



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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ECOWAS states commit to extending and improving the quality and sustainability of school meals programmes in West Africa

Dakar – The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) - with the support of the School Meals Coalition and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) - have concluded a three-day regional technical conference on Homegrown School Meals in West Africa.

Under the theme "Legislating change, Financing the Future", the conference brought together financial partners, government officials, policymakers, donor representatives, civil society, and researchers from the Education, Agriculture, Finance, Gender, and Social Protection sectors, from more than twenty countries in West and Central Africa, to discuss the ways forward in moving from policy to laws and national budget allocations around Homegrown School Meals.

To support nutritious local food systems and the development of the communities they serve, all 20 Western African countries emphasized the value of Homegrown School Meals. Furthermore, seven of the fifteen member states of the ECOWAS member states – Benin, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, and Togo – have committed to extending the quality and sustainability of their national Homegrown School Meals programmes.

More specifically, Senegal intends to increase the coverage of school meals programmes in public primary schools by 65 percent and establish a law on Homegrown School Meals by 2024, along with developing a plan for its implementation. Benin pledged to adopt and disseminate the school meals law by 2025, increase programme funding to 100 percent coverage by 2026, and share best practices with other countries.

The Gambia intends to scale up Homegrown School Meals programmes to cover all public schools in the country by 2030 and create fiscal space to maintain an incremental school meals budget line. Liberia announced that it will establish a budget line for school feeding and raise annual funding by five million over the next two years, to expand the reach of the school meals programmes by 45 percent by 2025.

"The theme of this conference shows the need to properly articulate the political vision for a school feeding system based on local production with a more stringent regulatory framework and the implementation of a more significant, lasting, and sustainable financing system," explained Professor Fatou SOW SARR, ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs.



“In addition to the already mobilized 4.5 million euros to finance the Support Project for Innovative School Feeding Models in the Member States, the ECOWAS Commission is committed to bringing greater support to Member States in their efforts to set up and operate sustainable school feeding programs”, added Mrs Massandjé TOURE-LITSE, ECOWAS Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture.

In West and Central Africa, 83 percent of countries now have a school meals policy in place, up from 67 percent in 2020. Governments in the region are investing US\$ 543 million in school meals, 84 percent of it from domestic funds. Despite this progress, challenges remain in human capital development with 8 out of 10 children under the age of 10 unable to read a simple text, according to the World Bank.

According to the [“Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa: A Landscape Analysis”](#) published at the conference, in the 20 countries of the region, 22.4 million children benefitted from school meals — the highest in Africa, where a total of 65.9 million children are fed at schools. Yet, more than 32 million children remain out of school, the largest share of all regions worldwide.

“Home-grown school meals offer a promising pathway to provide access to essential social protection systems, aiding vulnerable communities in meeting their basic needs, while fostering sustainable development and reducing poverty” said Evelyn Etti, WFP’s Deputy Regional Director.

“WFP is committed to working with national governments and partners to support national programmes by providing technical assistance and services, sharing our experience, and encouraging direct peer-to-peer learning among practitioners,” Etti added.

International Financial Institutions play an important role in expanding Homegrown School Meals initiatives in the ECOWAS region through strategic financial support, technical expertise, and advocacy. These institutions promote human capital development, resilience, food security, and social investment.

Additionally, the World Bank and IMF support programmes aimed at improving Public Finance Management to enhance the efficiency of public spending, which can also benefit Homegrown School Meals initiatives. The role and importance of IFIs was discussed and highlighted in a new publication “Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa: A Collaborative Effort by International Financial Institutions and Innovative and Sustainable Financing Schemes.”

"The cost-benefit analysis shows that school feeding programmes are economically essential, generating US\$ 9 in economic returns for every US\$ 1 invested by promoting the growth of healthier and better-educated children who will become productive adults. In my 20 years in development, I have rarely seen an investment as profitable as school feeding," said Dr Nabil Ghaleb, Director of the IsDB's Dakar Regional Hub.

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WFP

The United Nations World Food Programme is the world’s largest humanitarian organization, saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity for people recovering from conflict, disasters, and the impact of climate change.



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About ECOWAS:

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in May 1975 to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States, and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

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Publications:

[“Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa: A Landscape Analysis” - Link](#)

[“Ensuring Sustainable Financing for School Meals in West Africa: A Collaborative Effort by International Financial Institutions and Innovative and Sustainable Financing Schemes” - Link](#)

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