



**PRESS RELEASE**

Lomé, Togo, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Page 1/2

Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF)

## **ECOWAS States Commit to Extending and Improving the Quality and Sustainability of School Feeding Programs in West Africa**

*The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP), with the support of the School Meals Coalition and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), concluded today a three-day regional technical conference on Homegrown School Feeding (HGSF) in West Africa.*

Under the theme "Legislating change, Financing the Future", the conference brought together financing 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 way forward in moving from policy to laws and national budget allocations.

To support nutritious local food systems and the development of the populations they serve, all 20 Western African countries emphasized the value of homegrown school meals. Furthermore, seven of the fifteen member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—Benin, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, and Togo—have committed to extending the quality and sustainability of their national HGSF programs.

More specifically, Senegal intends to increase the coverage of school feeding programs in public primary schools by 65% and establish a law on HGSF by 2024, along with developing a plan for its implementation. Benin pledged to adopt and disseminate the school feeding law by 2025, increase program funding to 100% coverage by 2026, and share best practices with other countries. The Gambia intends to scale up home-grown school feeding programs to cover all public schools in the country by 2030 and create fiscal space to maintain an incremental school feeding budget line. Liberia announced that it will establish a budget line for school feeding and raise annual funding by 5 million over the next two years, to expand the reach of the school meal programmes by 45% 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 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% of countries now have a school feeding policy in place, up from 67% in 2020. Governments in the region are investing \$543 million in school meals, 84% of it from



Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF)

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 (World Bank data).

According to the “[Home-Grown School Feeding in West Africa: A Landscape Analysis](#)” published for the conference, in the 20 countries of the region, 22.4 million children received 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.

“It is crucial that the international community supports national governments in implementing their national commitments, to ensure human capital development, the development of sustainable local food systems and the economic growth of local communities,” said Evelyn Etti, WFP Deputy Regional Director for Western Africa. “WFP is committed to working with national governments and partners to support national programs by providing technical assistance and services, sharing our experience, and encouraging direct peer-to-peer learning among practitioners”.

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) play an important role in expanding Home-Grown School Feeding 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 programs aimed at improving Public Finance Management to enhance the efficiency of public spending, which can also benefit HGSP initiatives. IFIs role and importance 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 \$9 in economic returns for every \$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.

-----END-----

For further information, please contact:

Francis Dabiré, ECOWAS/Lomé,

Mob. +228 92 60 76 74

Email: [fdabire@araa.org](mailto:fdabire@araa.org)

Twitter: ARAA\_CEDEAO - Facebook: araaraaf

Website: [www.araa.org](http://www.araa.org)

Djaounsede Madjiangar, WFP/ Dakar,

Mob. +221 77 639 42 71

Email: [Djaounsede.Madjiangar@wfp.org](mailto:Djaounsede.Madjiangar@wfp.org)