by their peers and serve voluntary terms, although some suggest that they would appreciate modest compensation. They design menus, order food from SHFs, and supervise food deliveries. These tasks can take as many as eight hours per week during peak delivery periods and five hours per week during less busy periods.[141] This model highlights how structured, locally led committees can enhance accountability and ownership.

In **Benin,** parental involvement plays a vital role in the success and sustainability of HGSF programmes, contributing both materially and socially to their impact. For example, some opt to become cooks and benefit from an $8 monthly incentive.[142] Others provide in-kind contributions, such as firewood, chilies, eggs, corn or niébé and many send their children to school with 4 to 8 cents each day to offset food costs.[143] In northern **Benin**, implementers encourage families to participate in savings groups as a means of building financial resilience and securing funds for school feeding.[144] Parents and teachers reported that the HGSF programme positively impacted their community - children stay in school through the day, household food expenses have decreased, and mothers, in particular, gain time to focus on

[137] World Food Program Country Office – Madagascar, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[138] "Madagascar's turning point in school meals," The School Meals Coalition, November 2023, https://schoolmealscoalition.org/stories/madagascars-turning-point-school-meals
[139] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.
[140] World Food Program Country Office – Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[141] Public Primary School of Dohouime, Benin, in discussion with author, March 2025
[142] Ibid.
[143] Public Primary Schoos of Dohouime and Ahossougbeta, Benin, in discussion with author, March 2025
[144] Catholic Relief Services – Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

income-generating activities.[145] These outcomes have strengthened community cohesion and increased overall participation in school life.

Sololo Basic School, The Gambia

Strong community buy-in and formal structures for participation are strong indicators for programme success. In **The Gambia**, each school operates a 10-member food management committee - including parents, teachers, students, and administrators - that oversees school feeding. Decision-making power is delegated to parents, who always occupy the two most consequential positions on the food management committee: chair and vice chair.[146] Mothers' Clubs further strengthen this model by managing each school's petty cash and serving as volunteer cooks. The government's deliberate decision to empower these clubs reflects deep trust in mothers' commitment to their children's welfare. In interviews, mothers expressed pride in supporting school meals made with local ingredients, while smallholder farmers noted that HGSF programmes not only provide income but also reduce household food expenses- benefiting their families in multiple ways.[147] This model shows how empowering parents, especially mothers, through formal roles and trusted responsibilities can deepen community ownership, strengthen programme delivery, and multiply the social and economic benefits of HGSF.

More centralized systems often limit opportunities for meaningful community engagement. For example, in **Ghana** community engagement is uneven due to the caterer-centered HGSF model. Most key decisions are made at the national level, with little input from communities.[148] Although caterers are instructed to source at least 80 percent of food "locally," the absence of a clear definition and enforcement mechanism often leads them to procure food from outside the immediate area or even the country, undermining the programme's potential to strengthen local food systems. Moreover, while Parents are aware of HGSF programmes, they rarely provide cash or in-kind contributions or volunteer any service hours.[149] This can inhibit robust community engagement and limit the benefits of the programme.

[145] Public Primary School of Dohouime- Benin, in discussion with author, March 2025
[146] Sololo Basic School, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[147] Ibid.
[148] World Food Programme Country Office – Ghana, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[149] Ibid.

East Africa: Community Engagement

Across East Africa, community engagement is central to the operation of HGSF, as programmes are heavily dependent on parents' participation in the organization, cooking and distribution of food. Community participation varies by country, operating on a voluntary basis and incentivized through stipends or in-kind support. While this flexibility allows programmes to function, reliance on unpaid community engagement risks volunteer fatigue, potentially complicating efforts to sustain long-term involvement.

Embedding structured and well-supported community roles into HGSF programmes can enhance sustainability, improve meal delivery, and strengthen local ownership across diverse contexts. **Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan**'s HGSF programmes are partially reliant on community engagement for their effective operation. In all four countries, parents (specifically mothers) prepare the food in schools. In Burundi, each school relies on a rotating group of 10 parent volunteers for daily meal preparation, with some parents contributing as little as once per quarter. [150] Parents report that the programme frees up time for income-generating activities and helps reduce household food needs.[151] In **Burundi**, the broader community primarily contributes to menu design, provides firewood, supports cooking, and helps maintain school kitchens. Additionally, during periods of food shortages, some parents supplement school meals with sweet potatoes, yams, and cassava. While community engagement is generally strong, it lacks consistency and structure, varying significantly between schools and remaining largely undocumented.[152]

Other countries in the region have adopted more structured approaches to community participation. Cooks in **Ethiopia** are paid in cash or in-kind and this has demonstrated better sustainability and consistency.[153] In **Sudan**, PTAs play a formal role in implementing school feeding by managing daily food preparation, contributing firewood, cleaning kitchen spaces, and ensuring that children receive their rations.[154] Community members also participate in food safety training, cooking demonstrations, and behavioral messaging workshops organized by WFP and partners.[155] These efforts help reinforce food hygiene practices and promote local ownership of the programme. These examples suggest that while volunteerism is valuable, formalizing community roles and offering modest incentives can lead to more reliable, equitable, and sustainable HGSF outcomes.

Integrating school-level committees and community-managed gardens into HGSF programmes fosters local ownership, improves oversight, and enhances nutritional outcomes. In **Burundi, Kenya** and **Ethiopia**, the implementation of HGSF programmes is

[150] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[151] "Burundi Schools Serve Up Success One Plate at a Time," World Vision, August 9, 2024, https://beta.worldvision.ca/en/learn/article.html/hunger/burundi-schools-serve-up-success-one-plate-at-a-time/burundi-schools-serve-up-success-one-plate-at-a-time.
[152] Ibid.
[153] "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024. https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Ethiopia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[154] "Sudan: Global Survey of School Meal Programs Country Report." Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2021. accessed April 20, 2025, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Sudan_2021_09_08.pdf.
[155] World Food Programme Country Office – Sudan, in discussion with the author, March 2025

managed by a school committee consisting of parents, teachers, and community members. This committee oversees most HGSF operations.[156, 157] In **Ethiopia**, health workers further control the nutritional quality of school meals.[158] Community ownership is also promoted through the creation and maintenance of school gardens. In **Kenya, Burundi and Ethiopia**, the produce from the gardens is fed to the children in schools, which motivates the community to uphold them.[159, 160]

Gender roles significantly shape HGSF across different regions of the world, with women playing a central role in their success. In **Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan,** women are responsible for food preparation, increasing the responsibility placed upon women to guarantee nutrition. In **Sudan**, women represent a large majority of cooks and PTA leaders, and many are engaged in WFP-supported capacity-strengthening programmes aimed at improving their skills in food preparation, hygiene, and income generation.[161] In **Burundi**, more than half of the cooks are women and they play a crucial role in agricultural labor that supports school feeding programmes. [162, 163] As a value-added income-generating strategy, women in **Burundi** form agricultural cooperatives to produce cereals and legumes for direct sale to schools, creating a sustainable revenue stream while supporting school feeding programmes.[164] Yet, gender inequalities persist in the production process through unequal access to resources (land, inputs and machinery), as well as disproportionate amounts of unpaid domestic labor.

[156] Ibid.
[157] Nica Langinger, "School Feeding Programs in Kenya," *Stanford Journal of International Relations* 30 (2011).
[158] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[159] Lora Boll, "Lessons in Resilience: Insights from School Feeding in Burundi," World Vision, December 11, 2024, https://www.wvi.org/opinion/view/lessons-resilience-insights-school-feeding-burundi.
[160] World Food Program Country Office – Burundi, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[161] "Sudan Annual Country Report 2023," World Food Programme, 2024, accessed April 20, 2025, https://www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report?operation_id=SD02&year=2023.
[162] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024,
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

NUTRITION-SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING

Sub-Saharan African countries are incorporating nutrition-sensitive programming in their respective HGSF programmes. Successful programmes improve nutritional outcomes by designing culturally relevant menus, engaging SHFs, strengthening food safety standards, and training cooks. They also integrate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) measures, such as handwashing stations and clean drinking water.[165] Many successful programmes opt to incorporate nutrition education by teaching healthy eating habits and cultivating school gardens, maximizing the benefits to children's well-being.[166]

Analyses of several nutrition-sensitive interventions show that these initiatives improve children's dietary diversity, improve school attendance and performance, and reduce rates of hunger. Nutrition-sensitive interventions make HGSF programmes into platforms for advancing child development, local food economies, and national nutrition goals.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Developing culturally relevant menus, supplemented with indigenous and, where available, fortified foods.** This promotes dietary diversity and supports local procurement, and market development. It also ensures that school meals align with community health goals and cultural preferences.

- **Integrating WASH measures and food safety protocols into feedings.** This improves health and education outcomes at the school level while reinforcing healthy habits. Successful HGSF programmes may provide handwashing stations, hygiene education, food safety training, and/or kitchen infrastructure.

- **Embedding nutrition education in school curricula.** This builds knowledge and healthy habits, and it empowers students to become 'nutrition ambassadors' within their communities.

Southern Africa: Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

In Southern Africa, nutrition-sensitive programming expands the impact and scope of HGSF programmes by investing in nutrition education, health, and community development. All South African countries examined in this report incorporate food safety and quality standards, primarily by training cooks and community members. Nutrition education and dietary diversity are also key pillars of the region's nutrition-sensitive programmes.

HGSF programmes that prioritize culturally relevant, diverse menus best positioned to address the underlying drivers of malnutrition, while supporting local and national goals.

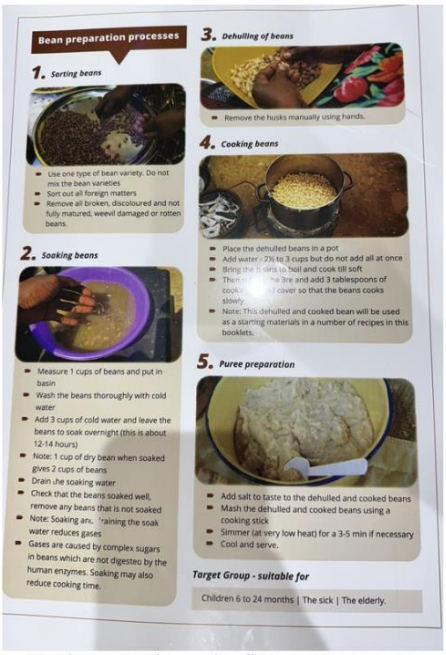
[165] Ayala Wineman et al., "School Meal Programs in Africa: Regional Results From the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs," *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (2022).
[166] Ibid.

In **Zambia**, school-based nutrition-sensitive programmes are a deliberate part of the government's broader strategy to address the relatively high national stunting rate, 32 percent. Zambian schools are strategically positioned as agents of change, where children receive nutritious meals and gain knowledge about healthy diets, which they can share with their communities.[167] The MoGE's Home-Grown School Meals Diet Diversification Plan takes a proactive approach to tackling the root causes of malnutrition.[168] Moreover, each region has a tailored "regional food basket" that includes a wide variety of food groups - cereals, legumes, vegetables, fruits, dairy - which contributes to dietary diversity. The Zambian National Food and Nutrition Commission holds the promotion of local foods as a key priority. While maize remains the primary staple in school meals - partly due to its dual role as a cash crop and its perceived social status - the commission is actively working to diversify school menus by incorporating more indigenous crops such as millet, cassava, sourdough, and sweet potatoes, which are also more drought-resistant. These efforts aim to reshape the narrative around indigenous crops and position schools as alternative markets that can stimulate demand. By doing so, the commission hopes to encourage smallholder farmers to grow these crops, which they currently avoid due to the lack of a reliable market.[169] Lastly, the National Food and Nutrition Commission is exploring the possibility of formally linking HGSF programmes to local cooperatives, overseen by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, to incentivize the consumption of proteins in school meals.[170] **Madagascar**'s HGSF programmes rely on the collaboration with WFP and School Nutrition Cells to ensure that school menus include fortified grains, protein, and leafy vegetables. Some HGSF menus include micronutrient powder, and others provide protein-fortified rice.[171] Additionally, the country's National Action Plan for Nutrition encourages expanding micronutrient and supplement provision during school meals.

Bulungu Primary School, Zambia

South African countries whose HGSF programmes purposefully integrate nutrition and hygiene education empower students to transfer knowledge to their households and communities, positioning schools as catalysts for development beyond the classroom.

[167] UN Food Systems Convenor - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[168] "Home Grown School Meals Diet Diversification Plan," Republic of Zambia, 2024.
[169] National Food and Nutrition Commission - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[170] Ibid.
[171] "Republic of Madagascar," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2020, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CR_Madagascar_07_2020.pdf.



Cooking Guidance leaflets, WFP Country Office Zambia (Lusaka)

Zambia promotes nutrition education and behavioral change interventions in accordance with its Nutrition Education Manual.[172] Schools use this manual to teach students about balanced diets and public health practices such as hygiene, handwashing, and safe water use. The manual aims to create a generation of nutrition ambassadors, capable of influencing household behaviors. Additionally, the establishment of school health and nutrition clubs embed nutrition-sensitive programmes within schools.[173] Zambian District Nutrition Coordinators from the National Food and Nutrition Commission help school districts implement the nutrition components of HGSF programmes. They facilitate nutrition education, ensure menu diversity, and help address any nutrition-related challenges in their district. WFP and the Zambian government have also produced leaflets and visual guides to support consistent and nutritious meal preparation practices across participating schools to increase local understanding of nutritional benefits of HGSF programmes.[174] In **Lesotho,** communities are organized into local Nutrition Hubs, whose members learn nutritional best practices and then disseminate this knowledge to schools.[175]

School-based interventions further foster healthy, safe learning environments and reinforce positive habits that support students' overall development in the region. In **Namibia**, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture introduced School-Led Total Sanitation (SLTS) Campaigns.[176] SLTS empower schools to assess specific sanitation situations and respond appropriately. Many schools have installed handwashing stations at the entrance of classrooms or taught students about good hygiene practices, for example. SLTS promotes positive habits, in the hopes that students will internalize these habits and champion them within their homes and communities. The Namibian Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Services, has integrated deworming campaigns into school feeding programmes, thereby improving education and health outcomes.[177] **Madagascar**'s National Action Plan for Nutrition includes a range of strategies to combat malnutrition, many of which are implemented at the school level. These include

[172] "Nutrition Education Guide," Republic of Zambia, 2022.
[173] Ibid.
[174] World Food Programme Country Office - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[175] "Lesotho Food and Nutrition Policy 2016-2025," Lesotho Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, 2016, https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/les209966.pdf.
[176] "Making Handwashing with Soap a Habit at School," United Nations Children's Fund, September 29, 2017, https://www.unicef.org/namibia/stories/making-handwashing-soap-habit-school.
[177] "Namibia School Feeding Policy 2018-2023," Republic of Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, 2018, https://www.fao.org/docs/devschoolfoodlibraries/materials-from-countries/namibian-school-feeding-policy-(2018-2023).pdf?sfvrsn=790f88f4_5.

promoting health education, deworming activities, and monitoring children's health and nutritional status.[178]

West Africa: Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

West African governments embrace HGSF in part because of its ability to boost children's nutritional and educational outcomes. Impact evaluations found that children who received nutritious, locally sourced meals experienced better nutritional outcomes (e.g. increased dietary diversity, reduced anemia and hunger, improved growth), in addition to improved educational outcomes (e.g. higher enrollment and attendance, lower dropout, and enhanced concentration and learning achievement).

Across West Africa, school meals are often the most nutritious meal children in low-income, rural areas receive - making their composition critically important. Menus increasingly feature nutrient-rich local ingredients, such as orange-fleshed sweet potatoes and fortified staples, underscoring the vital role of locally led, indigenous, and nutritious HGSF models in supporting student well-being, concentration, and school attendance.[179, 180] In **Benin**, community-driven trials have helped devise nutritious and culturally appropriate menus, which children enjoy.[181] It is reportedly standard to serve at least one egg per child per week, ensuring adequate protein intake.[182] All Beninois schools share the following food basket: rice, red beans, cowpeas, yellow corn, fermented cassava flour, Vitamin A enriched oil, iodized salt, vegetables and animal protein. In **The Gambia**, nutrition experts help design school menus, rooted in local food preferences and nutritional science. A recent impact evaluation of the country's HGSF programmes found that they not only increased attendance and lowered dropout rates, but they also enhanced children's food security, dietary diversity, and mental health.[183] Teachers also felt that providing nutritious meals in schools kept students safer, as fewer students left school midday to search for food.[184] Over time, these combined nutritional and educational benefits strengthen human capital development.

Dohouime Public Primary School, Benin (Djidja)

[178] "Madagascar (Niveau Nationale), Programme D'Alimentation, de Nutrition, et De Santé Scolaire II (2013 - 2015)," Republic of Madagascar, January 1, 2013, https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/fr/c/LEX-FAOC147736/.
[179] Ayala Wineman et al., "School Meal Programs in Africa: Regional Results From the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs," *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (2022).
[180] "The Effects of Child Nutrition on Academic Performance," World Food Programme, September 21, 2023, https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/effects-child-nutrition-academic-performance-how-school-meals-can-break-cycle-poverty/.
[181] World Food Program Field Office – Bohicon, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[182] Beninois National Agency for Food and Nutrition, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[183] "Gambia: Nourishing Minds and Bodies," *AllAfrica*, November 19, 2024, https://allafrica.com/stories/202411200021.html.
[184] Sololo Basic School, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

Food safety and hygiene standards are core pillars of HGSF in West African countries, ensuring that school meals are nutritious and safe for consumption, thereby protecting student health and sustaining community trust in the programme. In **Nigeria, Benin,** and **The Gambia**, HGSF implementers routinely offer food hygiene training, with a focus on safe cooking techniques, personal hygiene, and cleanliness. Some HGSF programmes also offer routine health screenings for people who handle food. In **Benin**, school cooks undergo annual health screenings, with a focus on communicable diseases.[185, 186] This ensures neither the cooks nor the meals pose a health risk to children. In **Nigeria**, a study involving 240 food vendors across three northeastern states revealed that access to information through radio, television, and food inspection institutions significantly improved vendors' food safety knowledge.[187] The study emphasized the need for disseminating food safety information via these channels. It also recommended that food vendors undergo formal training and possess food handling experience before participating in HGSF programmes.[188]

HGSF programmes in the region prioritize improved school infrastructure - upgrading kitchen safety and working conditions while equipping facilities with handwashing stations, clean water sources, and proper storage to reduce food spoilage and contamination risks.
In Bohicon, **Benin,** local authorities paid to install stoves with better ventilation, thereby reducing indoor smoke exposure and improving cook health. In **The Gambia**, school kitchens use hand-crafted chimneys to minimize smoke exposure.[189] Moreover, most Gambian schools have access to clean water, and all are equipped with kitchens and gender-segregated latrines through initiatives like the Korop Lower Basic Cycle School Water and Sanitation Project.[190] Similarly, in **Ghana**, the Veronica bucket, a handwashing apparatus with a tap and waste-water collection bowl, has encouraged proper handwashing practices, especially in areas without running water.[191] These measures collectively contribute to safer and more hygienic food preparation and consumption in schools.

East Africa: Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

In East Africa, nutrition-sensitive approaches are increasingly embedded in HGSF programmes, reflecting a growing commitment to improving student health through safer food systems, culturally appropriate meals, and targeted nutritional support.

HGSF programmes in East African countries increasingly focus on mitigating nutrition deficiencies, aiming to empower students to learn, grow, and thrive both academically and physically. In **Burundi**, the government works with schools and communities to develop menus, based on the availability of oil, vegetables, and cereals. Most menus only address

[185] World Food Program Field Office – Bohicon, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[186] Beninois National Agency for Food and Nutrition, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[187] Bulus Barnabas et al., "Food Safety Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Food Vendors Participating in Nigeria's School Feeding Program," *Journal für Verbraucherschutz und Lebensmittelsicherheit* 19, no. 1 (2024).
[188] Ibid.
[189] Sololo Basic School, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[190] "Korop Lower Basic Cycle School Water and Sanitation Project – The Gambia," Water Charity, accessed April 9, 2025, https://watercharity.com/project/korop-lower-basic-cycle-school-water-and-sanitation-project-the-gambia/.
[191] Isaac Monney et al., "Assessing Hand Hygiene Practices in Schools Benefiting from the Ghana School Feeding Programme," *Science Journal of Public Health* 2, no. 1 (2013).

basic food necessities; however, implementers aspire to better address micronutrient deficiencies by providing fortified foods or supplement pills. Some programmes already distribute iron, vitamin A, and iodine supplements, and a commodity voucher pilot reportedly helped schools purchase a greater volume of fortified food.[192] Implementers hope to build upon the successful pilot by increasing the local production of fortified foods.[193] **Burundi** further sets requirements for food baskets, nutrition education, and physical education to promote health and hygiene.[194] In **Ethiopia**, schools use fortified salt, oil, and wheat flour in their meals, ensuring that students receive iodine, zinc and vitamins A, B6, B12 and D3.[195] Schools also distribute iron and folic acid supplements.[196] **Kenya's** embrace of fortified crops has reportedly improved food diversity and vitamin intake.[197] HGSF programmes in the country include biofortified crops such as orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. Its Climate Friendly School Feeding Programme includes a corn-soya blend fortified with iron, zinc, thiamine, calcium, vitamins A, B12, and C.[198] In **Sudan,** school feeding programmes emphasize the local procurement of sorghum, wheat, and salt - staples that are widely grown, culturally accepted, and more resilient to local storage and transport constraints.[199] Fresh vegetables and fruits are also locally sourced where available, although limited infrastructure and conflict make consistent sourcing a challenge.[200]

Participatory menu planning - designed to ensure school meals are locally sourced and culturally accepted - is another key pillar of HGSF in the region. In **Sudan**, school feeding menus are centrally coordinated by WFP and in collaboration with local stakeholders. Menu planning is being piloted in several schools, with community engagement intended to better adapt food baskets to local production availability and cultural preferences.[201] In **Burundi**, schools adapt school meals to local contexts and diets by engaging community members in menu design. In one instance, schools chose to procure maize rather than rice to counteract supply chain disruptions, thereby improving food safety and seasonality.[202] Local procurement also enables schools to improve freshness, dietary diversity and seasonality of ingredients.

Several countries' HGSF programmes in strengthen food safety through upstream and downstream measures - ensuring safe handling from production and harvest to meal

[192] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[193] "Burundi: Country Strategic Plan (2024–2027)," World Food Programme, 2024, https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000154821.
[194] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, February 2, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[195] "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024. https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Ethiopia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Frederick Grant et al., "Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Interventions and Maternal and Child Nutrition Outcomes in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya," *Frontiers in Nutrition* 12 (2025).
[198] "Republic of Kenya," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024 https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kenya_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[199] "Sudan: Global Survey of School Meal Programs Country Report." Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2021. Accessed April 20, 2025. https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Sudan_2021_09_08.pdf.&#8203.
[200] Ibid.
[201] World Food Programme Country Office – Sudan, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[202] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.161517500.1209280113.1743865049-548498655.1695307431.

preparation and consumption in schools. **Kenya's** HGSF programmes embed food safety throughout the supply chain. Upstream, the focus is on safe production and harvesting practices. The National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy provides clear guidance on procurement, nutrition, and food safety, while the Ministry of Agriculture supports smallholder farmers by enforcing agricultural safety standards, providing certified seeds, and delivering training on proper post-harvest handling.[203] Downstream, Kenyan health workers lead monthly cooking demonstrations in schools using local ingredients and distribute Healthy Baby Toolkits to extend good practices beyond HGSF programmes and into households.[204] In **Burundi**, the Bureau of Standards and Quality Control tests local commodities to ensure safe levels of moisture and aflatoxins, as part of its commodity voucher pilot.[205] At school level, HGSF in the country includes training school cooks on food safety, as well as the implementation of deworming and handwashing campaigns.[206] **Ethiopia** also provides food safety and quality training to school cooks, with emphasis on limiting food waste by checking expiration dates.[207]In **Sudan**, the HGSF programme has placed increasing emphasis on food safety downstream, at the school level, where the WFP's food safety officers in partnership with community actors have introduced behavioral messaging and cooking demonstrations to reinforce safe handling, hygiene, and nutritional diversity.[208]

[203] Joyce Kamau et al., "Exploring Smallholder Farmers' Access and Participation in the Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Selected Counties of Kenya," *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (2025).
[204] Frederick Grant et al., "Nutrition-Sensitive Agricultural Interventions and Maternal and Child Nutrition Outcomes in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya," *Frontiers in Nutrition* 12 (2025).
[205] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.161517500.1209280113.1743865049-548498655.1695307431.
[206] Ibid.
[207] "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Ethiopia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[208] "Sudan Annual Country Report 2023," World Food Programme, 2024, Accessed April 20, 2025, https://www.wfp.org/operations/annual-country-report?operation_id=SD02&year=2023.

Innovative Approaches

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Innovation plays an important role in HGSF implementation – from digital procurement platforms that connect schools with SHFs, to climate-smart solutions and school gardens that mitigate environmental stress and supply chain disruptions. Innovation in home-grown school feeding is not restricted to one programmatic sector. It occurs across all sectors, thereby enhancing programme resilience, inclusivity, and adaptiveness.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Supporting school-based production units, such as school gardens.** This helps overcome transport bottlenecks, diversify meals, generate income, and teach agriculture skills. These units are particularly valuable in rural or hard-to-reach areas, where fresh produce is difficult to transport.

- **Employing digital procurement platforms.** These platforms are capable of bridging gaps between schools and SHFs. They allow schools to post their food needs in advance, giving farmers time to adjust and plan planting schedules.

- **Utilizing climate-smart and resource-efficient technologies.** This helps HGSF programmes adapt to environmental pressures, reduce costs, and increase energy efficiency. Some examples include mixed irrigation systems, solar cooking, bio-digesters, and low-waste kitchens. These technologies are especially relevant in SSA, where food production and fuel sources can be unpredictable.

Southern Africa: Innovative Approaches

Across the South African countries examined in this report, several noteworthy innovations in HGSF emerge - particularly in procurement practices, the alignment of food supply with school demand, and the integration of climate-resilient approaches.

Procurement innovations are taking shape, particularly in schools operating "production units" - typically consisting of vegetable and fruit gardens and, in some cases, chicken coops. Schools with production units were better able to ensure a steady supply of meals, generate supplementary income, support dietary diversity, and adapt to climate challenges.

Maimwene Primary School, Zambia

Moreover, school production units serve as practical learning spaces where students engage in educational activities related to nutrition and agriculture.

In **Zambia**, both rural and urban schools visited practiced some form of on-site farming. In smaller urban schools with limited space, school gardens were used primarily for income generation and sustaining climate-resilient practices through sack, open-field, or greenhouse farming. In contrast, larger rural schools - often facing logistical challenges - relied on school production units that not only contributed inputs for school meals but also generated income to support garden upkeep.

Zambia: Moving Procurement Toward School Self-Sufficiency

Maimwene Primary School, located in a rural area on the outskirts of Mumbwa in **Zambia's** Central Province, serves 1,018 pupils, with school meals provided three times a week - Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Meals include *nshima* (a maize-based staple) and a vegetable portion, such as *ifisashi* (greens with groundnuts) or spinach and tomato stew. The school is situated at the end of an 11 km clay road, often rendered nearly impassable by alternating heavy rains and droughts. While transporting dry staples like maize is already difficult, delivering fresh produce is nearly impossible. This logistical challenge was the primary reason for investing - initially with WFP's support - in a 1.5-hectare school garden. The garden produces cabbage, Irish potatoes, rabe, onions, tomatoes, maize, beans, and groundnuts, among other crops. These are used in school meals, while surplus is sold on the market. Profits are reinvested in inputs like fertilizers to keep the garden functional year-round. With water tanks and irrigation pipes donated by WFP, the school grows both rain-fed and irrigated crops, boosting climate resilience. Two school-employed farmers manage the garden alongside students working in rotation. This hands-on participation fosters agricultural and technological skill transfer, which - according to the School Principal - students can later apply as livelihood options and share within their families and communities. The school also uses chicken manure as natural fertilizer from its on-site chicken coop. Though the government still supplies maize, beans, and groundnuts, the School Principal emphasizes that these are now supplementary - the school can independently sustain its feeding programme. This self-sufficient model proves to be an effective way to address supply bottlenecks and improve the sustainability of HGSF. [209]

Zambia's Bulungu Primary School, located in Mumbwa's peri-urban zone, has limited arable land available - due to the school's proximity to town -, and experiences high theft rates from nearby communities, which prevented further investment in animal coops or garden expansion. With 3,240 pupils, the garden's output is not sufficient to support school meal provision. Instead, the garden serves two key purposes: it generates income through the sale of produce, which is reinvested in the purchase of key cooking inputs such as salt and oil,

[209] Maimwene Primary School Principal - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

and it acts as a vital learning space.[210] With WFP's support, the school introduced climate-resilient practices including crop rotation, green bags, hydroponics, and drip irrigation. These innovations make the garden an important educational tool, where students learn sustainable farming and irrigation techniques they can take back to their households and communities.[211]

South African countries are experimenting with digital tools for value chain coordination in HGSF, to support the alignment between demand (e.g., schools) and supply (e.g., SHFs), improve farmers' production planning and capacity, enhance meal diversity, and streamlining the sourcing and distribution of food to schools.

From Farm to School: Namibia's E-Tololi Digital Platform

In **Namibia**, WFP, in collaboration with the tech startup Tololi, is piloting an e-commerce platform called *E-tololi* across five regions. The platform connects schools participating in HGSF programmes with nearby SHFs in need of market access for their fresh produce. Schools can log their produce needs online, enabling SHFs to plan and adjust their crop production accordingly. This not only allows SHFs to benefit from a stable HGSF market but also helps ensure greater diversity in school meals - overcoming a common challenge where farmers are given too little notice to grow a variety of crops in time to meet schools' needs.[212, 213]

In **Zambia**, digital innovation in school feeding is being driven by the need to improve food accountability, ensure consistent commodity supply to schools, and enhance SHFs' production planning. The WFP is currently piloting a digital food tracking system in 15 schools in the country, designed to monitor the entire HGSF value chain. The system includes an alert mechanism to notify local district authorities when school food stocks are low, enabling timely procurement through aggregators and cooperatives, minimizing delays, and better aligning supply with demand. Connectivity challenges and high teacher turnover - such as at Bulungu Primary School in rural Mumbwa - slowed implementation. Despite these setbacks, WFP field officers in Mumbwa remain optimistic that the innovation will play a key role in streamlining and strengthening HGSF procurement.[214] The Virtual Farmers Market application *Maano*, introduced in **Zambia** by WFP's Innovation Accelerator in 2016, was also identified as a promising tool that - if tailored to school feeding - could enhance SHFs' market access and better align their production with the needs of HGSF programmes. Currently, *Maano* functions as an e-commerce platform where farmers can advertise their surplus produce and connect with buyers seeking specific crops. Given its capacity to match supply

[210] Bulungu Primary School Principal - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[211] World Food Programme Field Office - Mumbwa, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[212] "Namibia Country Brief," World Food Programme, September 2022, https://namibia.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/WFP%20Namibia%20Country%20Brief%20-%20September%202022%20FINAL.pdf.
[213] World Food Programme Country Office - Namibia, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[214] World Food Programme Field Office - Zambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

and demand efficiently, the platform holds significant potential to support more responsive and decentralized procurement systems for HGSF.[215]

Stakeholders in the region have expressed interest in adopting digital tools for menu planning optimization, such as SMP+, noting positive outcomes in countries where these platforms are already in use. This interest is accompanied by a recognition of the need to balance external innovations with nationally owned systems to ensure sustainability and contextual relevance.

In both **Madagascar** and **Lesotho**, the rollout of WFP's School Meal Plus (SMP+), an online tool to design school meals using locally sourced ingredients, drives significant improvement in HGSF. In **Madagascar**, SMP+ substantially contributed to enhancing national HGSF programmes by developing cost-effective menus based on locally available foods. In 2024, 59 percent of school meals' food was sourced locally, supporting local food systems and promoting the inclusion of staple crops, grown locally by SHFs, in school meals. In **Lesotho**, SMP+ is primarily used as an advocacy tool. By showcasing how easily meal planning can be done using locally sourced ingredients, the platform played a key role in securing a remarkable 65 percent increase in the HGSF budget between 2023 and 2024. In addition to influencing funding, it also enhanced the nutritional diversity of school meals - doubling the number of food groups included from four to eight and incorporating ten new locally available ingredients.[216]

West Africa: Innovative Approaches

In West Africa, HGSF programmes embrace innovative approaches to enhance sustainability. From climate-smart adaptations to resource-efficient practices, these approaches reflect a shift toward environmentally conscious and context-specific solutions.

Climate-resilient innovations are enabling more sustainable, locally grounded HGSF programmes. In **The Gambia**, the Gambian Agriculture and Food Security Project provides farmers subsidies for climate-resilient seeds and water management, and programme officials expressed their intention to introduce solar cooking technology in schools.[217] Similarly, in **Ghana,** WFP piloted a climate-smart agriculture project aimed at supporting SHFs. The project focuses on improving yields through sustainable practices like crop diversification and efficient water use, while also providing farmers with climate information and access to inputs. In collaboration with government and research institutions, the initiative aims to boost food security, resilience, and livelihoods.[218]

[215] "Maano - Virtual Farmers Market," World Food Programme, accessed April 4, 2025, https://innovation.wfp.org/project/virtual-farmers-market.
[216] "School Meal Planner (SMP) Plus," World Food Programme, accessed April 4, 2025, https://innovation.wfp.org/project/school-meal-planner-smp-plus.
[217] Gambia Agriculture & Food Security Project, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[218] World Food Programme Country Office – Ghana, in discussion with the author, February 2025.

Wonder cooking bag, Benin- Dohouime Public Primary School, Djidja

In **Benin**, the Beninois government and WFP introduced cooking bags to reduce cooking time and energy usage. Once a meal is halfway cooked, it is placed in the bag, which retains heat and completes the cooking process by significantly reducing energy usage.[219]

Resource-efficient solutions implemented in West African countries in schools enhance the long-term viability and operational efficiency of HGSF programmes. In **Togo**, the WFP, in partnership with the government, provided 20 bio-digesters to school gardens.[220] Bio-digesters break down organic waste, including food scraps, into biogas and fertilizer, used for clean cooking and gardening.[221] Bio-digesters have the potential to reduce schools' demand for firewood, which is expensive and environmentally damaging.

In **Benin**, schools work around limited water access by implementing grow-bag farming, planting directly within soil bags to decrease water use. Additionally, in Ahossougbeta Public Primary School, the Beninois Food and Nutrition Agency (ANAN) implemented a biogas cooking stove programme. This complemented existing compost and school garden programmes, creating a circular closed-loop economy.[222]

Soil Bag Farming for Dohouime Public Primary School, (Djidja), Benin

Nutrition deficiencies have spurred innovations in the use of local food crops in the region, driving efforts to integrate indigenous and underutilized species into school meals. In **Benin**, the Healthy Food Africa Project conducted a 2022 assessment of food availability across 12 primary school canteens, evaluating the diversity of food groups included in school meals. While the study revealed limited representation of micronutrient-rich groups like fruits and vegetables, it served as a catalyst for renewed investment in integrating

[219] World Food Programme Field Office - Bohicon, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[220] Alao Hycinthe and Agbisso Wanata, "The Experience of School Canteens in Togo," accessed April 7, 2025, https://gcnf.org/school-canteens-the-experience-of-home-grown-school-feeding-hgsf-boosts-the-dynamism-of-school-canteens-in-togo/.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Public Primary School of Dohouime, Benin, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

indigenous crops - such as baobab - into school menus.[223] In parallel, several Beninese schools are leading efforts in organic school gardening, focusing on the preservation and cultivation of neglected and underutilized species (NUS), reinforcing both biodiversity and nutrition goals.[224]

East Africa: Innovative Approaches

Innovative approaches in school feeding are emerging as core aspects of programming in East Africa, particularly regarding gender-inclusion, nutrition, and sustainability. Comprehensive documentation of these practices and their impact remains limited across multiple countries.

Gender-responsive HGSF programming is making school feeding more responsive to community needs while empowering women and strengthening their roles across the value chain. **Kenya,** with support from the WFP, is shifting towards gender-responsive school feeding, to reframe equity considerations in programming as a foundational and integral design principle rather than an add-on.[225] A gender evaluation, conducted as part of the national social protection framework with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and in collaboration with the Kenya Economic and Social Inclusion Programme and the Home-Grown School Meals initiative, has guided these efforts in maximizing food security and nutrition outcomes, while working to strengthen women's empowerment, and improve programme implementation.[226] These initiatives are innovative shifts that position inclusion as essential to programme design, delivery, and accountability, and ultimately have the potential to improve the programme impact, responsiveness, and sustainability.

The integration of dietary diversity rooted in local crops, as well as waste management solutions, are distinguishing features of HGSF programmes in East Africa. In **Kenya**, 'ugly' vegetables have emerged as an innovative approach for providing healthy school meals at a low cost.

[223] "Analysis of the school food environment in urban and peri-urban area of southern Benin to design nutrition intervention", HealthyFoodAfrica, October 7, 2022, https://healthyfoodafrica.eu/publications/analysis-of-the-school-food-environment-in-urban-and-peri-urban-area-of-southern-benin-to-design-nutrition-intervention/
[224] Lara Barangé, "Lunch Matters: How school meals enhance nutrition, education and agrobiodiversity in Africa," Alliance Biodiversity, February 27, 2025, https://alliancebioversityciat.org/stories/school-meals-nutrition-agrobiodiversity-africa#:~:text=As%20well%20as%20benefitting%20local,farming%20practices%20and%20local%20sourcing.
[225] "2030 School Meals Sprint," Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, 2024 https://globalallianceagainsthungerandpoverty.org/new/2030-school-meals-sprint-press-release/.
[226] Ibid.

Kenya: Providing Nutritious Meals While Reducing Food Waste

In **Kenya**, an estimated 75 metric tons of farm-grown produce - primarily destined for export - is discarded daily due to aesthetic imperfections. That's the equivalent of 600,000 tomatoes that are nutritious but misshapen, blemished, or otherwise deemed unsuitable for international packaging standards. Recognizing the potential of this wasted food, the WFP launched an innovative pilot project, named ***Transformers***, to **redirect** these **edible but overlooked vegetables from landfills to school lunch plates**. Supported by WFP's Innovation Accelerator and the Australian Government, the initiative aimed to simultaneously **reduce food waste and enhance the nutritional content of school meals** in three underserved schools on the outskirts of Nairobi.

In partnership with the Dutch social enterprise ENVIU, WFP connected with two export companies willing to divert surplus produce. Rather than discarding these vegetables, the companies delivered them to The Good Food Company, a Nairobi-based caterer contracted by WFP. There, the produce was prepared and delivered as part of the schools' daily meals. Building on the success of this off-site catering model, WFP plans to expand the approach, working more closely with fresh produce exporters and exploring on-site meal preparation at schools. This next phase is expected to deepen school ownership and pave the way for a sustainable, locally managed school feeding system - while continuing to address the twin challenges of food waste and child malnutrition.[227]

[227] "Ugly Veggies Destined for the Dump Now Feed Thousands of Students," World Food Programme USA, 2021 https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/ugly-veggies-feed-kenyan-students/

Monitoring & Evaluation

MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E)

HGSF programmes in SSA rely on M&E systems to track school attendance, food distribution, and operational costs. However, they often provide limited insights into nutritional outcomes and the broader livelihood impacts on SHF and their communities. Although paper-based M&E remains the most common approach at both school and local government levels, many countries are now piloting digital tools to enhance data quality and coverage. Some have already begun using digital platforms such as WFP's School Connect. To ensure long-term impact, HGSF programmes must invest in scalable monitoring systems that capture both programme outputs and community-level outcomes. This requires holistic evaluations and alignment with international guidance - such as that provided by The World Bank and FAO - to broaden the scope of impact assessment efforts.

Some overarching good practices include:

- **Embracing digital tools and data dashboards to monitor programme activity.** Integrating digitization and…allows schools to report attendance, enrollment, feeding days, and procurement, then transmit this information to programme managers in near real-time. This, in turn, facilitates programme oversight, helping managers to identify programme strengths and weaknesses and to allocate resources for maximum effect.

- **Incorporating global guidance to expand the scope and depth of HGSF impact evaluations.**
  - FAO's 2022 guidance note on assessing the impact of HGSF programmes[228] provides practical tools to strengthen and broaden M&E frameworks in-country, outlining a stepwise approach to HGSF impact evaluation - ranging from developing a theory of change to crafting context-specific sampling strategies and measuring multi-dimensional outcome. This structured framework offers countries in SSA a practical foundation for designing more rigorous and locally adapted impact evaluations.
  - The World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) provides a structured framework for countries seeking to conduct holistic evaluations of their HGSF programmes. These assessments help benchmark national systems against international standards, identify implementation gaps, and generate evidence that can support policy reform and donor advocacy. Countries undertaking this process also benefit from the World Bank's technical support and expertise throughout the evaluation.

[228] "Impact Evaluation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes. Methodological Guidelines", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2022, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3b804efa-2b2c-4594-89d5-59b20a2d9b70/content

Southern Africa: Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

Governments, international organizations, and schools each play a role in programme monitoring in Southern Africa. As M&E programmes expand, implementers focus on using digital tools to enhance monitoring systems and support evidence-based policymaking for HGSF. Limited infrastructure inhibits monitoring, and data collection disproportionately focuses on educational outcomes, at the expense of economic, health, and nutrition outcomes.

Across the region, monitoring at school level is documented on paper and focuses on students' attendance and food stock usage. Data is aggregated and shared monthly or quarterly with the respective government ministries by school principals and administrative staff. This approach, while critical, often results in delays of several months between when data is collected and evaluated. Therefore, implementation changes are subjected to delays, limiting the potential of M&E tools to effectively improve HGSF programmes. This is the case of **Lesotho**, where WFP field staff, with support from the Ministry of Education, collect data monthly utilizing checklists provided by the WFP's Country Office.[229] A similar process takes place in **Madagascar,** where school-level data is collected manually monthly, and later digitized and transmitted to regional and central governments.[230]

Implementing a phased, structured approach to monitoring that builds local capacity and gradually expands in scope is a valuable and effective practice. In **Namibia**, this progression is clearly reflected in the evolution of M&E practices throughout WFP's HGSF pilots. In the pilots' first year, monitoring followed a three-step process: establishing a baseline, conducting a midterm survey, and completing an end-of-year review. In the second year, WFP supported the development of a government-led M&E framework, introducing quarterly reviews that tracked key indicators such as school attendance, student focus and performance, and meal diversity. By the third year, monitoring expanded to include data on smallholder farmer growth and supply-demand dynamics, in coordination with the Ministry of Education.[231] This evolution demonstrates how gradually scaling M&E efforts not only strengthens local ownership but also supports more holistic, evidence-based programming, reflecting the multifaceted goals of HGSF.

Some challenges to generating timely, comprehensive data on the full multi-sector impact of HGSF include gaps in digital monitoring infrastructure, overstretched government capacity, and overlapping institutional responsibilities. This is the case of **Zambia**, where school principals maintain extensive ledger systems to systematically track daily student attendance, monitor food deliveries against existing stock, and record the number of meals distributed each day.[232] While this meticulous monitoring supports efficient management of school feeding operations and helps prevent stockouts, challenges persist in the timely sharing of data across different levels of government and ministries. These delays hinder the

[229] World Food Programme Country Office – Lesotho, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[230] World Food Programme Country Office – Madagascar, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[231] World Food Programme Country Office – Namibia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[232] World Food Programme Field Office – Mumbwa, in discussion with the author, March 2025.

effective use of monitoring data to inform procurement decisions and allocate funding for the HGSF programme.

South African countries rely on academic institutions and international organizations to conduct comprehensive evaluations of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) to inform programming. In 2016, the World Bank's SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) initiative - an international diagnostic tool that evaluates education systems against evidence-based standards - assessed **Zambia**'s HGSF programme across five key policy dimensions: policy frameworks, financial capacity, institutional coordination, programme design and implementation, and community participation. This evaluation highlighted the programme's inclusion in development planning documents but noted weak financial mechanisms and the absence of a formal monitoring and evaluation system. Ultimately, this SABER assessment provided **Zambia** with a concrete action plan to inform WFP's technical support and guide the transition to nationally owned, home-grown school feeding in the country.[233]

In **Zambia**, two relatively recent and in-depth evaluations - by FAO (2021) and the University of Zambia (2017) – further provide valuable insights into HGSF outcomes.[234, 235] The FAO report takes a broad perspective, assessing HGSF's impact across educational, agricultural, and nutritional indicators - including school attendance, smallholder farmer participation, dietary diversity, and household income. The findings show that HGSF improved school attendance, enhanced dietary diversity among students, expanded market access for smallholder farmers, and strengthened household food security. The University of Zambia dissertation adopts a more localized and implementation-focused lens, examining school-level outcomes such as enrollment, academic performance, and community involvement. It concludes that HGSF led to increased enrollment and improved student concentration, although challenges like irregular food supply and limited community capacity affected implementation. Notably, FAO's 2022 guidance note offers key insights into the impact of HGSF on smallholder farmers in the country. While increased demand can raise smallholder incomes, broader outcomes - like income stability, farm investment, or crop diversification - require specific enabling conditions. In **Zambia**, for example, farmers often reallocated resources within their existing crop mix rather than diversify, due to constraints in land, labor, and inputs. These findings provide important lessons for other countries seeking to strengthen their understanding of programme impact.[236]

[233] "Zambia SABER Country Report 2016," The World Bank, 2016, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/665611500361178427/pdf/117521-WP-SABER-EPS-Zambia-Country-Report.pdf.
[234] Ervin Prifti and Alejandro Grinspun, "Impact evaluation of the Home Grown School Feeding and Conservation Agriculture Scale-up Programs in Zambia," Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/db79808e-f335-4a9c-8369-ba2997e36411/content.
[235] Emmanuel Banda, "An evaluation of the implementation of home grown school feeding programme in selected primary schools in Nyimba district, Zambia," University of Zambia, November 2017, https://dspace.unza.zm/server/api/core/bitstreams/2257b5a7-aa6f-4629-bca9-8d1ee41d6c9b/content.
[236] "Impact Evaluation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes. Methodological Guidelines", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2022, https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3b804efa-2b2c-4594-89d5-59b20a2d9b70/content

In both **Namibia and Madagascar**, WFP conducted a "decentralized evaluation" of national school feeding programmes. In **Namibia**, the evaluation was carried down jointly with the Ministry of Education for the 2012–2018 period. The report assesses HGSF's impact across educational, nutritional, and economic dimensions, noting improved school attendance, more regular meals, and better dietary diversity. It places particular emphasis on local production, highlighting how food procurement from smallholder farmers and local suppliers boosted rural livelihoods and strengthened school–community linkages. However, the evaluation highlights challenges in scaling local sourcing, including weak supply chain coordination, limited production capacity, and insufficient institutional support.[237] In **Madagascar**, WFP's evaluation of the 2015–2019 period highlights result comparable to those observed in Namibia, including improved educational outcomes. While local food procurement was part of the programme, it fell short of fostering the level of community ownership outlined in national policies, largely due to limited technical and financial capacity at the local level. The report also notes gaps in consistent and effective monitoring at both local and regional levels, emphasizing the need for stronger institutional frameworks to sustain and expand home-grown school feeding initiatives.[238]

West Africa: Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

Most West African countries have successfully implemented reporting frameworks for HGSF. While comprehensive approaches, including data-driven tools that enable real-time oversight, have yet to fully materialize, HGSF implementers repeatedly cited M&E as a priority for their respective programmes.

Countries that delegate power to communities and local implementers have less insight into HGSF programmes than those that centralize authority. **Ghana's** HGSF programme employs private-sector caterers to manage many aspects of the HGSF supply chain from procurement to cooking, resulting in less transparent operations.[239] **The Gambia's** decentralized approach empowers communities to make decisions but also reduces

Sololo Primary School, The Gambia

[237] "Decentralized Evaluation of Namibia National School Feeding Programme " World Food Programme, 2020, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000119629/download/?_ga=2.114367239.1211320846.1745378675-1430782854.1743788011

[238] "Évaluation Décentralisée: Contribution des Cantines Scolaires aux Résultats de l'Éducation dans le sud de Madagascar," World Food Programme, May 2020, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000118909/download/?_ga=2.86122008.1211320846.1745378675-1430782854.1743788011

[239] World Food Programme Country Office – Ghana, in discussion with the author, February 2025.

implementers' visibility into daily operations. One potential solution would be developing reporting requirements for the communities that implement HGSF programmes. This would require resources and human capital investments.

Paper-based systems tend to experience delays or display inconsistencies, inhibiting efficient monitoring. **Benin's** model partially relies on paper-based ledgers, monitoring daily quantity of food consumed per ingredient and children's yearly height and weight measurement to assess their growth.[240] WFP's School Connect platform offers a solution for more continuous and timelier M&E, informing programmatic decisions and management by creating user-friendly dashboards with data on school enrollment, attendance (by gender), school feedings and procurement.[241] **Benin, Guinea-Bissau,** and **Senegal** each use School Connect, and **The Gambia** was rolling out a pilot in 50 schools as of mid-2025.[242, 243]

Current M&E tools provide a starting point, but opportunities exist to enhance the scope of data they collect and disseminate. In **The Gambia**, monitoring tools do not measure the health impacts of school feeding on children, nor the economic impact of providing market access to SHFs.[244] Implementers rely on the existence of contracts between farmer cooperatives and schools to depict the economic effect of HGSF programmes.[245] This does not fully capture the co-benefits of HGSF programmes.

To assess the wider benefits of HGSF programmes, West African countries have leveraged joint evaluations, launched in partnership with international organizations, to fill M&E gaps. For example, in 2025, **The Gambia** used a $300,000 grant from the Islamic Development Bank to conduct a strategic review of domestic HGSF programmes, using the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) exercise. Within the region, twelve countries–**Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal,** and **Sierra Leone**–have also completed SABER exercises.[246]

Findings from these SABER assessments highlight programme strengths, including robust policy frameworks, strong political commitment, well-defined governance structures, and positive impacts on student attendance and nutritional outcomes. The evaluations also identify challenges, often related to financing mechanisms and the need for greater integration with agricultural policies.[247] HGSF implementers can rely on comprehensive joint evaluations to bridge M&E gaps as they scale their own programmes.

[240] World Food Programme Field Office - Bohicon, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[241] World Food Programme Country Office – Gambia, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[242] Ibid.
[243] "Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa," World Food Programme, May 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000158900/download/?_ga=2.251640261.277838314.1740506839-1204912079.1738099657.
[244] Gambia Agriculture & Food Security Project, in discussion with the author, March 2025.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Linda Schultz et al., "The SABER School Feeding Policy Tool," *Frontiers in Public Health* (2024): 5.
[247] "SABER Annual Report 2020," World Bank, 2020, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/810711624283378763/pdf/SABER-Annual-Report-2020-Retrospective-Review-Transforming-Education-Systems-Accelerating-Foundational-Learning-for-Everyone.pdf.

East Africa: Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

East African countries have demonstrated considerable progress in leveraging robust M&E frameworks and innovative approaches to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their school feeding programmes.

In recent years, there has been a significant scale-up of M&E efforts in the region. In **Burundi** monitoring and evaluation activities for school feeding programmes have traditionally been led by WFP, but NGOs are increasingly becoming involved in this process. While in 2023 only 35 percent of schools were covered, the current pilot initiative – linked to 12 cooperatives, and serving about 50 schools - aims to expand M&E activities to 75 percent of schools. This expansion aligns with WFP's strategy for 2020-2030, which emphasizes enhancing the coverage and quality of the national school feeding programme.[248]
Similarly, in **Ethiopia,** in depth impact evaluations, particularly for HGSF implementation in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region, have been conducted. Additionally, there is ongoing effort to integrate school feeding indicators in the Education Information Management System (EMIS) and capture school feeding data annually.[249]

Technological integration in HGSF impact evaluations is gaining momentum across East African countries**.** In **Kenya,** the "Dishi na County" initiative exemplifies a successful public-private partnership, combining government resources with innovations from social enterprises like *Food for Education.* This programme utilizes Near Field Communication (NFC) technology to collect real-time data on meal consumption, attendance, and payments. Such data-driven approaches have enabled schools to adjust meal preparations, expand services to more schools, and refine menus to meet nutritional needs.[250] These advancements demonstrate a commitment to leveraging technology and data-driven approaches to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of school feeding programmes in EA.

All countries surveyed apply targeting mechanisms to determine school or student eligibility for HGSF, though the specific criteria used - such as poverty levels, food insecurity, or geographic vulnerability - vary widely**. Burundi's** National School Feeding Programme targets preschool and primary school, with a focus on communities suffering from high levels of food insecurity, absenteeism, and school dropouts.[251] **Ethiopia** targets its intervention based on grade levels, geography and the levels of food insecurity, droughts, or conflict that affect a school and the surrounding community. It also targets schools with high rates of school dropout and low rates of girls' school enrollment.[252] **Kenya's** school feeding

[248] "Pilot Impact Evaluation of the Commodity Voucher Procurement Model in Burundi," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161805/download/?_ga=2.161517500.1209280113.1743865049-548498655.1695307431.
[249] "Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP's USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme's Support in Afar and Oromia Regions in Ethiopia (2019 to 2025)," World Food Programme, August 2024, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000163163/download/.
[250] Elisheba Kiru, Nicola Okero, and Ruth Muendo, "Implementing School Feeding in Kenya: Unlocking Scalability," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, January 2024, https://gcnf.org/implementing-school-feeding-in-kenya-unlocking-scalability/.
[251] "Republic of Burundi," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Burundi_2024_Report_R1.pdf.
[252] "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Ethiopia_2024_Report_R2.pdf.

programme targets areas with high levels of food insecurity, focusing on arid and semi-arid lands, where food scarcity is most pronounced.[253] In **Sudan**, the programme utilizes WFP's Vulnerability Assessment Mapping to identify regions with high food insecurity, displacement, and limited access to education to ensure that resources are directed to the relatively stable areas most in need.[254]

[253] "Republic of Kenya," Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024 https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kenya_2024_Report_R2.pdf.
[254] "Sudan: Global Survey of School Meal Programs Country Report." Global Child Nutrition Foundation, accessed April 20, 2025, https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Sudan_2021_09_08.pdf.&#8203.

Conclusions & Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to strengthen HGSF programmes across SSA range from embedding rights-based legal frameworks and decentralizing procurement, to strengthening digital infrastructure and integrating climate-smart technologies. The purpose of these recommendations is to assist implementers in institutionalizing HGSF as a scalable intervention for food security, child development, and rural economic empowerment.

Policy and Enabling Environment

Clearly defined policies and strong legislation enshrine programme stability and viability. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, policies differ dramatically, ranging from lapsed legal frameworks to loosely defined HGSF programmes. All countries demonstrated a degree of willingness to create HGSF policies–or to embed them within other frameworks.

- ***Utilize and integrate a rights-based approach to school feeding:*** A rights-based approach to home-grown school feeding would involve access to local and nutritious meals in schools as a legal entitlement rather than a discretionary benefit. This creates legal obligations for governments to provide school meals, and it empowers communities to demand accountability and coverage if obligations go unmet. It also prevents exclusion by making home-grown school feeding universal.

- ***Differentiate home-grown school feeding from general school feeding:*** HGSF programmes explicitly link local agriculture, nutrition, and economic development to the provision of school meals. Home-grown school feeding differs from general school feeding, because it mandates local procurement, enforces multi-sector coordination, and creates agricultural markets. Until home-grown school feeding principles are enshrined in policy, governments probably will continue to fall short of local procurement targets and multi-sectoral coordination. **Ethiopia**'s policies requiring local procurement promotes the scalability of HGSF programmes and entitles local communities to the related benefits.

- ***Implement multi-stakeholder steering committees:*** Successful HGSF programmes institutionalize multi-sector coordination and hold each sector accountable for its contributions. Implementing steering committees also promotes transparency and garners more attention for HGSF programmes. A failure to institutionalize coordination risks fragmentation–providing too much to some communities and too little to others. **Benin's** ANAN and **Zambia's** School Health and Nutrition Directorate are strong examples of how countries can institutionalize coordination and improve outcomes.

Innovative Financing and Sustainability

Well-structured and stable funding models guarantee the effective implementation and long-term sustainability of HGSF programmes. While financing mechanisms vary across Sub-Saharan Africa, countries that allocate dedicated budget lines, localize cost management,

and diversify financing streams are better equipped to manage risk, deliver on programme objectives, and address funding bottlenecks in the long-term.

- ***Set dedicated, protected budgets for HGSF programmes:*** HGSF programmes become financially sustainable when governments establish dedicated, protected budget lines earmarked for 'home-grown' school feeding. This ensures that governments prioritize home-grown school feeding, and that programmes continue to receive resources over time. **Zambia**'s mandated annual increases in the HGSF budget are an example of how countries can generate programme momentum and secure funds. This is an accountability mechanism that guarantees incremental increases in funding over time.

- ***Shift towards more decentralized financing models, where possible:*** Decentralized models ensure that financial plans account for end-to-end costs, such as transport, procurement, storage, and distribution, thereby improving the operational efficiency of HGSF programmes. They also mitigate the risk that national budgets do not match local conditions. Allocating funds directly to local organizations, such as regional education offices or school boards, empowers local people to direct programme resources and makes HGSF programmes more adaptable to on-the-ground conditions.

HGSF Value Chain and Procurement

HGSF value chains are becoming more inclusive and resilient. Many countries are moving towards decentralized or hybrid models of procurement, ensuring that local agricultural supply corresponds to school food demand. Successful HGSF programmes emphasize community involvement, short supply chains, and SHF integration.

- ***Expand and deepen decentralized procurement systems where possible:*** Decentralized procurement aligns local agricultural supply with school food demand, reducing transport costs, enabling fresher meals, and providing a reliable market for SHFs. **Burundi**'s transition toward a decentralized CV model demonstrates that decentralizing procurement builds local capacity, improves procurement efficiency, reinforces local food systems, and shortens supply chains. Nevertheless, decentralization only works when local capacity is supported by adequate infrastructure, clear policy, and sufficient funding. In some contexts, centralization may be necessary to ensure oversight and scalability.

- ***Invest in rural infrastructure, with a focus on transport and storage:*** Limited transport and storage capacity consistently cause bottlenecks. These deficits not only lead to spoilage, delays, and higher costs but also limit the amount of food SHFs can provide to schools, as well as the amount of food that schools can safely store. Locally driven infrastructure improvements would address these challenges by enhancing food safety, reducing waste, and enabling schools to store larger quantities of produce for longer periods. Such upgrades would empower SHFs to participate more effectively in school feeding programs and help schools maintain consistent meal provision. **Zambia**'s Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is a key mechanism for addressing these

infrastructure deficits. The CDF provides direct funding to local authorities for targeted investments in infrastructure, including school facilities, water supply systems, and storage solutions

- ***Strengthen support for smallholder farmers:*** SHFs are central to the success of HGSF programmes but often experience limited market access, input constraints, and insufficient institutional support. Embedding community education campaigns and garnering SHF participation into the early stages of home-grown school feeding roll-out is thus critical. As **The Gambia** demonstrates, aggregators can play a valuable role in SHF empowerment by providing peer-to-peer mentorship, facilitating procurement and delivery, and investing in local production capacity.

Community Engagement

Community engagement models can improve HGSF programme ownership and outcomes. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, practices that pair clear volunteer roles with modest incentives and leverage school gardens as hubs for participation effectively sustain community engagement and link communities directly to home-grown school feeding's benefits.

- ***Formalize and incentivize community roles within HGSF programmes:*** Clearly defined responsibilities–whether in food management committees, school garden operations, or canteen oversight–foster more consistent and accountable community engagement. HGSF programmes that pair clear responsibilities with modest in-kind or monetary incentives, such as food baskets or stipends for cooks and volunteers, are also more effective in retaining engagement, especially among women. Embedding these mechanisms into school-level planning and budgeting processes can strengthen continuity of HGSF programmes without placing significant financial strain on governments or schools.

- ***Leverage school gardens for participation, skill transfer, and livelihood support:*** School gardens create tangible opportunities for communities to participate in - and benefit from - HGSF programmes. School gardens have served as entry points for both parents and students to contribute labor while acquiring knowledge of climate-resilient agriculture, nutrition practices, and new farming technologies - all skills that transfer back to the household, helping strengthen food security and resilience. The produce that gardens grow ultimately supplements school meals, uplifting both students and community-members.

Nutrition-Sensitive Programming

Home-grown school feeding is a multi-sector intervention, and successful programmes prioritize culturally relevant foods, incorporate nutrition education, and promote good hygiene. This improves children's well-being and positions HGSF programmes as platforms for advancing child development, local food systems, and national nutrition goals.

- ***Anchor HGSF in local, culturally relevant nutrition:*** Nutrient-rich, diverse meals address micronutrient deficiencies that would otherwise hinder students' learning and development. Menus that reflect local food preferences and include indigenous foods are more readily accepted by communities. This is evident in **The Gambia** and **Benin**, where nutrition experts and local food management committees collaborate to design school menus grounded in local preferences and nutritional science. Similarly, evidence from **Zambia's** regional food baskets shows that culturally tailored menus aligned with local produce availability can enhance dietary diversity and reduce malnutrition. Mapping seasonal crop calendars and/or involving communities in menu planning ensure school meals are locally sourced and culturally relevant, while also fostering community ownership and promoting the sustainability of HGSF programmes.

- ***Integrate comprehensive nutrition education into school curricula:*** Embedding nutrition education within school curricula fosters healthy eating habits and can positively influence household practices. **Zambia's** Nutrition Education Manuals in Zambia and **Lesotho's** Nutrition Hubs show how integrating structured lessons and peer-led engagement on health, hygiene, and nutrition can transform students into "nutrition ambassadors," who share knowledge with their households and communities. Nutrition education reinforces key messages about healthy diets, builds community awareness, and amplifies the long-term public health impact of HGSF programmes.

- ***Invest in food safety standards and WASH infrastructure for schools*****:** Robust food safety standards and WASH infrastructure guarantee that school meals are safe, nutritious, and supportive of student well-being. Upstream food safety measures, such as training smallholder farmers in post-harvest handling or providing certified seeds and safety guidelines, can enhance ingredient quality and boost farmer capacity. Downstream practices like training cooks in food safety and promoting hygiene through behavioral messaging can improve meal quality and reinforce healthy habits at the point of consumption. Investments in school infrastructure, including hand washing stations, can complement food safety measures and contribute to safe learning environments. All these measures reduce illness-related absenteeism, improve student concentration, and maximize the educational and nutritional benefits of HGSF programmes.

Innovative Approaches

Innovative practices that enhance efficiency, sustainability, and adaptability are key to strengthening HGSF programmes. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, models that integrate school-based production, embrace digital procurement tools, and apply climate-smart technology have improved school meal delivery and programme resilience.

- ***Integrate school-based production units into national HGSF strategies:*** Production units such as school gardens, greenhouses, and chicken coops enhance dietary diversity, strengthen food security, and increase the climate resilience of HGSF programmes. This is particularly significant in rural areas, where a dearth of transport infrastructure may

limit schools' access to fresh produce. Beyond nutritional gains, production units foster technical skills through hands-on agricultural education and help schools generate supplementary income. Embedding pathways for the establishment and expansion of school production units into national policies can institutionalize these benefits, making HGSF programmes more resilient and self-sufficient. Scaling up school-based production units, tailored to local land and resource contexts, can strengthen HGSF systems.

- ***Scale up digital procurement solutions:*** Digital procurement tools can stabilize supply chains, improve market access and transparency, and relieve national budgets. These tools enable schools to communicate food needs to local SHFs in advance, who can then tailor production, accordingly, reducing food waste and ensuring timely food delivery. **Namibia's** E-Tololi, an online marketplace now leveraged by WFP to connect SHFs to markets; **Zambia's** pilot of a HGSF value chain food tracker with an automated food restock alert; and the Maano Virtual Farmers Market app - an e-commerce platform where farmers in **Zambia** advertise surplus and buyers post crop demands, making it a strong candidate for HGSF integration. Challenges such as limited internet connectivity and low local uptake must be addressed through targeted infrastructure investments and capacity-building for school staff.

- ***Channel resources into climate-smart and resource-efficient solutions:*** Climate-resilient technologies are essential for helping school feeding systems adapt to shocks such as droughts, rising energy costs, and budget constraints. Emphasis should be placed on scalable, high-impact innovations that promote resilience, resource efficiency, and local capacity building. Examples include integrated irrigation and farming systems - such as Zambia's use of drip irrigation, hydroponics, open-field, garden, and sack farming - which enhance productivity and climate adaptability. Waste-to-resource technologies, like Togo's bio-digesters, can further reduce environmental impact while lowering operating costs. In Benin, rising energy prices have spurred the adoption of energy-efficient solutions such as cooking bags, which retain heat after food is brought to a boil, allowing it to continue cooking without further energy use. These innovations illustrate the potential for climate-smart practices to strengthen the sustainability and responsiveness of HGSF programmes.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

Sub-Saharan African countries have made uneven commitments to M&E. Some countries embrace digital collection and reporting technology to generate real-time insights, whereas others still employ paper systems or only conduct evaluations in partnership with international organizations. The good practices below offer actionable ways to enhance data systems, foster local ownership, and support evidence-based decision-making.

- ***Strengthen digital infrastructure through incremental investments:*** Targeted, incremental investments in digital infrastructure are essential for strengthening data collection and management systems. Drawing on successful initiatives - such as the deployment of digital platforms like WFP School Connect in several countries - continued

support for these technologies will enable real-time data collection, analysis, and information sharing. This approach will enhance programme monitoring and evaluation, facilitate timely decision-making, and improve overall programme effectiveness.

- ***Integrate participation throughout the M&E cycle:*** Participatory M&E systems that actively involve parents, teachers, and local leaders in all stages of monitoring, ensure marginalized voices are included, while enhancing the accuracy and relevance of monitoring. Practical investments in training for local committees and simplified reporting formats can support bottom-up data collection in ways that are both politically viable and administratively manageable.

- ***Leverage joint evaluations and global guidelines to establish robust M&E systems, capture holistic programme impact, and inform national strategies****:* The World Bank's SABER exercise, alongside evaluations led by FAO and WFP, provide structured tools that countries can adopt to systematically assess the strengths and weaknesses of their HGSF programmes. Integrating these evaluation frameworks into national planning cycles can support evidence-based programme design, highlight areas for reform, and strengthen alignment with broader education, nutrition, agriculture, and social protection strategies. By embedding these tools in their M&E systems, countries can enhance decision-making and progressively build more responsive and accountable school feeding programmes. Complementing these efforts, global guidance documents - such as FAO's 2022 note on HGSF impact assessment - provide a practical foundation that countries can draw on to develop M&E systems aligned with internationally recognized standards. By adapting the frameworks outlined in these technical notes, governments can design evaluations that incorporate well-established criteria, robust sampling strategies, and context-appropriate data collection methods, while still responding to local priorities and constraints. This approach not only strengthens the credibility and policy relevance of findings but also ensures that evaluations are grounded in realities on the ground.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A more comprehensive and standardized definition of home-grown school feeding (HGSF) is needed, as current definitions lack clear criteria regarding the proportion of locally sourced produce or the proximity of farms to the communities they serve. This lack of uniformity complicates research and comparison across programmes, since 'home-grown' can mean different things in different contexts. Establishing a clear, widely accepted definition would facilitate more accurate analysis, enable meaningful comparisons, and support the identification of best practices for both researchers and programme managers.

Sustainable financing mechanisms for HGSF also warrant further investigation, given the strong interest expressed by stakeholders. Future research could examine the potential of public-private partnerships, sustainable bonds, or commodity taxes to increase investment in infrastructure and climate-friendly agriculture. Strengthening domestic financing would

reduce aid dependency and better prepare governments to assume full responsibility for HGSF programmes-a critical step toward long-term sustainability.

Further analysis is needed to identify effective strategies for incentivizing and sustaining community engagement in HGSF. Comparative research into mechanisms such as formalized volunteer participation, in-kind compensation, stipends, or wages could yield insights into what works best in different contexts. Understanding these dynamics is essential for maintaining strong community support and ensuring programme success.

Ethnographic approaches offer valuable opportunities to deepen understanding of community dynamics and programme impact. While stakeholders consistently highlight the educational, nutritional, and economic benefits of HGSF, few studies provide rigorous evaluation of these outcomes. Ethnographic studies, particularly those incorporating a gender lens, could illuminate how HGSF programmes influence girls' economic participation and school enrollment, as well as broader community well-being. This approach would help address current gaps in the evidence base and inform the design of more effective, inclusive programmes.

Future research may wish to offer a more comprehensive definition of what constitutes home-grown school feeding, as current definitions lack standardized criteria. Most definitions fail to address what proportion of locally sourced produce is sufficient or how close farms must be to the communities they serve. This lack of definitional uniformity complicates efforts to study home-grown school feeding, as 'home-grown' means different things to different programmes. This, in turn, makes it difficult to form comparisons and identify good practices. A comprehensive definition would help researchers and programme managers avoid confusion and make informed inferences across programmes.

ANNEXES

Annex A. Remote Interviews

Southern Africa
WFP Namibia Country Office
WFP Lesotho Country Office
WFP Madagascar Country Office
WFP Regional Bureau Johannesburg
University of Zambia - Department of Food Science and Nutrition
Hivos

West Africa
WFP Benin Country Office
WFP Ghana Country Office
WFP Regional Bureau Dakar
Université Abomey-Calavi Benin
Alliance Biodiversité

East Africa
WFP Burundi Country Office
WFP Sudan Country Office
WFP Regional Bureau Nairobi
Grameen Foundation

Annex B. Field Interviews

Zambia	
Stakeholder Group	***Stakeholders***
WFP, UN, and Other Development Partners	*WFP Lusaka Country Office Staff* *WFP Mumbwa Field Office Staff* *UN Food Systems Convenor for Zambia*
Central Government	*Ministry of Education – Assistant Director of School Health and Nutrition* *National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) – Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director* *Ministry of Agriculture – Provincial Agricultural Business Development Officer for the Province of Lusaka* *Ministry of Community Development and Social Services – Nutritionist*
District Government	*District Agricultural Coordinator for Mumbwa* *District Education Board Secretariat for Mumbwa*
Farmers and Cooperatives	*Beans Aggregator for the Mumbwa District* *Food Reserve Agency Depot for the Mumbwa District*
Schools and Local Communities	*Bulungu Primary School – School Principal, Cooks, Administrative Staff, Students* *Maimwene Primary School – School Principal, Cooks, Administrative Staff, Students, Smallholder Farmers* *Community in the Maimwene Primary School Area*
Universities and Research Institutions	*University of Zambia, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies – Food Systems Project Project Manager and PhD Students*
Private Sector and Others	*Hydrangea – CEO and Operations Manager*

The Gambia	
Stakeholder Group	***Stakeholders***
WFP, UN, and Other Development Partners	*WFP Banjul Country Office Staff* *WFP Basse Field Office Staff*
Central Government	*Gambia Agriculture and Food Security Project – Director, Crop Production Officer* *School Agriculture and Food Management Unit (SAFMU) – Director, Programme Officers* *Ministry of Agriculture – Deputy Permanent Secretary* *Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) – Deputy Permanent Secretary*
District Government	*Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) – Region 1 Education Director*
Farmers and Cooperatives	*Aggregator in Brikama Ba* *Maruo Farms in Bantang – Director of Operations, Deputy Director of Operations* *Smallholder Farmers in Bantang*
Schools and Local Communities	*Sololo Basic School – Cooks, Parents, School Administrators, Students, Teachers*

Benin	
Stakeholder Group	**Stakeholders**
WFP, UN, and Other Development Partners	*WFP Benin Country Office Staff* *WFP Bohicon Field Office Staff*
Central Government	*Ministry of Nursery and Primary School Education – Director of Primary Education* *Technical Advisor, Focal Point National programme for Integrated School Feeding* *Ministry of Agriculture – Head of the Technical Unit for Monitoring and Support for Food Security Management* *National Agency for Food & Agriculture*
Implementing NGOs	*NGO Grassid – Focal Point, Mediators, Volunteers* *NGO FACeD Abomey-Calavi – Focal Point, Mediators, Volunteers* *CRS – Head of Programming*
Farmers and Cooperatives	*Vegetable Cooperative in Bohicon* *Maize Cooperative in Bohicon*
Schools and Local Communities	*Primary School Ahossougbeta – School Principal, Parents Cooks, Administrative Staff, School Guardians, Students* *Primary School Dohouime – School Principal, Cooks, Administrative Staff, Students, Smallholder Farmers*
Universities and Research Institutions	*University of Abomey-Calavi – International Institute of Tropical Agriculture* *Alliance Biodiversité – Researcher*
Private Sector and Others	*Moov Money Benin* *Dutch Embassy – Expert in Food Security & Nutrition*

Annex C. Interview Questionnaire

Dimensions
Policy & Enabling Environment
What are the national guidelines and policies around school feeding or HGSF?
How many programmes coexist in the country? Who leads each programme?
Is School Feeding and/or HGSF integrated into the country's existing legal framework? What are these frameworks?
Are there national or sectoral regulations around the definition of family or SHF that facilitate their targeting and thus inclusion in the programme?
Does the HGSF programme have one main "institutional home?"
What is the gap between policy level commitment and implementation in terms of HGSF?
Is there a clear distinction between school feeding and HGSF?
What sectors are involved in HGSF policy and implementation level? How do their roles differ?
Is collaboration between sectors sustained across the programme lifecycle? Is there a formal mechanism to coordinate and monitor the efforts of all actors? If so, at what level is it set up?
Financing
Do HGSF programmes have a stable and dedicated budget line in the government budget? Are funds disbursed at different levels (national, district, school etc.) and in a timely manner?
How much of the school year is covered by the programmes?
Are resources allocated by different ministries such as agriculture, health, social protection, commerce etc.? Or does funding belong to one single ministry?
What are the modalities of resource mobilization? Are there any public-private partnerships?
What is the national HGSF investment per student ratio?
To what extent is HGSF financed by the government vs external donors?
Are the programmes targeting specific schools or areas?
What financial mechanisms are they considering for financial sustainability?
HGSF Value Chain
1. What is the HGSF programme's operating model? What are the challenges with this model?
- *How many children are covered by the programmes? What is the age group?*
2. How are SHFs linked to HGSF programmes?
- *Is there a national, formal registration and certification system with specific requirements that allows implementers to identify SHFs and involve them in HGSF?*
- *How is the target population selected? What sub-group of SHFs are prioritized and targeted, and based on what criteria? Is equity considered? Is the onboarding of farmers into the programming selective to only those already making surplus*

production?
3. How are procurement barriers for SHFs to access HGSF markets broken down?
- *Are SHFs supported financially?*
- *Is there any administrative adjustment in place that shortens public payment procedures so that the time SHFs must wait for payments is reduced?*
- *In what ways are SHFs supported to fulfill HGSF transport and logistics requirements?*
- *Are short supply chains used? How long are the chains on average?*
- *Is transport the responsibility of SHFs? If not, who?*
- *Are there training and dissemination of good practices so that SHFs are ready to fulfill what is expected of them to participate in the programme? If so, who is responsible for it?*
- *Is there any complementary support in place for SHFs? Who disburses it, under which conditions, and in what forms?*
- *Does the government invest in storage facilities?*
Community Engagement
Have local communities been involved in programme design and planning as well as monitoring? (menu discussions, procurement processes, continuous feedback etc.) What actors are involved?
To what extent are communities involved in the different phases of the value chain? Cooking? School canteens? Community gardens? In-kind contributions? Are contributions voluntary?
Have the benefits of the HGSF programme been clearly communicated to the relevant communities? Do they believe the benefits are felt in their communities?
Nutrition-Sensitive Programming
How are menus developed? Are they using existing menu development tools? Are nutritionists involved? Is there a national or regional plan for it?
How are nutritional requirements for the target population identified and then integrated into menus? How much fresh vs packaged foods?
Are there school/community-based gardens or farms?
How is positive social behavior encouraged through HGSF?
Which foods are staples? What are they feeding the children?
Are traditional, underused, and indigenous nutrient-rich foods incorporated into school menus?
Are meals fortified or supplemented with micronutrients?
If no, what are the barriers to not providing fortification?
If yes, how is fortification carried out?
What is the impact on nutrition? How are nutritional outcomes monitored and evaluated?

What are food safety processes in place?
Are there training or local sensitization sessions on food safety and quality? At what level?
Are there any projects around food hygiene and clean water access?
Innovative Approaches
Are there any digital tools used across the value chain?
Are training and capacity building exercises provided for staff involved in data collection?
Are there agreed upon HGSF indicators to monitor implementation?
Are climate resiliency considerations embedded in the programme(s)? How and to what extent?
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)
Is there a M&E system in place?
How is data collected? Are there tools for data management? Is data collected via paper and then aggregated digitally from local to national level or is it digitized via, for instance, tablets?
Other

Annex D: Good Practices

Dimension	***Sub-Region***	***Good Practices***
Policy & Enabling Environment	*Southern Africa*	*Mutually reinforcing formal policy, legal, and institutional backing promotes HGSF programme sustainability as seen by Zambia's multi-tiered home-grown school meals strategy*
		Cross-sector role mandates break down silos between ministries that otherwise don't coordinate and mitigates implementation bottlenecks as seen in Lesotho
	West Africa	*Integrating coordinated capacity-building for government officials within inter-ministerial groups to promote knowledge sharing and skills transfer as seen in Senegal's GMSANE*
		Explicit legislative and constitutional commitments enhance transparency in food tracking and unlocks greater national and donor investments as seen by Guinea-Bissau's School Canteen Law
	East Africa	*Decentralized governance structures with HGSF integrated in regional policies and plans (Ethiopia); horizontally and vertically integrated HGSF governance (Kenya) drives programme responsiveness, local ownership, and enables even implementation*
		Conducive public procurement regulatory laws prioritizing flexible requirements/processes formalizes SHF integration as seen by Ethiopia's preferential procurement schemes

Financing	*Southern Africa*	*Dedicated budget lines in Zambia and Madagascar: avoid the conflation of HGSF and regular SF. This allows HGSF programmes to be resilient and to be upgraded*
		Incremental budget lines in Zambia: provides a stable and predictable budget that increases as the programme scales up
		Factoring in transportation costs in Zambia: allows the government estimate procurement costs and come up with a precise budget to overcome supply chain challenges
	West Africa	*Private-Public Partnerships in Benin to scale-up HGSF programmes and build local capacities to participate in them*
		Green Bonds in Benin: The use of SDG Green Bonds and Loans to obtain a larger amount of financing over a long period of time to upgrade and scale-up programmes
		Moov Money payment platform in Benin to increase timely payments for smallholder farmers. The securitized direct accounts from government to school communities increase efficiency and local participation while promoting transparency
	East Africa	*Stable financing from multiple donors across the region to help maintain programme implementation and quality*
		Localized and decentralized financial models: in Burundi: Both commodity vouchers and cash transfer models lower costs, promote local procurement and community empowerment
		High return on Investment study in Ethiopia: demonstrated contribution to the Ethiopian economy with a 1-5 ROI ratio. This monitors the use of the programme and proves its efficiency
HGSF Value Chain	*Southern Africa*	*Decentralized procurement including aggregators & cooperatives strengthens SHF*

		linkages: Zambia's district aggregation model has improved last-mile logistics and SHF participation
		Hybrid models can enhance both supply chain efficiency and food safety. In Lesotho, mapping smallholder farmers centrally while managing procurement at the district level strikes a balance between quality control and the advantages of local sourcing
		HGSF value chains that incorporate school infrastructure improvements (e.g., storage) enhance food safety, minimize waste, and expand schools' capacity to manage produce. In Zambia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) serves as an effective mechanism to address these infrastructure gaps by providing direct funding to local authorities for targeted projects, including school facilities, water supply, and storage improvements.
	West Africa	*Community-driven supply chains improve delivery and resilience: The Gambia's food management committees improve resilience during times of shortage*
		Clear procurement quotas have an impact on local supply chains: Senegal's quotas for local procurement have increased local crop output and farmer incomes
	East Africa	*Decentralizing parts of the supply chain balances scalability with localization: Burundi's commodity voucher system enables schools to procure food from local markets, making meal delivery less vulnerable to supply chain disruptions and supporting local farmers and cooperatives*
		Inclusive procurement creates new market opportunities for SHFs: Ethiopia's expansion of government contracts for small and micro-enterprises has increased SHF participation
Community Engagement	*Southern Africa*	*Modest incentives improve consistent participation: small food basket incentives in Namibia*

	West Africa	*Formal community structures enhance governance and transparency: Benin's elected food management committees have formalized community roles* *Decision making power and shared responsibility boosts participation – Mothers' Clubs managing petty cash in The Gambia has increased consistent participation and created a support structure that supplements meals during shortages*
	East Africa	*Rotating volunteer involvement can help with fatigue: Burundi's parent rotation system has helped get more community members involved* *Formalizing roles and responsibilities can expand engagement potential: Kenya's PTA-led school gardens have increased garden production and offered an opportunity to learn about farming/nutrition*
Nutrition-Sensitive Programming	*Southern Africa*	*Nutrition Education Manuals distributed in schools and Regional Food Baskets informing menu design in Zambia* *Locally led Nutrition Hubs disseminating nutrition and hygiene education in schools in Lesotho* *School Led Total Sanitation Programs (SLTS) to combat preventable diseases in schools in Namibia*
	West Africa	*Food hygiene training focused on safe cooking techniques and personal hygiene in Nigeria, Benin, and The Gambia* *Schools equipped with improved hygiene infrastructure such as the Veronica Bucket in Ghana* *Menu design driven by nutrition experts in The Gambia and communities in Benin, to ensure appropriate nutrition and cultural relevance*

	East Africa	*Upstream Food Safety: Training of SHFs on post-harvest handling (Kenya); Testing of local commodities for moisture and aflatoxins (Burundi)* *Downstream Food Safety: Behavioral messaging in schools in Sudan (WFP Food Safety Officers)* *Nutrition Deficiency Mitigation: Biofortified, nutritious, local crops such as orange flesh sweet potatoes included in school meals in Kenya*
Innovative Approaches	*Southern Africa*	*School Production Units (School Gardens/Chicken Coops) in Zambia: climate resilient school gardens engaging in crop rotation and relying on mixed irrigation systems* *Digital Tools for Value Chain Coordination: E-Tololi in Namibia connecting SHFs needing market access with schools involved in HGSF; Food Tracker in Zambia to improve food accountability via alert mechanisms to notify local authorities of low food stocks in schools*
	West Africa	*Climate Resilient Innovations: Subsidies for climate-resilient seeds in The Gambia; WFP-pilot to help SHFs adapt to climate change through crop diversification and efficient water use in Ghana; Cooking bags in school kitchens in Benin to preserve energy, ensure safe cooking, and reduce environmental footprint* *School-based Resource Efficiency Models: Biodigesters in Togo to optimize clean cooking, gardening, and reduce reliance on firewood* *Integration of indigenous crops in Benin: renewed research on heirloom "superfoods," like baobab, promoting their use as highly nutritious inputs for school meals; school*

		gardening focused on preservation of Neglected and Underutilized Species (NUS)
	East Africa	*Gender-responsive programming in Kenya: gender evaluation of HGSF to introduce inclusion as essential programme design pillar*
		Nutrition Diversity and Waste Solutions in Kenya: WFP's "Transformers" Pilot Project to recover slightly damaged but safe produce destined for export and otherwise discarded, redirecting it to school meals
Monitoring & Evaluation	*Southern Africa*	*Namibia's phased M&E approach: from baseline, midterm, and end-of-year reviews to a government-led M&E framework with quarterly tracking of attendance, performance, and meal diversity. Monitoring later included smallholder farmer participation and supply-demand data, coordinated with education authorities. This progression increased local ownership and improved evidence-based programme management*
		Countries such as Zambia have used joint evaluations, most notably the World Bank's SABER exercise, to fill M&E gaps and holistically evaluate programmes
	West Africa	*HGSF programmes are transitioning to digital M&E systems (WFP School Connect)*
	East Africa	*Kenya uses public-private partnerships and near-field communication technology to collect real-time data on school attendance, meal consumption, and vendor payments, streamlining data collection.*
		Ethiopia integrates school feeding indicators into its Education Information Management System, creating an obligation for stakeholders to collect data. This institutionalizes M&E.

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