

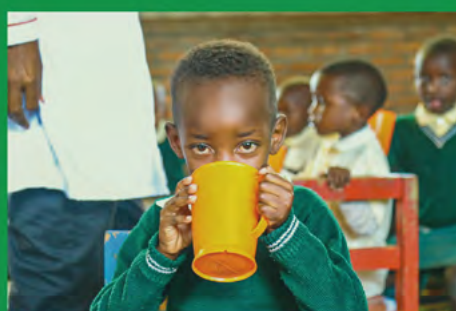
SCHOOL MEAL MODELS



Photo: WFP/Cassandra Prena

School meals are essential for the promotion of education, health, peace, and social cohesion. In times of health restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, children, especially girls living in conflict and emergency situations, depend on the continuity, sustainability, and improvement of school-meal programmes. Despite recent advances and investments by governments that have helped make school meals the world's most extensive social safety net, more than 500 million children are still unable to return to the classroom. Another 73 million in 60 lower-middle-income and low-income countries remain without access to school meals.¹ At a time when countries and their partners are evaluating strategies to reduce chronic undernutrition, malnutrition, and poverty, the discussion of school-meal models becomes imperative.

Different contexts impose different implementation models for national school-meal programmes. One way to classify these models is by how financial resources are distributed until they reach schools; this can happen in a centralised, mixed, or decentralised manner. With the common goal of generating human capital, supporting national growth, and promoting socio-economic development, these approaches have both advantages and challenges.



Photos: WFP

¹ The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022.

Disponível em: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2022>

CENTRALISED MODEL

Historically, the centralised model is the most adopted. Its basic characteristic is being managed at the national level. In this model, the government is responsible for budget, food purchase, distribution, and monitoring of activities and institutions related to the school meals supply chain.

This model seeks to improve quality control and efficiency through the development of economies of scale. This is the case, for example, in countries where food is stored in centralised warehouses and then transported – often over long distances – to schools that participate on of school-meal programmes. Enthusiasts of the centralised model also argue that it facilitates better targeting of resources and actions of surveillance and control. Among the challenges of the centralised school-meal model is difficulty of management at the community level, which occurs closer to the demands of each school unit. In addition, it becomes more difficult for the national-level manager to loosen and adapt certain measures to meet the specific needs of a location, region, or group.

The centralised school feeding model can be entirely controlled by the central government (insourced) or implemented by a third party (outsourced), when the control and management of parts of the school-meal chain – production, purchase, distribution, and consumption – are usually carried out by a private company that assists the government.

If well implemented, the outsourced centralised model can contribute to reducing costs, improving effectiveness, and decentralising control of income distribution. In addition, it has the advantage of allowing better budget management and economies of scale.

DECENTRALISED MODEL

The decentralised model provides for a wider distribution of functions, resources, and responsibilities, with smaller participation of the central government and a larger role for other entities, such as states, municipalities, districts, and regions. In this model, community-based organisations such as women's groups, farmer cooperatives, and school committees can play a more active role in decision-making and accountability.

As in the centralised model, the decentralised school meals model can be insourced, when the local government or administration manages and controls the supply chain, or outsourced, when these activities are carried out by the private

sector. The central (or federal, in the case of countries such as Germany, Brazil, and India) government has a less prominent role in the decentralised model.

The decentralised model tends to bring school-meal programmes closer to local communities and farmers, allowing greater flexibility to create menus. However, the emphasis on local dynamics can create logistical and supply difficulties, notably in more remote regions, away from food distribution centres.

MIXED MODELS

School-meal models are called mixed when they have a few of the same characteristics as the main models. This is the case of the semi-decentralised model, in which responsibility for the school-meal programme lies between the central and local levels. Like the others, the semi-

decentralised model can be insourced (when operated by different levels of public administration) or outsourced (when it involves external actors such as the private sector). In some cases, it can be difficult to identify and characterise mixed models.

Learn about countries that adopt different school-meal models

CENTRALISED MODEL

Botswana

As part of its school-meal programme, Botswana uses a centralised model funded entirely by the central government to purchase dry and non-perishable food, covering all children in Grades 1 through 7 of the country's primary public schools. In all, it provides a daily meal to more than 330 thousand children. In rural areas and in regions with a higher concentration of children in vulnerable situations, a second meal is provided.

Inter-sectoral coordination involves the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health, responsible for monitoring the quality of food and meals, and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, which coordinates the work of education professionals.

Despite being centralised, the African country's school-meal model has a greater role for district councils and schools in the purchase of perishable food. This is the case of bread used in school meals, which is usually bought from local farmers. This practice generates income and contributes to the creation of jobs, especially for women. District councils are responsible for hiring primary school cooks and staff to

process sorghum. As for distribution, local producers transport food products to central warehouses. From there, the products are later sent to district warehouses and then to schools.

The main challenges of the Botswana model are the possible lack of transport for food collection and distribution; inadequate storage conditions in some warehouses; difficulties in inter-sectoral coordination between ministries linked to school meals; inadequate monitoring of perishable food purchases; and finally, the lack of a robust programme evaluation.

Consequences of extreme weather events in the country such as droughts and floods have also affected the state of food and nutrition security in Botswana. Small producers face greater difficulties in ensuring a continuous flow of food for school meals, which generates higher dependence on imported products.

DECENTRALISED INSOURCED MODEL

■ ■ Côte d'Ivoire

according to the Integrated Programme for the Sustainability of School Canteens ("Programme Intégré de Pérennisation des Cantines Scolaires – PIP/CS"), developed with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP), food purchases in Côte d'Ivoire may be centralised, managed by the National Canteen Directorate (DNC), which can then be distributed locally or decentralised through local administrations.

According to the school-meal model implemented in the country, local communities must develop their crops autonomously with their own means of production, which can take up to five years. During this time, the DNC ensures the supply of canteens, hiring suppliers who distribute products stored in regional warehouses to school management committees.

Throughout the first year, local groups receive seeds, fertilisers, and tools from the DNC, plus technical training from a private company or from the National Agency for Support to Rural Development (ANADER), in order to ensure that they may develop some degree of sustainability. In that first year, about 25% of the total production is allocated to school canteens.

This percentage increases to 50% in the second year, when agricultural products are introduced. To ensure greater diversification, producers receive training and resources. In the third and fourth years, the total production destined to school canteens rises to 75% and 100% respectively.

The community plays an active role in several key stages of the school-meal programme: preparing lunches, purchasing perishable foods, organising cooks, managing inventory, and general maintenance of the kitchen and meal areas. In addition to contributing to the sustainability of the local economy as a whole, active community participation especially favours women.

From the institutional arrangement point of view, the DNC articulates with several ministries, such as those of education, agriculture, economy/finance, and health. Funding for the national school-meal strategy is provided by the Ivorian government through the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which channels resources to schools, and by agricultural cooperatives. Of the total resources, 60% is earmarked for school canteens and

40% for management, distribution, and monitoring fees. The programme also receives financial support from the United Nations, through WFP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Japan and the European Union.

The programme has faced some challenges: insufficient technical support to local producers, need for greater involvement of local authorities and communities, scarce financing mechanisms, inadequate seeds and inputs, low agricultural productivity, small bargaining power of local producers to negotiate prices, and lack of stable incentives for greater involvement of local producers in the school-meal programme.

As a way to keep continuity, overcome structural and circumstantial obstacles,

and contribute to the development of the Ivorian Food Programme, WFP mobilised McGovern Dole funds for interventions in the periods of 2015-2021 and 2021-2025. This action aims to increase the number of enrolments, alleviate hunger in the short term through school meals, improve students' health and nutrition status, and expand the involvement of communities and local farmers.

Despite this, a decentralised evaluation commissioned by the WFP Country Office in Côte d'Ivoire has shown that some advances observed between 2015-2021 have stagnated or even regressed, such as the quality of services in school canteens. The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent closure of schools were pointed out as two variables that explain that.



Photo: WFP/Ramin Rafirasme

DECENTRALIZED OUTSOURCED MODEL



the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP), established in 2005, is organised through a decentralised model in which the purchase, processing, and distribution of food is outsourced. In 2012, GSFP served more than 1.6 million children (38% of the total school-age population) for 195 days in about 5,000 schools located in 216 districts of the country. In 2013, the annual investment in school meals per child reached about US\$ 45.

Private companies selected by bidding process are responsible for the purchase, preparation, and delivery of food in schools. The programme establishes that at least 80% of the food intended for school meals must be purchased from smallholder farmers from communities surrounding the assisted schools. The resources for this are transferred by district assemblies under supervision of specific committees. Suppliers can buy food directly from smallholder organisations or traders.

The GSFP has an elaborate coordination system, which goes through the national and district levels and includes a monitoring mechanism involving suppliers, a school meals committee, ministries, and district assemblies. Other agencies manage the

programme locally. In addition, the Ghanaian government has established an agency with the specific function of overseeing the implementation of the school feeding programme, the Ghana National Secretariat of the School Feeding Programme.

On the one hand, the decentralised Ghanaian model allows schools to take sole responsibility for educating students, which reduces the administrative burden of purchasing and preparing meals. It also innovates by using electronic payment for suppliers and establishing uniform parameters for contracting and purchasing.

On the other hand, it faces a few challenges. The purchases from smallholder farming are not mandatory, which affects the government's objective of ensuring that 80% of GSFP products come from smallholder agriculture; outsourced companies deal with constant fluctuations in food prices and delays in financial transfers; and, if these suppliers do not obtain credit or loans, they end up choosing to buy from large producers, disrupting local production chains.



Photo: WFP/Derrick Botchway

SEMI-DECENTRALISED INSOURCED MODEL



The Indian School Feeding Programme (“Mid- Day Meal Scheme”), created in 1995 and the world’s largest in number of children, serves around 120 million students. It is characterised as semi-decentralised by having centralised funding with decentralised implementation. In addition, the purchasing process is mixed: the central government subsidises grain through the Food Corporation of India, while other products, such as fruits and vegetables, are managed at subnational levels. The preparation of meals with food produced exclusively in the country can be carried out in centralised kitchens in states or directly in schools by cooks hired by implementing agencies.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is managed by the Department of School Education and Literacy of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, which receives support from other central government bodies and local authorities in management, financing, and implementation, which generates different programmatic configurations in different parts of the country. A monitoring and evaluation committee, established at the national level, monitors and evaluates the programme’s impact, providing direction to central and local governments, mobilising community support, and promoting public-private partnerships.

In each state and federal territory, a body is nominated to oversee implementation

and transfer of resources to districts and, subsequently, to schools. District agencies, in turn, are tasked with developing menus and transporting grains used in school meals. The multi-level articulation is completed by groups of parents and teachers and the school administration.

The Indian school-meal programme is founded upon a series of Supreme Court decisions, which allows, for example, civil society to use the legal system to demand the sustainability of school meals in the country and the right to food for all Indians.

Considered a model of school-meal programme for several countries, notably for the way it is structured and the number of supported students, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has had to deal with delays in the distribution of resources. Some states also faced difficulties in supplementing costs that were not covered by the central government, which created obstacles to making the programme universal.

In addition, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme had different results on community engagement. In some regions, for example, low levels of community participation and local leadership were observed. In others, public-private partnerships were encouraged, with mixed results. Another challenge concerns the share of purchases from smallholder farming, still considered insufficient.

SEMI-DECENTRALISED OUTSOURCED MODEL

Chile

Under responsibility of the Junta Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas (JUNAEB), under to the Ministry of Education, Supply, Storage and Logistics, the Chilean School-Meal Programme (PAE) is based on a semi-decentralised outsourced model. Food procurement takes place centrally, but implementation is decentralised and outsourced to private sector companies.

The process is executed through bidding processes, and national and international companies can be selected to deliver meals in the country. According to the rules of the PAE, each contract lasts up to 3 years and the bidding processes are divided geographically, involving a third of the country. Suppliers submit their offers through an online system and are subsequently evaluated by JUNAEB according to each company's management competence and technical and financial capacity.

The menus are standardised and, once selected, the supplier is responsible for managing the entire supply chain, which involves everything from kitchen services to the preparation of meals and their delivery to schools. Food and supplies can be purchased from local or international producers. Vendors are paid per meal served to each child.

Because it is based on a semi-decentralised structure, the central government allocates resources directly to the selected implementing companies, with no intermediation from other government entities. The programme is monitored locally by public officials and teachers to ensure that all pre-registered students receive meals. JUNAEB may choose local community groups to support the process.

Despite its coverage, the Chilean programme is not universal. Schools receive meals according to a vulnerability index based on family socio-economic data of primary school students. Teachers then determine the allocation of food to the most vulnerable students, ensuring that the programme reaches them.

On the one hand, the programme is efficient and ensures lower costs to the State. On the other, it reduces the possibilities of strengthening smallholder farming. This is because third-party suppliers can look for producers outside the local market. In addition, there is no policy or regulation that guarantees the effective involvement of smallholder farmers in Chilean school meals. Greater inter-institutional coordination with ministries such as Health and Agriculture is also pointed out as important for the development of the programme.



Photo: WFP/Boris Heger

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