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Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa: A Collaborative Effort by International Financial Institutions and Innovative and Sustainable Financing Schemes



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements4

Key messages and Main Finding.....5

Executive Summary6

Introduction7

Role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs).....10

IFIs Financing Tools and Other Financing Mechanisms12

Examples of IFI Financing Projects in the ECOWAS Region.....14

The Power of Procurement16

Examples of Sustainable/Innovative Financing Projects18

Policy implications of sustainable financing for HGSF programs24

Recommendations for policymakers, governments, and other stakeholders26

Conclusion28

Bibliography29

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KEY MESSAGES AND MAIN FINDING

KEY MESSAGES

- International Financial Institutions (IFIs) play an important role in expanding Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) initiatives in the ECOWAS region through strategic financial support, technical expertise, and advocacy.
- Tailored sustainable financing approaches in the ECOWAS for HGSF interventions must integrate education, agriculture, health, and nutrition, aligning closely with regional SMC Commitments and goals.
- Regional fora, such as a Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM)-led ECOWAS regional Community of Practice and related digital platforms, form a critical channel for continuous interaction and collaboration among stakeholders, supplementing traditional conferences.
- Evidence-based planning and monitoring are critical to drive ongoing improvement and adaptation in HGSF projects across the ECOWAS regional Community of Practice.
- Governments in the ECOWAS region can improve educational access, quality, and nutritional well-being through strategic cooperation in HGSF with IFIs and other stakeholders.
- Public procurement in HGSF is a powerful tool for generating transformative change, fostering sustainability, equity, and economic growth and driving substantial transformations in food systems.

MAIN FINDINGS

- International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), World Bank (WB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and International Monetary Fund (IMF) provide funding for school meal programs and have the potential to further support Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) initiatives in the ECOWAS region, given HGSF multisectoral strategic benefits. These institutions promote human capital development, resilience, food security, and social investment. Additionally, the World Bank and IMF support programs aimed at improving Public Finance Management to enhance the efficiency of public spending, which can also benefit HGSF initiatives.
- Alternative finance strategies, such as results-based funding and integrated approaches to rural infrastructure development, help HGSF projects be more successful and sustainable.
- Successful IFI-financed ECOWAS initiatives, including those in Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, and Senegal, employ specialized techniques to meet specific issues and objectives, resulting in improved student health, academic performance, and community resilience.
- Public procurement policies have the capacity to significantly influence food systems. Depending on how they are designed and implemented, these policies can either perpetuate unfair practices or drive long-term, positive transformations. For example, in Milan, the United States, Brazil, and in parts of Africa, public procurement has been used to support local farmers, promote sustainability, and ensure fair practices. These instances demonstrate that well-crafted procurement policies can lead to more equitable and resilient food systems, while poorly designed policies may reinforce existing inequalities and inefficiencies.
- Innovative financing projects such as Brazil's procurement strategy, Bolivia's use of the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons, Guatemala's VAT earmarking, Ecuador's debt-for-nature conversion, and Mexico's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Bond initiative demonstrate the effectiveness of sustainable financing in supporting local economies, improving educational outcomes, and encouraging inclusive growth.
- Policy implications underline the necessity of long-term financing for HGSF initiatives, advocating for holistic methods that integrate education, agriculture, health, nutrition, social protection, economic development, and environmental sustainability to promote fair access and efficacy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homegrown-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) can offer significant returns on investment, particularly in agriculturally diverse regions with arable lands. As a context-sensitive intervention, HGSF financing also demands tailored approaches. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each context is crucial for effective financing and implementation. ECOWAS member states commitments to HGSF and their embrace of indigenous nutritious sovereign foods and self-sustainable agriculture practices is most commendable. These commitments demonstrate a dedication to holistic approaches to food security and nutrition.

In the ECOWAS region, HGSF initiatives are vital for ensuring children's access to nutritious meals, quality education, and overall well-being. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) play a crucial role in broadening the reach of these programs, by providing financial support, technical expertise, and advocacy. Sustainable HGSF financing requires tailored approaches to integrate education, agriculture, health, and nutrition, aligning with regional commitments and goals.

Successful IFI-supported initiatives in countries like Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin, and Senegal have demonstrated improved student health, academic performance, and community resilience. Moreover, alternative finance strategies, such as results-based funding and integrated rural infrastructure development, enhance the success and sustainability of HGSF projects. The role of IFIs extends beyond financial support, to include fostering policy environments conducive to sustainable HGSF interventions and effective programme implementation.

Public procurement policies wield significant influence, with the potential to either perpetuate unfair practices or drive transformative change in food systems. Innovative financing projects, such as Brazil's procurement strategy and Mexico's SDG Bond initiative, showcase the effectiveness of sustainable financing in supporting local economies and educational outcomes.

To enhance HGSF financing mechanisms, policymakers should develop integrated policy frameworks that align with broader national development priorities. Multi-stakeholder collaboration, evidence-based planning, and monitoring are crucial for program success. Moreover, prioritizing budget allocations and exploring innovative financing mechanisms can ensure sustainable funding. A detailed costing for the duration of the program is also key, as it provides a clear financial roadmap and helps in securing long-term investment. Additionally, the role of cross-sector budgeting should be emphasized to leverage resources across different sectors, fostering a more comprehensive and efficient approach to financing.

Capacity development initiatives and promoting local procurement strategies are essential for strengthening program implementation and market development. Policy advocacy efforts, supported by ECOWAS leaders, can garner public support for sustained investment in HGSF initiatives while promoting a conducive policy environment for HGSF interventions.

HGSF interventions in the ECOWAS region hold significant potential to address multiple SDGs and deliver tangible outcomes to children and local communities. By implementing these recommendations and leveraging digital platforms for ongoing engagement, ECOWAS stakeholders can catalyze transformative change in HGSF financing, enhance program effectiveness, and build stronger and more resilient food systems which promote the holistic development of children and communities across the region.

INTRODUCTION

Investing in the health and well-being of school children transcends mere altruism; it's a strategic investment in the future of nations¹. At the heart of this investment lies the concept of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs, pivotal initiatives that intertwine nutrition, education, and economic development to nurture the potential of the next generation. HGSF programs entail providing meals to schoolchildren using locally sourced raw food produce and ingredients, thereby supporting smallholders, stimulating economies, and ensuring children receive the essential nutrients for their growth and development.

EMPOWERING THROUGH NUTRITION AND EDUCATION

School meals are not just about sustenance; they are about empowerment. Evidence suggests that healthy, well-nourished schoolchildren not only perform better academically but also develop crucial skills such as concentration, problem-solving, and social interaction, laying the foundation for their future productivity². The report shows that human capital is about 70% of the wealth in high-income countries and only 40% in low-income countries, underscoring the imperative of considering multifaceted investments that maximize not only health and education outcomes but also long-term productivity and economic growth³.

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO WELL-BEING

Moreover, school meal programs, alongside interventions such as deworming, iron and folic acid supplementation, and vision screening, offer a holistic approach to supporting children's well-being and educational outcomes. By addressing both the nutritional and health needs of students, these programs contribute significantly to enhancing access to education and improving learning outcomes, particularly for vulnerable students and girls.

INCENTIVES FOR ATTENDANCE

Furthermore, nutritionally adequate school meals serve as powerful incentives for families to send their children to school regularly, fostering increased attendance and engagement in learning activities. Recognized as highly effective by multilateral agencies and governments, school meals have shown strong evidence of improving access to education and enhancing learning outcomes, particularly for vulnerable students and girls.

CHALLENGES AND URGENCY

Despite their viability and effectiveness, financing HGSF programs remains a challenge. Shrinking fiscal space, limited domestic resources, and competing priorities hinder efforts to adequately fund these initiatives. Additionally, food inflation, which has been particularly high in regions like West Africa, exacerbates these financial constraints, making it even more difficult to sustain and expand HGSF programs. Yet, the stakes are high—underinvestment risks widening educational disparities, perpetuating cycles of poverty, and stifling economic growth, particularly in regions like Africa, where the youth population is rapidly increasing⁴.

COLLECTIVE NATIONAL COMMITMENTS

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

CHARTING A PATH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOLUTIONS

It is these national commitments that this paper aims to serve in supporting governments to identify financial solutions (tools, mechanisms, and partners) to address their paths to national sustainable financing for their future generations' prosperity. The paper delves into the critical issue of financing HGSF programs in the ECOWAS region, drawing on experiences from Latin America and East Africa to provide actionable recommendations for sustainable funding solutions. It underscores the imperative of robust financial commitments and offers actionable recommendations to policymakers, governments, and international financial institutions (IFIs) to bridge the financing gap.

1 The Education Commission, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition, School Meals Coalition, Global Education Forum, 2022. Investment Case for School Health and Nutrition. Available at: <https://www.edc.org/global-education-forum-investment-case-school-health-nutrition>

2 World Food Programme, 2023. The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Available at: <https://publications.wfp.org/2022/state-of-school-feeding/>

3 World Bank, 2018. Moving Beyond GDP to Look at the World Through the Lens of Wealth. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/01/30/moving-beyond-gdp-to-look-at-the-world-through-the-lens-of-wealth>

4 SFI, 2024. Looking to 2030 – A Projection of School Participation Profiles for School Feeding Programs. Available at: <https://www.edc.org/looking-2030-projection-school-participation-profiles-school-feeding-programs>

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER:

- 1. Introduction:** Sets the context by defining HGSF and highlighting the evidence supporting the benefits of school meals.
- 2. Role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs):** Explores the specific roles that IFIs play in financing HGSF programs, including their funding mechanisms, policies, and priorities.
- 3. IFIs Financing Tools and Other Financing Mechanisms:** Examines in detail the various financing tools used by IFIs for HGSF programs, such as grants, loans, and technical assistance, and compares them with alternative financing mechanisms employed elsewhere.
- 4. Examples of IFI Financing Projects in the ECOWAS Region:** Provides case studies or examples of HGSF projects funded by IFIs in the ECOWAS region, highlighting their successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- 5. The Power of Procurement:** Integrates the discussion of procurement practices into the exploration of IFI financing tools and other financing mechanisms, as procurement often plays a crucial role in HGSF program sustainability and efficiency.
- 6. Examples of Sustainable/Innovative Financing Projects:** Presents innovative financing models and successful case studies from Latin America or other regions, showcasing alternative approaches to funding HGSF programs that could be adapted in the ECOWAS context.
- 7. Policy Implications of Sustainable Financing for HGSF Programs:** Analyzes the broader policy implications of sustainable financing for HGSF programs, including its impact on education, nutrition, poverty alleviation, and economic development.
- 8. Recommendations for Policymakers, Governments, and Other Stakeholders:** Offers actionable recommendations based on the insights gathered throughout the paper, addressing policymakers, government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders involved in HGSF program financing.
- 9. Conclusion:** Summarizes the key findings of the paper, reiterates the importance of sustainable financing for HGSF programs, and emphasizes the potential impact of implementing the recommendations outlined.
- 10. Bibliography:** Provides a comprehensive list of sources cited in the paper, including academic studies, reports, policy documents, and other relevant literature.

Through this structured approach, the paper aims to contribute to resilient education systems, improved nutrition outcomes, and socioeconomic development across the ECOWAS region by presenting evidence of realistic ways and/or opportunities to address the finance gap, offering insights and experiences from Latin America, and advocating for long-term funding solutions.





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ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIS)

IFIs play a crucial role in supporting HGSF initiatives globally through financial assistance, technical expertise and knowledge sharing, and specially since both IsDB and WB are partners in the School Meals Coalition. The World Bank, African Development Bank, and Islamic Development Bank have been instrumental in providing both funding and guidance to governments to strengthen their school meals programs⁵.

African Development Bank (AfDB): AfDB emerges as a critical force driving economic and social advancement across the African continent. Functioning as a regional multilateral development finance institution, it channels financial assistance, including loans, grants, and technical support, to African nations. Prioritizing poverty alleviation, sustainable growth, and regional integration, the AfDB focuses its efforts on diverse sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, education, health, governance, and private sector development. Through strategic partnerships with governments, regional entities, development partners, and the private sector, the AfDB strives to address Africa's multifaceted development challenges and stimulate inclusive progress ("African Development Bank Group"). For example, the AfDB supports initiatives like the Multi-Sectoral Approach for Stunting Reduction Project (MASReP) in Ethiopia. Through MASReP, the AfDB aids in improving access to multi-sectoral nutrition services for children under-five and pregnant/lactating women. This project, aligned with the

Seqota Declaration, targets high-stunting prevalence areas, enhancing health, food production, and knowledge on feeding practices. While funding is from the African Development Fund, the project is implemented by Ethiopia's Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance⁶.

Islamic Development Bank (IsDB): In a distinct scope of south-south cooperation, the IsDB assumes a unique role in fostering economic and social progress within its member countries and Muslim communities in non-member countries. Founded and grounded on Islamic principles, it offers financial aid, including loans, grants, and technical assistance, to support projects spanning various sectors such as education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and Islamic finance. Operating in alignment with Islamic finance principles, the IsDB promotes collaboration among member nations to tackle development hurdles and attain sustainable growth. Through partnerships with governments, private sector, NGOs & civil society, and stakeholders, the IsDB endeavors to facilitate poverty reduction, promote inclusive development, and enhance the well-being of communities. For instance, as part of its partnership with WFP to support human capital development related to school health and nutrition, the IsDB has financed the "Support to the School Feeding, Nutrition and Out-of-School Children" in Benin as a pilot of the initiative to improve rural livelihoods⁷.

5 SFI and Fab Inc., 2024. School Meals International Donor Analysis: Analysis of school feeding financing data systems: challenges and opportunities.

6 Ibid. p. 24-25.

7 Ibid., p. 25-26.

The World Bank: The WB stands as a pillar in the realm of global development finance. Comprising the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA), which extends financial support and technical expertise to governments of low and middle-income countries. Its mission centers on poverty reduction and sustainable development, encompassing a broad spectrum of initiatives such as education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, and social protection (“World Bank Group - International Development, Poverty, and Sustainability”). Collaborating with governments, NGOs, and international organizations, the World Bank endeavors to support the implementation of policies and projects aimed at fostering economic growth and societal well-being. For instance, the World Bank has supported various HGSF initiatives globally, such as in Togo, where it supported a Healthy-SABER evaluation, assessing school health and nutrition policy and governance, and the services, including school meals, offered in schools. It financed other complementary health services such as deworming across countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Angola, Niger, Sao Tome e Principe, Senegal, Togo, and others.⁸

The WB could play an important role in strengthening government-led school meals programs, to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. The WB has been engaging on issues like targeting, adequacy, community engagement, local sourcing of food products, complementary health and nutrition services (i.e. school-based deworming, micronutrient supplementation, WASH), social accountability, and other implementation standards. In most low- and middle-income countries, annual public spending on education during middle childhood and adolescence is USD210 billion, while only USD4 billion is invested in health and nutrition. This misalignment does not enable the health sector to provide adequate support for school health and nutrition programs alongside their education sector counterparts. Therefore, it is essential that there is an increase in coherent investments that bring together stakeholders from all tiers of health, nutrition, and education sectors for the maximized impact of school health and nutrition programs.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD): A specialized UN agency focused solely on rural development and food systems transformation. IFAD directs its investments towards those most marginalized - impoverished small-scale producers, women, youth,

indigenous communities, and other vulnerable demographics. By prioritizing rural areas, IFAD aims to foster prosperity, bolster food security, and fortify resilience in these communities. The institution operates as a catalyst for both public and private investments in agriculture and rural enterprises, with a distinct emphasis on placing rural inhabitants at the forefront of its endeavors. Through grants and low-interest loans since its inception in 1978, IFAD has been pivotal in empowering rural populations to enhance their food security, elevate their standards of living, and assume control over their own development trajectories. IFAD's commitment to advancing rural well-being aligns seamlessly with its role in the Rome-Based Agencies Joint initiative for HGSF, a collaborative effort with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WFP aimed at supporting nations like Kenya, Philippines, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, and Senegal in implementing HGSF programs. With an allocated budget of \$10 million over three years, this initiative epitomizes IFAD's dedication to leveraging agriculture as a vehicle for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

International Monetary Fund (IMF): The IMF operates as a significant player in global financial assistance, albeit not directly focused on school feeding initiatives. While the IMF doesn't typically provide direct funding for such programs, its lending operations to countries can profoundly impact the development of conducive environments for national school meals initiatives. Through agreements on fiscal targets, the IMF may indirectly encourage the expansion of school meals programs as part of broader economic strategies (IMF). Although the IMF hasn't specifically allocated funds for school meals, its loans serve as vital financing sources for developing countries. In February 2023, the IMF, along with other prominent international organizations, issued a joint statement urging action to address the global food and nutrition crisis, acknowledging the importance of school meals programs (IMF). While recent IMF programs, such as the one for Ghana, may indirectly support school feeding initiatives, the extent of this support remains unclear in various countries. Thus, while the IMF's primary focus isn't on school meals, its policies and financing mechanisms can influence the landscape in which such programs operate, potentially fostering conditions conducive to their growth and sustainability.¹⁰

8 Ibid., p. 22-24.

9 Ibid., p. 28.

10 Ibid., p. 24.

IFIS FINANCING TOOLS AND OTHER FINANCING MECHANISMS

IFIs offer various financing tools to support school meals and HGSF programs:

- **Official Development Assistance (ODA):** ODA refers to government aid aimed at promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries. It includes both bilateral aid, which is assistance given directly from one country to another, and multilateral aid, which is provided through international financial institutions (IFIs) and other multilateral organizations. IFIs, such as the International Development Association (IDA), allocate ODA (concessional loans and grants) to support development projects, including education and nutrition programs like school meals, particularly in low-income countries. As an entity of the World Bank Group, IDA offers concessional financing to the world's poorest countries, supporting initiatives such as school feeding programs through low-interest loans and grants. Additionally, IDA resources leverage trust funds to support countries' priorities and specific programs such as school health and nutrition. Bilateral aid can also play a significant role in Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs, further enhancing their reach and impact.
- **Technical Assistance:** Apart from financial support, IFIs provide technical expertise and capacity-building assistance to governments to design, implement, and monitor effective school meals programs.

By leveraging these financing tools, such as results-based financing and strategic investment mechanisms, IFIs play a pivotal role in ensuring sustainable financing for (HGSF) programs. These tools enable the linking of investments in crucial rural infrastructure and the development of local value-chains directly to school feeding initiatives. For instance, funds could be allocated towards improving transportation networks, enhancing agricultural productivity, and bolstering food processing facilities in rural areas, all of which contribute to the success of HGSF programs. Moreover, employing results-based financing mechanisms ensures that investments are tied to measurable outcomes, incentivizing efficiency and accountability in program implementation. This integrated approach not only promotes nutrition and food security but also supports local economies by stimulating agricultural production and creating employment opportunities. Ultimately, the synergy between financing tools and HGSF programs stands to enhance educational outcomes, fostering a healthier and more prosperous future for communities.

Besides the financing tools provided by IFIs, governments can utilize other innovative financing mechanisms to support school meals and HGSF programs. These mechanisms include:

1. **Windfall Taxes:** Leveraging windfall gains from sectors like energy and commodities through taxation offers a potential revenue source for financing safety net interventions, including school meals programs. However, reliance on windfall taxes may introduce revenue volatility, depending on the cyclical nature of sectors generating windfall profits.
2. **Climate Finance:** Refers to funding directed towards addressing climate change, encompassing activities like emissions reduction and resilience building. It aims to support mitigation and adaptation efforts, particularly in developing countries, fulfilling international commitments such as those in the Paris Agreement. While there are disparities in funding distribution, climate finance is expected to grow, offering opportunities to bridge gaps and drive broader sustainable development goals, including food security and resilience-building in communities. An important mechanism within climate finance is the use of carbon credits, which allow entities to offset their emissions by investing in environmental projects that reduce greenhouse gases, further supporting global emissions reduction targets.
3. **Earmarked Taxes:** Designating specific taxes to fund school meals programs provides a dedicated revenue stream, as demonstrated by the examples like India's Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh (PSK). While earmarked taxes ensure a stable funding source for HGSF initiatives, they may face challenges in political will and resistance from taxpayers.
4. **Taxing "Public Bads":** Implementing taxes on products detrimental to public health, such as sugar-sweetened beverages, can generate revenue to support school meals programs while promoting healthier dietary habits among children. However, taxing public "bads" requires careful consideration of economic impacts, potential resistance from industries, and monitoring to ensure desired health outcomes.
5. **Debt Swaps:** Debt swaps involve the exchange of a portion of a country's debt in return for investments in social development projects like HGSF initiatives. While debt swaps offer an opportunity to reduce the

burden of debt repayments and allocate resources towards critical programs, it's important to note that they may not be an option for many countries depending on who their creditors are. Additionally, debt swaps may lead to difficulty in future borrowing by countries, impacting their creditworthiness and access to financial markets. Therefore, careful consideration of the implications and potential consequences is essential before engaging in such agreements.

6. Impact Bonds: Impact bonds are performance-based contracts where private investors provide upfront funding for social programs, such as HGSF, and receive returns based on the achievement of predetermined outcomes. Impact bonds present a promising avenue for addressing the challenges within the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program, particularly the issue of cash flow for providers. One of the key hurdles in HGSF implementation is the misalignment between when farmers need to be paid, which is at the point of purchase and when governments typically pay, often in arrears at the end of the term. This discrepancy creates significant cash flow challenges for providers. Impact bonds could serve as a solution to this issue by leveraging private investors' upfront funding. By establishing performance-based contracts, impact bonds incentivize efficiency and effectiveness in program delivery while also shifting financial risks from governments to investors. However, successful implementation of impact bonds in HGSF requires careful consideration of outcome metrics, risk allocation, and financial sustainability to ensure their effectiveness in addressing the cash flow issue for providers.

7. Social Impact Funds: Social impact funds pool resources from various stakeholders, including governments, philanthropic organizations, and private investors, to finance social projects with measurable positive outcomes, including HGSF initiatives. These funds provide flexibility in financing, allowing governments to access capital for program implementation and scale-up. However, ensuring alignment between fund objectives and government priorities is essential to maximize impact and sustainability.

8. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): PPPs involve collaboration between government entities and private sector partners to finance, implement, and manage social projects, including HGSF programs. Through PPPs, governments can leverage private sector expertise, innovation, and resources to enhance program efficiency and effectiveness. However, PPPs require careful negotiation of terms, transparent governance structures, and mechanisms to safeguard public interests and accountability.

By tapping into these alternative financing mechanisms, governments can diversify their funding sources for HGSF initiatives, ensuring sustained support alongside IFI contributions. These mechanisms offer avenues to align fiscal policies with developmental goals, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency within national school feeding programs¹¹.



11 SFI, 2023. School meal programmes: A missing link in food systems reform, p. 26. Available at: <https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/School-meals-Food-Systems.pdf>

EXAMPLES OF IFI FINANCING PROJECTS IN THE ECOWAS REGION

The successful implementation of sustainable school meals programs hinges significantly on securing diverse funding sources, including support from IFIs. Through strategic partnerships with IFIs such as the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), governments across the ECOWAS region can realize their goals of enhancing education access, quality, and nutritional well-being. Let's explore three such projects financed by these institutions, each tailored to address specific challenges and priorities within their respective countries and with content provided by each institution.

AfDB Food and Nutrition Project in Burkina Faso:

In Burkina Faso, the AfDB is driving a groundbreaking initiative aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition among students in rural village schools. The School Meals with Local Produce for Intelligent Nutrition Project, generously funded by Japan, is a source of hope across Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Sud, and Sud-Ouest regions. Since its inception in 2020, the project has transformed selected schools into hubs of agricultural self-sufficiency and nutritional education, significantly impacting the lives of students and communities alike.

- **Strategic Objectives:** The project's core objectives are multifaceted: to ensure every child receives a nutritious meal daily, to elevate the nutritional quality of meals, and to promote sustainable agricultural practices. By integrating locally sourced produce into school meals and providing essential resources and training, the initiative not only addresses immediate hunger but also fosters long-term resilience and self-reliance within communities.
- **Financing Structure:** With an initial investment of \$990,000 from the AfDB and Japan, the project has demonstrated a strategic commitment to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in Burkina Faso. This funding has facilitated the establishment of fields and gardens in selected schools, as well as the provision of crucial equipment and resources. Moreover, it underscores the importance of sustainable investments in education and nutrition to uplift vulnerable populations.
- **Expected Outcomes:** The project has already yielded remarkable outcomes, with tangible improvements in student health, academic performance, and community cohesion. By the end of its inaugural phase, schools have harvested over 25 tons of agricultural produce, defying adverse weather conditions and supply chain disruptions. Students now enjoy nutritious meals sourced from local ingredients,

fostering a deeper connection to their cultural heritage and agricultural traditions. Additionally, the project has empowered communities with essential skills and knowledge to sustainably manage their food systems and advocate for nutrition policies.

The School Meals with Local Produce for Intelligent Nutrition Project stands as a testament to the transformative power of strategic partnerships and targeted investments in education and nutrition. As the initiative progresses into its next phase, there is growing optimism for its expansion and replication across Burkina Faso and beyond. By continuing to prioritize the well-being of vulnerable populations and fostering community resilience, the AfDB and its partners are paving the way for a brighter, healthier future for generations to come.

World Bank Project in Togo: The World Bank is spearheading a transformative project in Togo. The Project for the Improvement of the Quality and Equity of Basic Education in Togo (PAQEED - P172674), aimed at bolstering the quality of basic education, with a special emphasis on advancing girls' education and fortifying overall educational management. This initiative, backed by the IDA and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), represents a strategic response to critical educational gaps identified within the Togolese education sector.

- **Strategic Objectives:** The project aligns with Togo's overarching goal of enhancing teaching and learning outcomes while promoting equitable access to basic education. By strengthening system management, it seeks to address deficiencies identified in previous initiatives and propel sustainable educational development.
- **Financing Structure:** Totalling US\$60.1 million, the financing package comprises contributions from IDA and GPE. Notably, the project adopts a results-based financing (RBF) approach, with 30% of GPE funding contingent upon achieving predefined outcomes.
- **Expected Outcomes:** Anticipated outcomes encompass improved teaching quality, expanded access to education, reduced repetition rates, enhanced management capacity, and heightened gender inclusivity and knowledge on the critical gaps around school meals and complementary services such as school-based deworming. With a projected reach of approximately 2 million students, including 1.1 million girls, the project aims to harness digital technology to scale up educational endeavors and foster holistic stakeholder engagement.

The WB can also bring value added in bolstering government financing at a time of fiscal constraints. For example, the Togo Safety Nets and Basic Services Project is investing \$5 million to deliver around 15 million school meals to more than 52,000 primary school children in the poorest communities, building on previous projects. In Ghana, the Social Protection and Jobs team also recently received a government request to finance school meals and it is currently supporting the geo-location of the most vulnerable areas and schools within them.

Project in Benin: In Benin, the IsDB is spearheading a multifaceted initiative geared towards enhancing access to quality education, particularly targeting vulnerable and marginalized segments, including girls and disadvantaged children. This comprehensive endeavor addresses a spectrum of challenges pervading the Beninese education landscape, ranging from low enrollment rates to malnutrition among school children.

- **Strategic Objectives:** Aligned with Benin's education strategy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the project aims to augment access to safe learning environments, elevate educational standards, and bolster child well-being. By mitigating human capital underinvestment, it endeavors to catalyze sustainable development and economic prosperity.
- **Financing Structure:** Combining IsDB financing totalling EUR 18.52 million with contributions totalling EUR 5.10 million from the Education Above All Foundation, Plan International, and the Beninese government, the project demonstrates a shared commitment to its success, with significant financial resources earmarked in the national budget.
- **Expected Outcomes:** The project will provide new and functional canteens for forty primary schools equipped with new canteens, enrol and educate some 80,000 out-of-school children in Alternative Learning Centres (ALTs), improve school completion rates, and reduce the prevalence of malnutrition among school-aged children. The project aims to promote an inclusive, child-centred educational environment through a range of interventions, including nutrition awareness programmes, teacher capacity building and curriculum improvements.

IsDB Project in Senegal: Senegal's pursuit of food resilience and sustainable local supply for school canteens receives a significant boost through the IsDB financing. Under the "Project for Strengthening Food Resilience of Populations and Sustainable Local Supply to School Canteens in Senegal" (P2RAP-ACS), the IsDB partners with Senegal to fortify food security measures and enhance educational outcomes.

- **Strategic Objectives:** Aligned with SDGs 2, 3, and 4, the project aims to eradicate hunger, ensure food security, improve nutrition, and facilitate equitable access to quality education. By strengthening the school meals policy and supporting local agricultural ecosystems, it addresses fundamental challenges impeding educational progress and community well-being.
- **Financing Structure:** With a budget of \$25 million USD, predominantly financed by IsDB's Food Security Response Project (FSRP), the project underscores the institution's commitment to fostering sustainable development in Senegal. Over a three-year duration, the initiative targets rural and peri-urban schools across Senegal's academies.
- **Expected Outcomes:** Envisaged outcomes encompass infrastructure establishment, canteen strengthening, value chain enhancement, and increased operational resources for school canteens. By improving enrollment, transition, and completion rates, alongside nurturing agricultural ecosystems, the project endeavors to cultivate resilient communities and foster educational prosperity.

In essence, these projects embody the transformative potential of IFI financing in advancing education, nutrition, and socio-economic development within the ECOWAS region. By synergizing financial resources with strategic priorities, governments can realize their visions of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational systems, thereby nurturing human capital and fostering national prosperity.

THE POWER OF PROCUREMENT¹²

Public procurement budgets wield significant influence in shaping food systems, particularly through their association with school meal programs. Recognized as one of United States federal government's most potent tools for ensuring nutrition security among children, school meals are pivotal in fostering sustainable food practices.¹³

By delving into local and national procurement frameworks, these programs can either perpetuate inequalities and unsustainable practices or serve as catalysts for transformation towards more equitable and sustainable food systems.¹⁴

The impact of procurement budgets extends far beyond mere transactions. They trigger multiplier effects that resonate throughout supply chains and local economies. For instance, research in the United States indicates that every additional dollar received by farmers through school meal procurement can generate \$1.5 to \$3 in broader economic value.¹⁵

Moreover, the ripple effects of such investments contribute significantly to poverty reduction, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is a primary source of livelihood.¹⁶

Municipal authorities worldwide are harnessing the power of procurement to realign food markets with values emphasizing sustainability and equity. Milan's pioneering shift towards sourcing from local farms led to a substantial reduction in carbon emissions, showcasing the potential for procurement policies to drive environmental objectives.¹⁷

Similarly, initiatives like the Good Food Purchase Program in the United States prioritize supporting local agriculture, sustainable practices, and social equity through public procurement.¹⁸

Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE) stands out as a testament to the transformative potential of procurement policies. By mandating that at least 30% of funds be spent on produce from family farms, Brazil has not only fostered a reliable market for small-scale farmers but also promoted diversified and sustainable agriculture.¹⁹

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where food security remains a pressing concern, HGSF programs offer a promising avenue for bolstering local food systems.²⁰

As the world grapples with the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, procurement emerges as a potent tool for promoting regenerative agriculture. By incentivizing practices that improve soil fertility, reduce reliance on agrochemicals, and enhance biodiversity, school feeding programs can contribute to both food security and climate resilience.²¹

As such, the power of procurement extends far beyond the act of purchasing goods; it serves as a linchpin for driving systemic change in food systems. By leveraging procurement budgets to prioritize sustainability, equity, and resilience, governments and institutions can pave the way for a more just and sustainable future.

12 SFI, 2023. School meal programmes: A missing link in food systems reform. Available at: <https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/School-meals-Food-Systems.pdf>

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 National Farm to School Network, 2017. "Economic Impacts of Farm to School: Case Studies and Assessment Tools". Available at: <https://www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/economic-impacts-of-farm-to-school>

16 T. S. Jayne et al., 2021. "Agricultural Productivity Growth, Resilience, and Economic Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa," Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD).

17 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2023. Available at: <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org>

18 Daniels and Delwiche, 2022. "Future Policy Award 2018: The Good Food Purchasing Program, USA", *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 5.

19 Valencia et al., 2019. "Structuring Markets for Resilient Farming Systems," *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, 39.

20 SFI, 2023. Op. cit.

21 Africa Regenerative Agriculture Study Group, 2021. "Regenerative Agriculture. An Opportunity for Businesses and Society to Restore Degraded Land in Africa".



EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE/INNOVATIVE FINANCING PROJECTS

BRAZIL – BETTER PROCUREMENT WITH THE 30% RULE AND CO-FINANCING BY MUNICIPALITIES²²

Background: Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE) is recognized as one of the most successful initiatives in leveraging school meals to combat hunger, improve nutrition, and bolster education. Enshrined in the Brazilian constitution, the PNAE provides free meals to over 40 million students across the nation's 5,570 municipalities. This program has played a crucial role in reducing hunger and enabling children from poorer households to stay in school.

Implementation: PNAE operates through a highly decentralized structure monitored by School Feeding Councils. These councils bring together representatives from federal, state, and local governments, as well as parents, teachers, and civil society organizations. A key feature of the program is the "30 per cent rule," which mandates that at least 30% of federal funds allocated to the program must be spent on produce from family farms, with a preference for local suppliers. This rule, implemented since 2009, has ensured a stable market for small-scale farmers and encouraged them to diversify their production, thereby fostering resilience and sustainability in agriculture²³.

Impact: The success of the PNAE extends beyond addressing immediate nutritional needs. It serves as a catalyst for broader environmental and social justice goals. For example:

São Paulo has set a target to transition to 100% organic school meals by 2030, incentivizing regenerative agricultural practices and supporting farmers through premium prices and transition programs.

Niteroi and Salvador have initiatives aimed at reducing high-fat meat consumption among school children while promoting plant-based protein sources, aligning school meal policies with health and sustainability objectives.

These efforts have resulted in more diverse and nutritious food baskets, as well as stronger connections between schools and local farmers. Additionally, PNAE has facilitated integrated strategies spanning food security, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

Challenges: Despite its success, the PNAE faces challenges, such as:

- **Logistical Issues:** Ensuring consistent supply and quality of locally sourced products can be challenging, especially in remote areas.
- **Financial Constraints:** While the program is robust, budgetary constraints at the municipal level can limit its reach and effectiveness.
- **Farmer Participation:** Encouraging more family farmers to participate requires ongoing support and resources to help them meet the standards and demands of the program.

Recommendations: To enhance the PNAE and its impact, the following recommendations are proposed:

Increased Funding and Support: Allocating additional resources to support logistical infrastructure and farmer training programs can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program.

Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems can help identify areas for improvement and ensure the program's goals are being met.

Expansion of Sustainable Practices: Encouraging more municipalities to adopt ambitious targets for organic and sustainable school meals can further drive environmental and social benefits.

Conclusion: Through the PNAE, Brazil exemplifies how innovative procurement strategies, coupled with municipal leadership and community engagement, can drive transformative change in food systems. By linking government procurement to regenerative agricultural practices and broader social justice goals, the PNAE offers a blueprint for sustainable and inclusive development, not only within Brazil but also as a potential model for the ECOWAS region.

BOLIVIA'S INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION FINANCING: LEVERAGING HYDROCARBON TAX AND CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS²⁴

Latin America and the Caribbean face significant challenges in ensuring access to education and adequate nutrition for children, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities. Bolivia, recognizing the importance of addressing these challenges, has implemented innovative financing mechanisms to support

22 Africa Regenerative Agriculture Study Group, 2021. "Regenerative Agriculture. An Opportunity for Businesses and Society to Restore Degraded Land in Africa".

23 SFI, 2023. School meal programmes: A missing link in food systems reform. Available at: <https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/School-meals-Food-Systems.pdf>.

24 Valencia, Wittman, & Blesh, 2019. Structuring Markets for Resilient Farming Systems. *Agron. Sustain. Dev.* 39, 25 (2019). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-019-0572-4>

education and nutrition programs, including the Complementary School Meals (CSM) program and the Juancito Pinto School Bonus. These initiatives are funded, in part, through the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons (IDH), which allocates revenues from hydrocarbon exports to municipal governments. The Juancito Pinto School Bonus, introduced in 2006, complements these efforts by providing conditional cash transfers to families, incentivizing school attendance and reducing financial barriers to education.

Background: The Complementary School Meals program in Bolivia, initiated in 2000, targets children and adolescents from impoverished households attending public schools. As part of Bolivia's social protection policy, the program aims to alleviate hunger, improve nutrition, and prevent dropout rates. Concurrently, the Juancito Pinto School Bonus operates as a conditional cash transfer program, offering financial incentives to families based on their children's school attendance. Both initiatives contribute to enhancing educational outcomes and reducing poverty among vulnerable populations.

Implementation: Bolivia's decentralized approach to program implementation empowers municipal governments to manage and finance education and nutrition initiatives. Through the IDH, municipal governments receive funding to support social programs, including the CSM program and the Juancito Pinto School Bonus. Municipalities play a crucial role in allocating resources, implementing programs, and promoting local economic development through the purchase of locally produced food for school meals.

Impact: Studies have shown the positive impact of the Juancito Pinto School Bonus on school enrollment and attendance rates, particularly among marginalized communities. By addressing financial barriers to education, the program contributes to reducing dropout rates and promoting educational attainment as a pathway out of poverty. Moreover, the integration of the CSM program and the Juancito Pinto School Bonus enhances the overall well-being of children and adolescents, addressing both nutritional and educational needs.

Challenges and Recommendations: Despite the successes of these initiatives, challenges remain, particularly regarding the stability of funding sources. Bolivia's reliance on hydrocarbon revenues exposes social programs to volatility in the global market. To ensure the long-term sustainability of education and nutrition programs, including the Juancito Pinto School Bonus, it is recommended that Bolivia should explore alternative financing mechanisms and strengthen coordination among government agencies and stakeholders.

Bolivia's innovative approach to education financing, leveraging the hydrocarbon tax and conditional cash transfers, serves as a model for addressing the complex challenges of educational access and nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa. By prioritizing social investment and local economic development, Bolivia demonstrates its commitment to improving the well-being and future prospects of its most vulnerable citizens.

GUATEMALA'S SUSTAINABLE FINANCING MODEL: EARMARKING VAT FOR CHILD NUTRITION AND EDUCATION²⁵

In addressing the critical need for education and nutrition programs among vulnerable populations in Latin America and the Caribbean, innovative financing mechanisms have become imperative. Guatemala, recognizing these challenges, has implemented sustainable and pioneering strategies to support its School Feeding Program (SFP) and ensure access to education for its youth. This includes leveraging a value-added tax (VAT) earmarked tax to fund the SFP, demonstrating a commitment to child welfare and development.

Background: Guatemala's School Feeding Program, initiated in 1956, has evolved into one of the largest social protection initiatives in the region. By providing meals to millions of kindergarten and primary school children in public institutions, the program addresses hunger, improves nutrition, and promotes educational attainment. The recent inclusion of secondary school students underscores Guatemala's dedication to expanding access to education and enhancing overall well-being.

Implementation: Guatemala's approach to program implementation is decentralized, granting local authorities significant responsibility in managing and financing education and nutrition initiatives. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food (MAGA) collaborate with Parents Organizations (PO) and municipal governments to ensure effective deployment of resources. The VAT earmarked tax serves as a stable funding source for the SFP, emphasizing financial sustainability and local ownership.

Impact: Studies indicate the positive outcomes of Guatemala's School Feeding Program, including improved educational outcomes, reduced dropout rates, and enhanced nutrition among participating children. By prioritizing local procurement from accredited suppliers, the program also stimulates economic development and supports small-scale farmers. This integrated approach addresses both educational and nutritional needs, contributing to the holistic development of Guatemala's youth.

25 SFI, 2022. School Meals Financing Rapid Assessment: Bolivia. Available at: <https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/SFI-Country-Case-Study-Bolivia-April-2022.pdf>

Challenges and Recommendations: Despite its successes, Guatemala's SFP faces challenges, particularly regarding funding consistency and administrative costs. To ensure the program's long-term viability, Guatemala should explore diversifying funding sources and strengthening coordination among stakeholders. Additionally, investing in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential to track program effectiveness and address areas for improvement.

Guatemala's innovative financing approach to education and nutrition, exemplified by the VAT earmarked tax for the School Feeding Program, showcases a commitment to social investment and child welfare. By leveraging sustainable funding mechanisms and fostering local engagement, Guatemala sets a precedent for addressing the multifaceted challenges of educational access and nutrition in the region.

PIONEERING SUSTAINABLE FINANCING: ECUADOR'S DEBT-FOR-NATURE CONVERSION AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMS²⁶

Background: In a groundbreaking move towards sustainable development, Ecuador, with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC), successfully executed the world's largest debt-for-nature conversion.

Completed in May 2023, this initiative addresses Ecuador's debt management challenges while allocating critical resources towards long-term marine conservation in the iconic Galápagos Islands. This effort promotes both environmental preservation and the well-being of Ecuadorians.

Implementation: The operation involved an unprecedented combination of an \$85 million IDB guarantee and \$656 million DFC political-risk insurance. These financial tools facilitated the purchase of Ecuador's existing public debt under more favorable terms, resulting in substantial lifetime savings exceeding \$1.126 billion. Credit Suisse acted as the global lead arranger, while Oceans Finance Company served as project manager, with Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy as a cooperating partner. The creation of the Galápagos Life Fund is central to this initiative, generating estimated savings of \$323 million to support conservation activities over the next 18.5 years.

Impact: The primary objective of this operation is to finance conservation activities through the Galápagos Life Fund, which will support efforts in the Galápagos Marine Reserve and the newly established Reserva Marina

Hermandad. This collaborative initiative involves various stakeholders, including government agencies, the fishing sector, academia, and civil society, highlighting Ecuador's commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development. The Reserva Marina Hermandad, spanning 60,000 square kilometers, connects the Galápagos Marine Reserve with trans-national protected areas, safeguarding vital habitats for threatened shark species. The Galápagos Marine Reserve, home to over 3,500 species, including numerous endemics, is crucial for Ecuador's tourism and artisanal fishing industries, fostering both economic growth and social well-being.

Challenges: While the Ecuadorian debt-for-nature conversion sets a significant precedent, it also presents several challenges. Ensuring the long-term effectiveness of the Galápagos Life Fund requires consistent management and oversight. Additionally, the success of such initiatives depends on continued collaboration among diverse stakeholders, which can be complex to maintain over time. Securing ongoing political and financial support, particularly in fluctuating economic conditions, remains a critical challenge.

Recommendations: To build on the success of Ecuador's model, other nations should consider adopting similar debt-for-nature conversion strategies. This approach not only alleviates financial burdens but also strengthens environmental and public-debt management policies. Additionally, expanding the model to include debt-for-social investment conversions could redirect financial resources towards vital social programs, such as school meals initiatives. By prioritizing the well-being of their youth, countries can ensure that children receive adequate nutrition for their growth and development. Future initiatives should continue to innovate by combining guarantees with political-risk insurance to mobilize resources for broader social and environmental goals.

Conclusion: Ecuador's debt-for-nature conversion exemplifies a pioneering model for integrating debt management with environmental sustainability. As the IDB continues to champion innovative financing instruments, this operation reinforces the commitment to sustainable development goals and biodiversity preservation. By emulating Ecuador's approach, ECOWAS member states can potentially balance economic prosperity with human capital development and environmental stewardship, paving the way for a sustainable future.

²⁶ IDB, 2023. Ecuador Completes World's Largest Debt-for-Nature Conversion with IDB and DFC Support. Available at: <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/ecuador-completes-worlds-largest-debt-nature-conversion-idb-and-dfc-support>

MEXICO'S SDG BOND INITIATIVE²⁷

Mexico's 2023 SDG Bond initiative represents a groundbreaking approach to sustainable financing, epitomizing the country's dedication to advancing the United Nations' (SDGs). Spearheaded by the Mexican Government, this initiative showcases an innovative mechanism that aligns financial investments with global sustainability objectives.

Background: The SDG Bond leverages the SDG Impact Standards for Bond Issuers, developed by SDG Impact, a flagship initiative of UNDP's sustainable finance hub. These standards serve as guiding principles, emphasizing the integration of impact strategies, transparency, and governance mechanisms into bond issuers' decision-making processes. Mexico's commitment to these standards underscores its vision for a more sustainable future.

Strategic Intent: Since 2017, the Mexican Government has systematically aligned budgetary programs with SDGs, fostering collaboration between line ministries and the Ministry of Finance. This alignment process ensures targeted investments in programs that address specific SDG targets, with a particular emphasis on marginalized regions. The inclusion of a geospatial criterion enhances the strategic allocation of resources, promoting equitable development.

Management Approach: The management approach emphasizes granular information and robust monitoring mechanisms within the Ministry of Finance. Despite changes in leadership, continuity in strategy highlights the resilience of governance structures, ensuring consistency in achieving SDG objectives. Transparency is prioritized, with efforts to enhance reporting mechanisms and accountability.

Program Selection and Allocation: Rigorous criteria guide program selection, maximizing impact across various sectors. The integration of Eligible Expenditures aligned with Green SDGs demonstrates a holistic approach to sustainability, expanding the scope of investments beyond traditional social programs. The use of the Social Gap Index ensures targeted interventions in marginalized areas, fostering inclusive growth.

Impact Reporting: The impact reporting framework underscores the tangible outcomes of SDG Bond investments, focusing on theory of change and expected impact indicators. Data segmentation and output monitoring enhance accountability, enabling stakeholders to track progress towards SDG targets and make informed decisions.

Mexico's SDG Bond initiative serves as a case study for sustainable financing, offering valuable insights for other countries seeking to mobilize resources for development initiatives. By aligning financial mechanisms with SDGs, fostering transparency, and promoting governance innovations, nations can pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future.

ACCELERATING A CLEAN COOKING TRANSITION IN SCHOOLS IN TANZANIA²⁸

Background: Transitioning schools to clean, affordable, and reliable cooking solutions can significantly improve the health of students, teachers, and cooks by reducing exposure to harmful air pollution generated by traditional biomass cooking methods. This initiative, led by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), aims to support the Government of Tanzania's goal of delivering clean cooking solutions to 80% of the population by 2033. The focus is on schools to directly benefit students and staff and foster a culture of clean cooking in the wider community.

Implementation: The initiative will be rolled out in two phases:

- **Proof of Concept:**
 - Objective: Deliver electric cooking solutions to 200 primary schools with feeding programs over two years, impacting over 100,000 students and reducing emissions by 100,000 tCO₂e.
 - Actions: Provide energy-efficient electric cooking appliances to selected schools, develop a sustainable financial model integrating grants, carbon revenues, and a revolving loan facility.
 - Timeline: Two years for the proof of concept, targeting 200 schools.
 - Partnerships: Collaborate with the Ministry of Energy and National Carbon Monitoring Centre. Mobilize partners and resources, with initial funding promised by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) for 60 schools.
- **Scaling:**
 - Objective: Extend the clean cooking solutions to all government primary schools with feeding programs and potentially to other sub-Saharan African countries.
 - Actions: Unlock financing through carbon markets and scale the initiative based on the proof of concept's success.

27 UNDP, 2023. Non-Binding Opinion: Mexico's 2023 SDG Bond Allocation and Impact Report. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-11/231122-bono-ods.pdf>

28 <https://www.seforall.org/news/seforall-and-world-food-programme-launch-partnership-to-accelerate-a-clean-cooking-transition>

- **Partnerships:** Leverage partnerships with the Global Electric Cooking Coalition and other stakeholders to drive nationwide and regional adoption.

Impact:

- **Health and Social:** Improved health outcomes for students, teachers, and cooks by reducing exposure to smoke and pollutants.
- **Environmental:** Significant reduction in deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions from the transition to electric cooking.
- **Economic:** Potential cost savings for schools and communities by reducing reliance on biomass.
- **Gender and Youth:** Empower women and girls by reducing time spent on collecting biomass and providing opportunities through a STEM traineeship program focused on clean cooking and energy.

Challenges:

- **Financial Sustainability:** Ensuring the model is economically viable for all types of schools.

- **Infrastructure:** Upgrading school kitchens and ensuring reliable electricity supply.
- **Awareness and Training:** Building capacity among cooks, teachers, and local authorities to adopt and maintain new cooking technologies.

Recommendations:

- **Policy Support:** Strengthen government policies to support clean cooking initiatives and provide incentives for schools.
- **Financial Mechanisms:** Develop innovative financing solutions, including carbon credits and microloans, to sustain the transition.
- **Partnerships:** Foster collaboration among international organizations, governments, and local communities to enhance impact and scalability.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement a robust system to monitor progress, gather data, and refine the approach based on feedback and results.
- **Next Steps:** Feedback and collaboration from the Government of Tanzania are crucial to refine and successfully implement this initiative.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR HGSF PROGRAMS

Considering the multisectoral nature of HGSF programs, sustainable financing has far-reaching policy implications across various sectors. It's essential to emphasize that without costed policies and national commitments, securing adequate budgets and funding becomes challenging, thereby hindering the effective implementation and sustainability of HGSF initiatives.

To navigate this challenge and unlock the full potential of HGSF programs, policymakers must embrace a holistic approach that transcends traditional silos. By integrating education, agriculture, health, nutrition, social protection, economic development, and environmental sustainability into a unified policy framework with costed plans and commitments, governments can foster synergies and maximize the impact of school meals initiatives.

Furthermore, the need for continued research and evidence on HGSF in terms of policy cannot be overstated. Robust research and evidence-based policymaking are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of HGSF interventions, identifying areas for improvement, and informing policy decisions. Continued investment in research and monitoring mechanisms will not only strengthen the evidence base but also enable policymakers to adapt and refine policies to better meet the evolving needs of children, families, and communities.

A closer look into each policy sector is considered below:

1. Education Policy:

- Sustainable financing ensures the availability of resources to support the expansion and continuation of HGSF programs, directly impacting educational outcomes such as increased enrollment, attendance, and retention rates. Policies should prioritize budget allocations to sustainably fund HGSF initiatives, ensuring equitable access for all children regardless of socioeconomic status.

2. Agricultural Policy:

- Sustainable financing of HGSF programs provides an opportunity to bolster agricultural development by creating a steady demand for locally sourced food. Policies can focus on incentivizing smallholder farmers to produce nutritious crops suitable for school meals through training, access to credit, and market linkages. Additionally, investments in agricultural infrastructure and research can enhance productivity and promote sustainable farming practices.

3. Health and Nutrition Policy:

- HGSF programs contribute to improving children's health and nutrition outcomes by providing regular access to nutritious meals. Policy frameworks should prioritize the nutritional quality of school meals, incorporating guidelines for balanced diets and the inclusion of locally available nutrient-rich foods. These guidelines should also be developed for children under the age of 5 years that attend day cares/ community spaces since this time period lays the foundation for health growth and development. Integrating complementary health services such as regular health screenings, deworming, vaccination drives, and hygiene education into HGSF programs can address broader health determinants, enhancing the overall well-being of children. Moreover, investments in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are crucial to ensure the effectiveness of HGSF interventions in addressing malnutrition and promoting healthy eating habits.

4. Social Protection Policy:

- Sustainable financing of HGSF programs supports social protection objectives by targeting vulnerable populations, including children from low-income families, and addressing food insecurity. Policies can integrate HGSF into broader social protection frameworks, leveraging existing mechanisms such as cash transfers or food vouchers to complement in-school feeding initiatives. Additionally, measures should be in place to identify and support the most marginalized communities to ensure equitable access to HGSF benefits.

5. Economic Development Policy:

- HGSF programs contribute to economic development by creating market opportunities for local farmers and food producers, stimulating rural economies, and fostering entrepreneurship. Policies should prioritize local procurement strategies, supporting small-scale producers and businesses to participate in school meals supply chains. Furthermore, investments in value addition and food processing can enhance economic opportunities along the agricultural value chain, generating employment and income opportunities.

6. Environmental Policy:

- Sustainable financing of HGSF programs can promote environmental sustainability by encouraging agroecological farming practices, reducing food miles, and minimizing the carbon footprint associated with food production and transportation. Policies should integrate environmental considerations into HGSF procurement guidelines, promoting the sourcing of seasonal, locally produced foods and supporting agroforestry initiatives to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

In summary, sustainable financing for HGSF programs transcends just budgetary provision; it embodies a commitment to holistic development and human capital investment. By aligning national priorities, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and embracing innovative financing models, policymakers can pave the way for transformative change, ensuring that every child has access to nutritious meals, quality education, and a brighter future.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS, GOVERNMENTS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

To enhance HGSF financing mechanisms and address the multisectoral nature of these programs, policymakers, governments, and stakeholders can consider the following recommendations:

1. Integrated Policy Frameworks:

- Develop integrated policy frameworks that explicitly recognize and address the interconnectedness of sectors such as education, agriculture, health, nutrition, social protection, economic development, and environmental sustainability.
- Ensure that HGSF programs are not treated in isolation but are strategically aligned with broader national development priorities and strategies across these sectors.
- Foster multi-stakeholder or cross-ministerial collaboration to ensure policies are well-integrated and effectively implemented, leveraging the strengths and resources of different sectors.

2. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:

- Establish and actively engage in multi-stakeholder platforms such as a regional ECOWAS Community of Practice led by CERFAM, that bring together government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities, academia, and international partners.
- These platforms should facilitate ongoing dialogue, knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and joint decision-making processes related to financing and implementing HGSF programs.

3. Evidence-Based Planning and Monitoring:

- Invest in comprehensive assessments such as Healthy SABER, Value for Money studies, impact evaluations, HGSF costing tools, and other cost-benefit analyses to strengthen the evidence base for HGSF programs.
- Develop and implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks with clearly defined indicators to track progress, measure outcomes, and identify areas for improvement.
- Incorporate mid-term and long-term planning processes to ensure the gradual progression and scaling of HGSF initiatives, recognizing that achieving substantial impacts requires sustained effort and time.

4. Budget Allocation and Resource Mobilization:

- Prioritize budget allocations for HGSF within national education, agriculture, health, and social protection budgets to ensure sustainable funding for program implementation and monitoring.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships, short-term financing through IFIs, social impact bonds, and donor coordination platforms to mobilize additional resources and diversify funding sources for HGSF initiatives.
- Develop and facilitate national financing strategies to identify potential funding sources, including revenues, innovative mechanisms, and/or parental contributions, to fill funding gaps.
- Engage with ministries of finance, planning, parliamentarians, and their committees, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to develop realistic options that contribute to a sustainable financing strategy for HGSF.

5. Capacity Development:

- Invest in capacity building initiatives to enhance the skills and expertise of government institutions, local authorities, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders involved in planning, implementing, and overseeing HGSF programs.
- Provide training and technical assistance on various aspects of program design, procurement, supply chain management, nutrition education, food safety, and environmental sustainability.
- Improve public finance management to increase the efficiency of public spending by addressing issues related to payment, disbursement, and the gap between allocation and spending.

6. Local Procurement and Market Development:

- Promote and incentivize local procurement strategies that prioritize sourcing food from smallholder farmers, women producers, and local businesses.
- Invest in the development of market infrastructure, value chains, quality standards, and certification mechanisms to strengthen local food systems and ensure reliable supply chains for HGSF programs.

7. Policy Advocacy and Awareness:

- Seek support of heads of States, First ladies and Parliamentarians in driving country HGFSF policy, legislation, and funding changes
- Advocate for the integration of HGFSF programs as a central policy intervention to achieve broader goals related to education, nutrition, health, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability.

- Conduct targeted awareness campaigns, knowledge dissemination efforts, and social mobilization activities to build political will, garner public support, and catalyze policy action in favor of sustained investment in HGFSF initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, governments, and stakeholders can contribute to the enhancement of HGFSF financing mechanisms, the improvement of program effectiveness, and the holistic development of children, communities, and nations.



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CONCLUSION

In the ECOWAS region, the journey towards sustainable HGSF financing intertwines with the region's unique challenges and aspirations. IFIs have emerged as key partners, that stand to offer not just financial assistance but also technical expertise and advocacy, being that both IsDB and WB are partners of the School Meals Coalition, and vital for bolstering HGSF initiatives within the ECOWAS context. Through targeted investments and strategic partnerships, IFIs contribute significantly to realizing the ECOWAS vision of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational systems.

Yet, the path to sustainable HGSF financing in ECOWAS demands a tailored approach, one that recognizes and addresses the region's interconnected priorities. Integrated innovative and sustainable financing schemes, and policy frameworks are essential, explicitly acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between education, agriculture, health, and nutrition. By aligning HGSF programs with ECOWAS' broader development objectives, policymakers can ensure their strategic integration into regional development strategies, fostering coherence and maximizing impact.

While platforms such as the envisioned ECOWAS Community of Practice provide invaluable forums for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and resource mobilization, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of traditional conferences in the long term due to their expense and

resource-intensive nature. Therefore, stakeholders must explore alternative avenues to build on current momentum, ongoing engagement and collaboration, leveraging digital platforms, webinars, and online communities to foster continuous dialogue and participation in HGSF initiatives.

Evidence-based planning and monitoring remain imperative, offering insights tailored to the region's specific needs and challenges, driving continuous improvement and adaptation. Budget allocation and resource mobilization strategies must be contextually relevant, while capacity development initiatives ensure stakeholder empowerment in HGSF planning and implementation. Additionally, targeted policy advocacy efforts can rally support from ECOWAS leaders to prioritize HGSF initiatives within the regional agenda.

By embracing these region-specific recommendations and complementing traditional conferences with sustainable digital engagement channels, ECOWAS policymakers, governments, and stakeholders can catalyse transformative change in HGSF financing mechanisms, enhance program effectiveness, and nurture the holistic development of children, communities, and the region as a whole. This commitment reaffirms the vision of building a brighter future where every child in the ECOWAS region has access to nutritious meals, quality education, and the opportunity to thrive, advancing collective prosperity and well-being.

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