



# SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FEEDING ACROSS THE AFRICAN UNION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





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# STUDY ON SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FEEDING ACROSS THE AFRICAN UNION

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# STEERING COMMITTEE

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# FOREWORD

It is with immense pleasure that I am presenting this African Union Study on Sustainable School Feeding in Member States. The information it contains sheds a clear light on the contribution that school feeding makes to inclusive quality education in Africa. It also draws the connection between how the productivity of the sectors including nutrition, health, agriculture and local development can be linked to sustained school feeding programmes across Africa.

I am pleased to express appreciation to the World Food Programme (WFP) and its Centre of Excellence in Brazil for sponsoring this study, continued collaboration and technical support.

The African Union adopted the **Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25)** as a regional operationalization framework for SDG number 4 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Moreover, CESA 16-25 is a key policy tool for AU’s Agenda 2063 aimed at fostering the skills, human capital, and education revolution in Africa.

CESA’s Strategic Objective 2 aims to “build, rehabilitate, preserve education infrastructure and develop policies that ensure a permanent, healthy and conducive learning environment in all sub-sectors and for all, to expand access to quality education”. For advancing this objective and committed to strengthening school feeding as a critical action, the AU Heads of State and Government instituted the 1st March as the African Day of School Feeding, through the Decision of the Assembly/AU/Dec.589 (XXVI), and recommended this continental study of school feeding.

The study recognises that there are several diversities in school feeding programmes across Africa and leverages on experiences of existing programmes to identify best practices that have worked across the board, thus serve as a useful resource for the development of school feeding programmes across Africa.

School feeding is a key investment in our youthful population. The study suggests strengthening multisectoral approaches by using quality and accountability mechanisms in School feeding programmes.

I therefore call on all Member States and stakeholders to embrace this study and utilize it in their efforts to optimize and build new school feeding programmes that improve education and all its linked sectors.



**H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor**  
Commissioner, Human Resources Science and Technology  
**African Union Commission**

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The completion of this continental study was made possible through the encouragement and assistance of those who have given their time to this study. The Commission would like to extend its profound gratitude to H.E. Dr. Martial De-Paul Ikounga, Former Commissioner of HRST for all his support throughout the development of this study. This research was also supported by the government of Brazil and its Brazilian Agency for Cooperation' and the Brazilian National Fund for Education Development, actors that provided insights and expertise that assisted the investigation.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the valuable partnership with the staff of the WFP Liaison Office to the African Union, specifically, Ms Angeline Rudakubana, Mr Thomas Yanga and Ms Wanja Kaaria. We thank the crucial assistance from the whole staff of the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil, particularly, Mr Daniel Balaban, Mr Peter Rodrigues, Ms Sharon de Freitas, Ms Gabriela Marques, Mr João Cavalcante, Mr Vinicius Limongi, Ms Mariana Rocha, as well as the technical support of the Projects, Operations, and Communications teams, which have contributed greatly in assisting this research project.

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## Summary

School feeding programmes have been consistently proving to advance education, health and nutrition outcomes of school going children. Moreover, if well designed with the addition of home-grown food supply component, these programmes have the potential to benefit entire communities through stimulating local markets, facilitating agricultural transformation and enabling households to invest in productive assets. Acknowledging these impacts, and driven by a desire to make progress towards the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (CESA 16-25) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many African countries have successfully implemented school feeding programmes at national and sub-national levels. Some of them have already developed into home-grown school feeding programmes. Observing this rapid expansion of school feeding programmes on the continent, the AU, guided by its Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology intensified its support to member states in the design and implementation of national, innovative and home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programmes.

As part of concrete efforts to augment school feeding's position on the African continent, the Heads of State and Government of the AU, in a landmark decision during the AU Assembly in 2016, established the 1<sup>st</sup> of March as the official African Day of School Feeding. Moreover, this Assembly called for the establishment of a multi-sectoral technical committee to support and promote sustainable school feeding. As an important first step, the Assembly requested the African Union Commission (AUC) to research school feeding's impacts on inclusive, quality education in AU countries, and how school feeding can facilitate progress across a range of sectors, including education, nutrition, health, and agriculture and local development. This research, alongside analysing the returns from school feeding across these sectors, generated entry point recommendations for AU member states in optimising and enhancing their own national school feeding programmes. To carry out that Assembly's decision, the AUC and the World Food Programme Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil (hereafter the "WFP Centre of Excellence") commissioned the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), a global institute based in Cape Town, South Africa, to conduct the study.

## Purpose and outline of study

Overall, this study synthesises the outcomes of and multi-sectoral returns from school feeding in AU member states. It relies on both secondary sources, as part of a structured desk review, and primary data, as qualitative research to construct a high-level landscaping of the state of school feeding in the AU. The study then takes the evidence and best practices revealed by the desk review and primary research to develop a conceptual framework for sustainable school feeding that operates from a systems approach, and to generate entry point recommendations. These operational outputs present broad indicators progressing towards more nationally owned, integrated and sustainable school feeding programmes. Complementary to this study document, a report with case studies on 20 selected AU member states allows for further elaboration and reflection on the diversity of and innovations within school feeding programmes across the continent. To ensure equitable representation of school feeding programmes, the focus countries for case studies were selected in accordance with the AU's five geographic regions and in proportion to linguistic representation of the AU's official languages.

In line with the above, this study consists of three chapters:

An overview of school feeding in Africa, its sectoral (education and learning, health and nutrition, and agricultural and economic development) evidence base and programmes' design and implementation features that contribute to sectoral impacts;

A conceptual framework, linking school feeding to continental and international development agendas, including Agenda 2063, the SDGs and CESA 16-25; and

A set of seven core entry point recommendations for AU member states, translating into a series of indicators and outputs connected to each recommendation what school feeding policymakers could consider to successfully reach scale and contribute to their country's development.

## Chapter 1: School feeding in the African Union

School feeding programmes encompass a diverse array of designs, implementation arrangements and management structures. These programmes can either be nationally owned or administered by international organisations. Occasionally, they can be run through a partnership between a national government and international or non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, school feeding programmes in Africa operate in a range of contexts and under various constraints, which further add to the programmatic diversity on the continent. However, despite the diversity, there are common trends and features that emerge across AU school feeding programmes. This conclusion is revealed by a high-level desk review and primary, qualitative research conducted through in-country missions, consultations with national stakeholders and a survey distributed to AU member states. These commonalities underscore the current state of school feeding in Africa, as well as where school feeding is headed, and include some of the following observations:

- Almost all school feeding programmes target primary school students;
- Most school feeding programmes further target geographically, often based on vulnerability assessments;
- School feeding programmes primarily serve in-school meals;
- Complementary health and nutrition interventions are present in nearly all school feeding programmes, with deworming, micronutrient fortification and trainings being the most common;
- National school feeding policies exist or are in the process of being elaborated/adopted in the clear majority of AU countries;
- Ministries of education and/or the World Food Programme are generally the main implementers for school feeding;
- Communities are involved in the implementation for nearly all school feeding programmes, primarily in meal preparation and serving, giving in-kind or monetary contributions and procurement;
- Rate of enrolment, rate of attendance and other education and learning outcomes are the most common objectives/indicators for school feeding programmes, though a host of school feeding programmes also feature health and nutrition outcomes as objectives; and

- The expansion of HGSF elements, increased cross-sectoral cooperation and transitioning to national ownership are indicated to be the focus areas for future policymaking on the continent.

While the above pinpoint common design and implementation features, a deeper review of sectoral evidence across the education and learning, health and nutrition, and agriculture and local economic development sectors is essential to further understanding the state of school feeding in Africa.

## Sectoral evidence

In general, the strongest sectoral outcomes measured from school feeding programmes are associated with education and learning. These outcomes include increased attendance and enrolment rates at schools; reduced repetition and dropout rates; and improved retention, cognitive performance (as evidenced through test scores), and completion and promotion rates. Within the health and nutrition sector, evaluations on school feeding programmes have shown positive outcomes on schoolchildren's anthropometric measurements, such as height, weight, and body mass index; micronutrient status; reported short-term hunger; and incidence of illness. Evidence of school feeding programmes' impacts on the agriculture and local economic development is limited, however, evaluations on HGSF programmes reported more productive and expanded smallholder cooperative societies, as demonstrated through increased yields, and greater feelings of community empowerment.

While the above and other sectoral outcomes support school feeding's potential to productively contribute to several multi-sectoral development goals, more efforts are needed to better and more comprehensively measure the returns from school feeding, particularly over the long-term.

## Review of school feeding in the African Union

Despite the strong outcomes across various sectors that school feeding programmes in AU member states have already realised, the desk review of existing international evidence and primary research uncovered some general shortcomings, gaps and areas of improvement in African school feeding programmes. There are also positive generalisations to be made about school feeding in AU member states, such as the near-universal uptake of complementary interventions. Suitably, the below list summarises some matters that merit future consideration if school feeding policymakers wish to amplify the positive outcomes and effects from school feeding programmes:

- Education-based objectives and indicators remain the most common means for measuring outcomes from school feeding programmes in AU member states, with little integration of cross-sectoral indicators and/or objectives.
- A single line ministry, primarily the Ministry of Education, and/or WFP are the sole financing and implementation agencies for school feeding programmes.
- Low application of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for school feeding programmes on a national scale, with limited usage of automated feedback systems to contribute to policymaking.
- Lack of large-scale structured demand programmes and supply-side responses to support the expansion of HGSF and local production capacities.
- Cross-sectoral coordination and integration of school feeding into national development plans and agendas are still at nascent levels of uptake.

- Achievement of complete national ownership of school feeding programmes is a persistent challenge and rarely seen.

The identified gaps and challenges to school feeding programmes in Africa are not insurmountable. Consecutively, a systems approach to national and African development can facilitate improvements to these and other issues.

## Chapter 2: A conceptual framework for sustainable school feeding

The highlighted sectoral outcomes in Chapter 1 demonstrate that school feeding programmes are already effective on their own in *driving* sectoral outcomes. Though policymakers may design programmes to specifically achieve these aims, it is necessary to acknowledge a school feeding programme's ability to *enable* returns across interventions and sectors. This acknowledgement can maximise school feeding's relevance to a country's development agenda and to furthering a systems approach to development.

Accordingly, Chapter 2 elaborates a conceptual framework for school feeding in AU member states to guide policymakers. As policymakers are the target audience, this study's conceptual framework is organised around policy themes and builds innovatively on the renewed School Feeding Policy from the World Food Programme (2013) and on the World Food Programme-World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) research framework on school feeding and health. Additionally, although this study's focus is on school feeding in AU member states, the conceptual framework is designed to be accessible enough to possess relevance to policymakers in other parts of the globe who wish to integrate school feeding programmes into multi-sectoral development plans. The conceptual framework figure is displayed below:

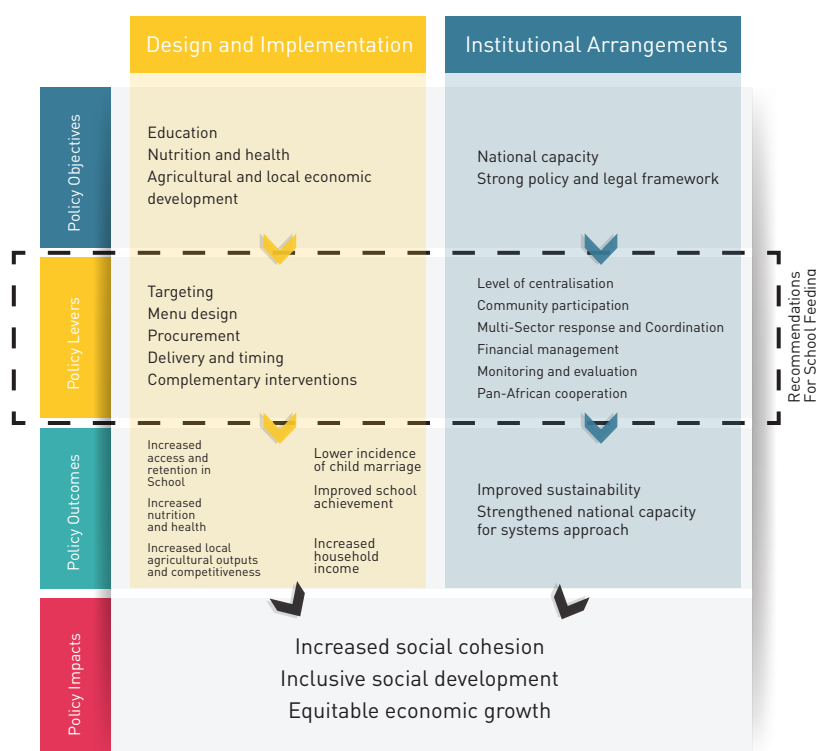


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for sustainable school feeding

The figure itself is divided into four rows, defined as follows:

- **Policy objectives** stand for thematic areas that school feeding programmes are designed to address. The policy objectives listed in the conceptual framework are education and learning, nutrition and health and agricultural and local economic development, which correspond to the sectors discussed in Chapter 1; and national capacity and strong policy and legal frameworks, which refer to how well-designed, multi-sectoral interventions can build national and institutional capacity levels to design, implement and manage such interventions.
- **Policy levers** refer to the mechanisms and/or strategies through which policy objectives can be achieved. The levers in the left-hand column match school feeding programme design features presented in Chapter 1, while the levers in the right-hand column signify strategies that policymakers can use to ensure optimal implementation of integrated school feeding programmes.
- **Policy outcomes** refer to more short-term effects from school feeding programmes and cross-sectoral development programmes. In the right-hand column, the highlighted policy outcomes reflect reported outcomes and linkages between those outcomes from school feeding programmes, as discussed in Chapter 1. In the left-hand column, the policy outcomes suggest the results of well-executed development programmes and the connection between high-performing programmes and improved sustainability and national capacity.
- **Policy impacts** characterise the longer-term impacts of school feeding programmes embedded into cross-sectoral development programmes that continuously produce positive outcomes, both in terms of human capital development and national capacity levels.

Having a clear understanding of the concepts presented in the conceptual framework is essential to their practical application and execution, which is what the entry point recommendations contained in Chapter 3 aim to support.

## Chapter 3: Recommendations for school feeding in the African Union

The study closes with a list of seven core recommendations (hereafter referred to as the “core 7”), targeted at guiding countries in building national, sustainable school feeding programmes, operating within a systems approach to development. As such, the foundation for the recommendations has two dimensions. First are the concluding observations from Chapter 1, which speak to outstanding gaps or shortcomings in school feeding programmes in AU member states that policymakers need to confront should they wish to position school feeding as an enabler of returns. Second, the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 aims to address the shortcoming and gaps while simultaneously providing policymakers with an outline for realising school feeding’s full utility as an enabler for sustainable development, given its promise for cross-sectoral outcomes on the education and learning, nutrition and health, agriculture and local economic development sectors, as well as on national capacity development. With these two sides in mind, Chapter 3 responds to the issue at hand by operationalising the conceptual framework into a series of entry point recommendations for AU guidance for member states, presented below:

1. Link school feeding programmes to international, continental and national development agendas.
2. Design and implement school feeding programmes to achieve cross-sectoral policy objectives.
3. Invest in and empower multi-sectoral response and coordination mechanisms.
4. Commit to developmental procurement strategies that exert a strong focus on increasing local production capacities.
5. Innovate financial arrangements by diversifying sources of financing for school feeding programmes and/or putting into place co-financing mechanisms.
6. Devote resources to stronger M&E systems and automate feedback processes to improve policy outcomes.
7. Deepen and learn from South-South and pan-African cooperation to optimise policy impacts.

## Concluding thoughts

Going forward, African policymakers and countries should strongly consider school feeding's place, and its home-grown component, in strategic conversations on improving human capital, increasing access to income-generating activities, boosting national production and reaching desired impacts across the education and learning, health and nutrition, and agricultural and local economic development sectors. Building the skill levels of national workforces through better education and health outcomes is particularly critical, given the more knowledge and services-focused trajectory of the global economy; while improving agricultural production and farming capacities are important aspects for the livelihoods and food security of many Africans who depend on agriculture as their primary source of income and food. The goals and objectives of the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and CESA 16-25 help set benchmarks for African policymakers' development plans, but the path to reaching those benchmarks will require a set of adaptable and progressive interventions guided by a systems approach to development. However, in the continent's desire to foster social cohesion, promote inclusive social development and achieve sustained equitable economic growth, school feeding is well positioned to facilitate progress across goals, objectives and development agendas







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