



HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Current state
and future
perspective

CERFAM
CENTRE D'EXCELLENCE REGIONAL
CONTRE LA FAIM ET LA MALNUTRITION



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Executive Summary

Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) is a model of school feeding that “provides children in schools with safe, diverse, and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholders.” It promotes quality and safety standards for local food, supporting diversification with regard to culturally appropriate dietary habits, with the aim of maximizing benefits and strengthen capacities of smallholder farmers and better linking schools to local food production sources. HGSF is a first step towards providing nutritious foods with high nutrient value in schools and promoting community based and sustainable resilient solutions towards better nutrition.

The Regional Center of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM) is a platform of exchanges, partnerships, and cooperation aiming to respond to the increasing demand of national governments striving to strengthen their national capacities, knowledge management, documentation, and sharing of good practices and lessons learned in the fight against hunger and malnutrition in the continent. With the interest of CERFAM both in capitalization, documentation, and supporting learning on HGSF in the region, this study aimed to 1) establish a snapshot of the current landscaping of HGSF in West and Central Africa, identify its current objectives, opportunities and challenges and 2) provide a future perspective of where HGSF can move towards with capitalization, sharing, and cooperation. With these objectives, it is expected to provide policy makers with quality information to understand the importance, opportunities, and challenges in HGSF and support their decision-making process when advancing in HGSF, as well as providing technical implementors on all levels (international and governmental) to support in advancing programmatic success.

Using the CERFAM selected criteria of good practices for HGSF value chain, this paper presented an analysis and proposed recommendations aimed at contributing to a better understanding as to how to create feasible, replicable, and sustainable HGSF programmes that can support scale up. By linking the analysis to the original recommendations of the 2018 African Union study on HGSF, the paper notes how the landscape mapping of HGSF has evolved, and where it can go in the years to come.

The study finds that the region is showing a clear interest in pushing the agenda of HGSF and establishing groundwork on how to create sustainable and scaled up programmes both on the international and national stage. Through the consultations, it was however clear that the level of communication, coordination, sharing across countries, particularly for technical experts and implementors is very limited. A further limitation of the study has been the lack of documented papers both on an international and country level. Most information comes from direct consultations. Nevertheless, this study has shown that there are many points for engagement, including learning from each other on direct topics or sharing ideas, that will encourage the common goal for sustainable HGSF strategies.

For this reason, this paper suggests three main priorities for the future: 1) a focus on better documentation of HGSF strategies as well as individual components on the HGSF value chain, 2) priority aiming at conducting lessons learnt exercises and identifying specific validated good practices of HGSF strategies in specific contexts, and 3) aim to better utilize a knowledge platform to share, disseminate and publicize their work, to allow for continuous learning among the region and in a context. Utilizing existing platforms like CERFAM, with the technical expertise and knowledge they provide, will offer the services and exchanges that the region needs to strive.

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Scope and purpose



Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) is defined as a model of school feeding that “provides children in schools with safe, diverse, and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholder farmers.” This definition has two core elements. On one hand, through “safe, diverse and nutritious food” it promotes quality and safety standards for locally sourced and produced food, supporting the diversification of culturally appropriate eating habits. On the other hand, with the caption of “sourced locally from smallholders” HGSF programmes aim to maximize benefits and strengthen capacities of smallholder farmers, whilst better linking schools to local food production sources. In an overarching view, HGSF programmes provide a first step towards linking local production value chains to supporting the provision of nutritious foods in schools. This will enable the creation and promotion of a strong and sustainable community base, able to fight food insecurity, strengthen local economic developments and increase education outcomes in line with promoting gender equality.

In March 2019, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Cote d'Ivoire launched the first Centre of Excellence in Africa, based in Abidjan. The Regional Center of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition (CERFAM) is a platform of exchanges, partnerships, and cooperation aiming to respond to the increasing demand of national governments striving to strengthen their national capacities, knowledge management, documentation and sharing of good practices and lessons learned in the fight against hunger and malnutrition in the continent.

HGSF has been identified as a priority area for CERFAM's programme of work, following a regional consultation held with stakeholders in June 2019. Supporting national efforts to strengthen HGSF can be an effective strategy for contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and continental priorities such as the Agenda 2063 and the Malabo Declaration.

The concept of HGSF first gained attraction on the African Continent in 2003 with the decision of governments to include

programmes that source locally grown food from smallholders on a strategic and multi-dimension level, and in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the new Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which launched HGSF pilot projects in 12 different African countries. Ever since, numerous landmarks around the world have brought attention to the importance and acceptance of HGSF. For example, the inclusion of HGSF within the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as well as the bold decision of African heads of state to link the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals with HGSF in January 2016. When in March 2016, the first Africa School Feeding Day was dedicated to HGSF, it was clear that the importance and attraction for HGSF on the African continent had formally arrived.

The multisectoral benefits from HGSF attracted attention worldwide and included the thematic in the global agenda despite the nature of these programmes that remain context specific, flexible, and dimensional linked to each government's aims. It is an attractive idea for governments to pursue, but concrete large-scale examples of these programmes are still rare. Countries are in different stages of HGSF advancements, which are mainly reflecting how they relate to key environmental sets necessary to allow them to progress such as financial resources, political engagement, multisectoral collaboration and coordination, institutional capacities and development of a consistency value chain.

Despite HGSF advancements being context-specific, similarities of initiatives, lessons learned, opportunities and comparable challenges among countries in West and Central Africa exist and could be very helpful to countries to understand how they can advance their programmes. With the interest of CERFAM both in capitalization, documentation and supporting learning on HGSF in the region, this study aims to 1) establish a snapshot of the current landscaping of HGSF in West and Central Africa, identify its current objectives, opportunities and challenges and 2) provide a future perspective of where HGSF can move towards with capitalization, sharing and cooperation.

The study will then present an ideal HGSF value chain as a benchmark to guide countries, while producing recommendations to help countries identify how to fill their programme gaps to progress towards improving and transforming their initiatives into good practices. In addition, providing an overview of similarities in terms of strengths and challenges will aim to demonstrate how cooperation among countries can provide learning opportunities and harness the benefits of joint capitalization towards sustainable HGSF programmes. With these objectives, it is expected to provide policy makers with quality information to understand the importance, opportunities, and challenges in HGSF and support their decision-making process when advancing in HGSF, as well as providing technical implementers on all levels (international and governmental) the support in advancing programmatic success.

This study was commissioned on the basis of a three-month staff exchange programme between the WFP Chad country office and CERFAM, whose interest was to champion CERFAM's methodology in capitalizing (identifying, documenting and sharing) good practices and utilize the approach for improving programmatic activities in Chad, particularly their scale up. CERFAM's tools include the knowledge capitalization methodology which aims at developing and/or improving projects through the identification, documentation and sharing of good practices, particularly across countries which share similarities in the same region. By utilizing samples from countries sharing similar context, realities and issues, the initiative was aimed to support the development of the HGSF strategy in Chad. Through South-South cooperation and national capacity strengthening, countries can learn not only from each other but find common solutions to problems that are recurrent within the different regions.

Methodology



Capacity strengthening is defined as “the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain their capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. It is about building on existing skills, knowledge, institutions, and systems to enable governments to take responsibility for investing in and managing hunger solutions.” This definition works on the fundamental principles of partnership, ownership, recognition, trust, and time. The three key domains that enable the principles are firstly having supportive law, policies, and strategies in place (the enabling environment), secondly, having well-functioning organizations (organizational domain), and lastly, supporting education and skilled people (individual domain).

CERFAM works under these principles to strengthen national capacities, looking at mobilizing cooperation and exchange to demonstrate the importance of country ownership and investment in school feeding and HGSF. The Centre works on the premise that HGSF reap both hard and soft capacity benefits on education, nutrition and agriculture. The HGSF value chain presented below depicts how vast the influences on each of these three items presents across the programme.

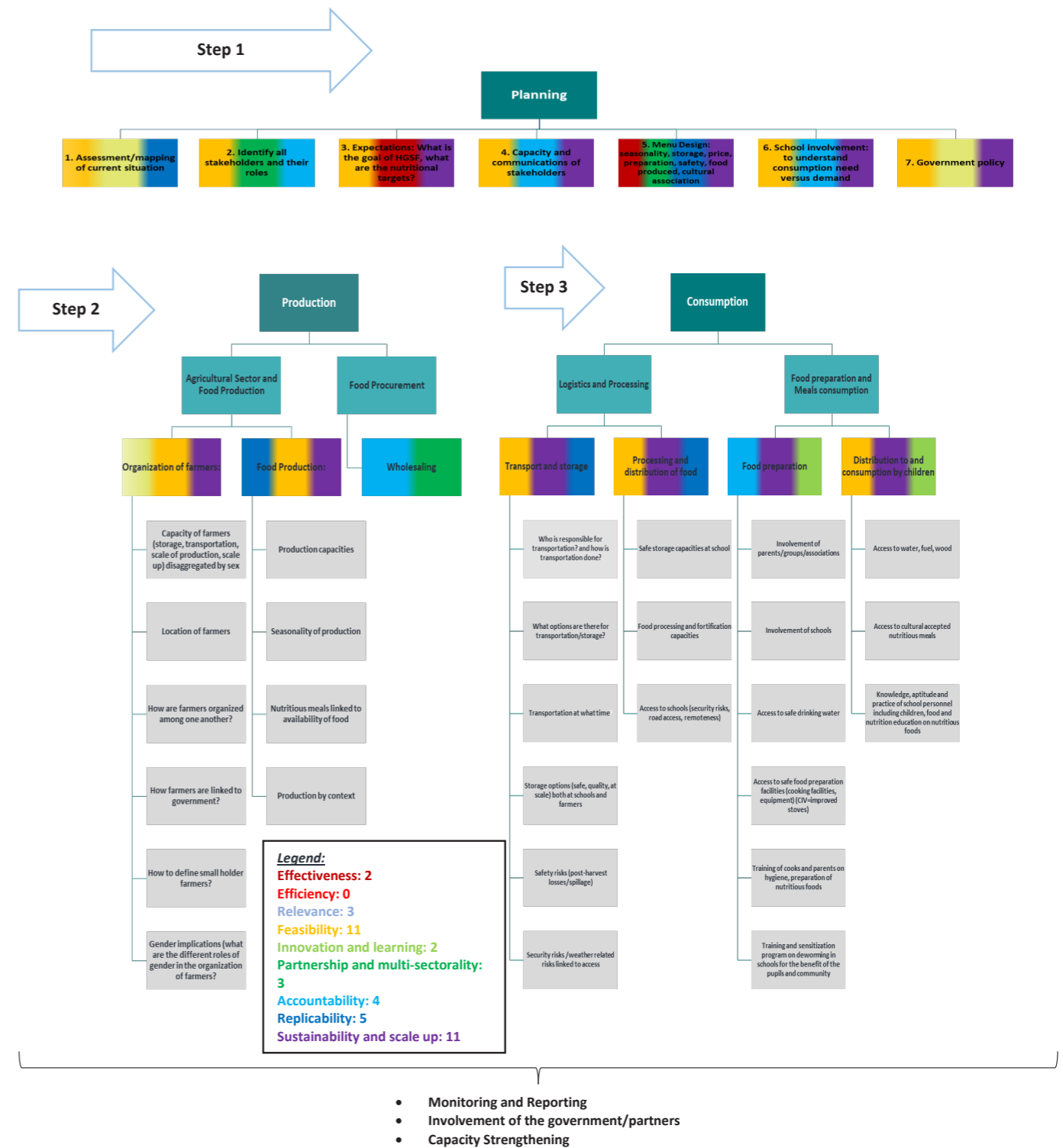
In West and Central Africa, the Centre has remarked that national governments are interested in advancing their individual HGSF programmes as well as progress on an international stage. Through this study, the Centre aims to support countries by providing a representation of the current landscape of HGSF in the region, highlighting the current common challenges and opportunities, as well as offering some recommendations of good practices within HGSF. The findings and analysis of HGSF in the region will produce information regarding gaps and challenges which are persistent across countries and which areas are missing which prevents them from moving towards the HGSF value chain benchmark.

This paper departs from the African Union (AU) study published in January 2018 on “Sustainable School Feeding

across the African Union” which presented the achievements of school feeding on the continent. Through 20 selected case studies and secondary data review, the study aimed to “develop a conceptual framework for sustainable school feeding that operates from a systems approach, and to generate entry point recommendations.” These recommendations defined clear performance indicators and outputs for AU member states to follow to reach a more sustainable school feeding programmes across the continent in 2018. Revisiting the AU study through the lens of CERFAM’s 2019 capitalization of good practice tool, constituted an initial key step to guide building the methodology of this capitalization study as it was key for understanding continental trends and countries’ experiences in HGSF.



HSGF Value Chain





The HGSF value chain will serve as a benchmark for the findings and analysis in this study, and will guide as the model to achieve for a successful and sustainable HGSF programme. The HGSF value chain encompasses three steps: planning, production, and consumption. This paper will utilize these three steps to detail to the reader recommendations as a whole and within the specificities of the HGSF value chain. This will be done while combining it with CERFAM's methodology of capitalization of good practices. The colors indicate how the components of the HGSF value chain connects and contributes to the nine criteria for identifying good practices. This framework guides the recommendations for countries to progress in the HGSF value chain and respond to key criteria for long term development such as feasibility, replicability, and sustainability.

CERFAM's methodology of good practice focalizes on assessing interventions (projects, programmes, activities etc.) based on 9 criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, feasibility, innovation and learning, partnership and multi-sectorality, accountability, replicability, and sustainability and scale up. Each of these criteria represents an aspect which can qualify an intervention to be a good practice. This methodology is intended to support South-South cooperation and the capitalization of effective approaches across the continent. Through this tool, CERFAM builds up a collection of documenting practices for further dissemination among stakeholders to support their efforts towards achieving food security and nutrition (SDG2) and contributing to related SDGs in general.

In accordance with the objective of the study, CERFAM's good practice methodology was linked to the HGSF value chain to understand the key criteria which are needed in order to conduct a successful HGSF programme. Through Figure 1 it is visible to see that three out of the nine criteria are the most common across the value chain, these are: feasibility, replicability, and sustainability and scale up. For this reason, the paper has suggested that the analysis will focus more specifically on three of the nine components of the good practice methodology, as they represent the important factors of a HGSF programme.

Feasibility refers to the ability to implement a realistic, context-specific programme that focuses on obtainable outputs within a circumstance. For HGSF specifically, feasibility means to assess if conditions are in place to implement successful HGSF. The HGSF value chain will be used to show the eleven criteria



related to ensuring that feasibility is reached. Sustainability and scale up looks at to what extent the programme can be a long-term success and to what extent it can deeply implicate communities and the countries' national structures for continuity with quality results for the beneficiaries. For this study, sustainability relates to components that need to exist to guarantee long term implementation of the programme. Eleven criteria were identified in the value chain to be explored if a programme is to be sustainable in time.

Lastly, replicability refers to programmes and practices that can be taken to or adopted by other countries and stakeholders, good practices that are potentially to be shared due to similar challenges. For this study, replicability relates to the capacity of a practice to be taken to another context, adapted and customized. Five components of the value chain can be explored to support programme replicability and it will be discussed at the recommendations.

The collation/collection of the information required for the review was undertaken through the following steps: data collection included i) collection of existing material and documented good practices on HGSF through consultations, desk reviews, and interviews with HGSF global and regional experts as well as with the individual 19 countries in the West and Central African region; ii) linking the findings of this desk review with CERFAM's HGSF value chain to understand where commonalities in challenges and opportunities lie, and lastly iii) connecting this analysis to CERFAM's capitalization criteria to provide clear recommendations for policymakers on how to sustainably advance HGSF programmes.

To proceed with the study; first, the findings based on a desk review along the HGSF value chain will be presented. This will be followed by an analysis of these findings utilizing the HGSF value chain. Lastly, recommendations for policymakers and countries based on the HGSF value chain findings and linked to the 3 key criteria (feasibility, sustainability and scale up, and replicability) identified will provide a conclusive remark.



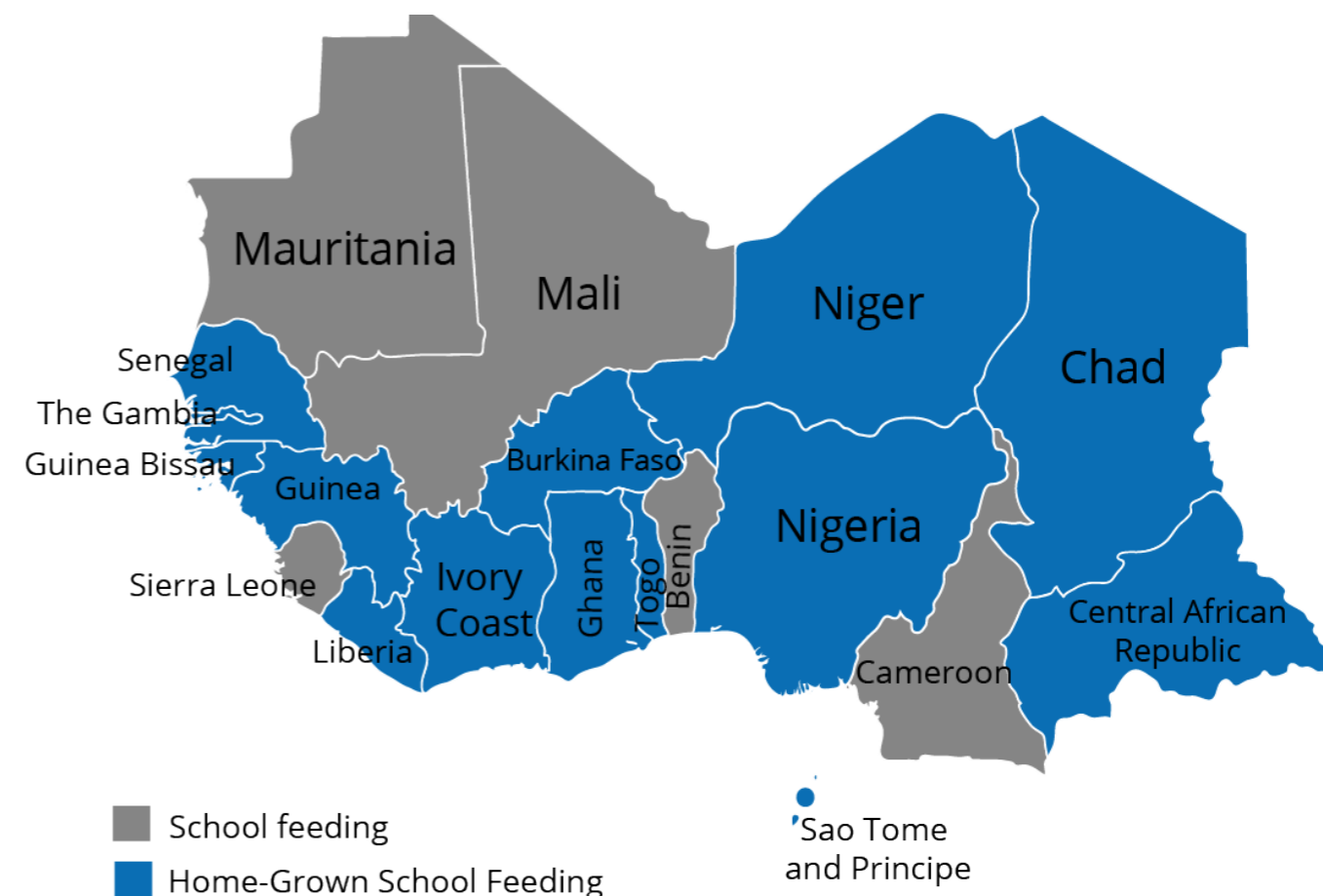
Findings on the HGSF value chain



The section below will demonstrate general findings on HGSF in West and Central Africa, organized methodologically, and utilizing the HGSF value chain. The findings are sourced from a review of existing literature on the subject and direct consultations with the 19 School Feeding Focal Points in the WFP Country Offices (CO) located in the region. It aims to give the reader a landscape mapping of the current HGSF initiatives in the region. According to the HGSF value chain they are organized as 1) General Findings, 2) Planning, 3) Production and 4) Consumption.

1. General Findings

In the 19 countries within the West and Central Africa region, there is a wide array of HGSF programmes. From the 19 countries a total of 14 countries have HGSF initiatives and 5 countries (Mali, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Benin and Cameroon) are yet to develop HGSF initiatives, but have begun the implementation of SF programmes (Figure 2). The varying developments of HGSF initiatives in the countries differ depending on context, with some countries heavily dependent on climate conditions (particularly in the Sahel), or others due to funding gaps linked to prioritization interventions. The countries where there is currently no HGSF programme however are developing interest. For example, in Benin, HGSF is planned under the PNASI, the integrated National School Feeding Programme, and is to be implemented soon. Sierra Leone is also considering starting a HGSF programme, and as such conducted a Value Chain and Market Analysis of Potentially Locally produced Food Crops to Empower Women and Youth for HGSF in 2020.



The table below (Figure 3) is an attempt to place countries in a timeline according to the main features of their programmes, starting from existence or not of HGSF initiatives in the countries and ending where HGSF is nationally owned and spread. It reaches then from Cameroon and Mauritania on the far left where there is no current interest in HGSF initiative, to the farthest right with Nigeria, Ghana and Sao Tome e Principe (STP) where the HGSF programme is completely nationally owned and embedded into national policies and legal frameworks.

It is noticeable that the HGSF practices are encrusted in the majority of countries in the region and there is a shared wish to have a HGSF initiative. The West and Central Africa region is rarely seen as an ideal environment for HGSF practices, but despite the challenge's governments continue to advance in this connection between locally produced and procured food to serve school feeding programmes. The timeline can also indicate elements countries could put in place to advance their HGSF programmes and progress to the following level.



Government engagement and intention to prioritize HGSF is a key initial step. As you may notice, government engagement increases as the level changes and as national financing committed to support HGSF increases. A leading implementer is another component key to understanding how to progress towards nationally owned HGSF. This graphic depicts that there are only 3 governments that purchase and implement HGSF without support from other partners (either WFP or other international organizations). Even in countries where there are other organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), it is WFP who purchases the food.

2. Planning:

i. *Government Policy*

A key step for planning is to count on a favorable political environment with government policies and strategies which can provide the requirements for creating and implementing HGSF across the countries. Further from table 1, the findings also show that there is a large difference not only between the type of HGSF programme but also how it is embedded in the government. Table 2 below shows the difference of HGSF strategies within each country in the region. With 12 countries in total, most in the region have a HGSF policy in government.

The planning phase of the HGSF value chain focuses on how a programme is set up, what assessment methodologies are conducted, what technical staff are assigned to the programme, and the allocation of the budget. Depending on the placed importance of the HGSF initiative this will vary.

Law	Policy	None	Other
3 country (Togo, STP, Guinea Bissau) Ghana and Mali have laws that are under-review	12 countries (Cameroon, Chad, Benin, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Senegal, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali)	1 country (Central African Republic)	Nigeria

ii. *Community Participation*

Across the region, there are also different examples of community involvement, as well as the role the school plays within the HGSF programme. Some countries such as Guinea and Senegal show that the parent-teacher groups are the key players responsible for the implementation of the programme. In Guinea for example, parents organize the process of procurement with the smallholder farmers and the schools through mobile money. In these contexts, they are the individuals indicating their needs to the smallholder farmers to inform production, as well as making sure consumption is adequate. In other contexts, insufficient uptake of the HGSF and ownership by communities provide substantial issues because the involvement of external actors is a major concern. For example, in Chad, the current programme is trying to increase ownership and involvement with parents because they seem to display a lack of interest if HGSF programmes don't have incentives.

General Findings

- WFP is the primary purchaser for HGSF in the region and the main technical partner supporting countries to progress in HGSF initiatives.
- There is potential for improved multi-sectoral collaboration across ministries (Ministry of Agriculture, Health and social affairs) that can support receiving additional funding and more government action.
- There is a need for increased assessments of possible food production and logistics needed to serve HGSF in each country.
- Countries need to reflect the definition of smallholder farmers and how they are included in vulnerable populations.
- There is a need for exchanges over technologies to help the region mitigate their climate change issues and to understand options to increase their food production.
- There is a lack of awareness about food quality and safety procedures.
- Low capacity for implementing HGSF at all levels.
- Difficulty in accessing markets to sell the production.
- Evidence to guide changes in the implementation of HGSF is not normally accessible and disseminated with policy makers in the region.

Planning

Countries in the region have prioritized creating policy and legal frameworks for their programmes, including HGSF components. Although all countries have school feeding activities and HGSF is at the forefront of governments' agenda, not all have been able to start HGSF or to evolve from a pilot perspective.

There is a large difference between how countries in the region have integrated HGSF and SF in the region, as a law, policy, neither or a different format.

Countries in the region understand the importance of engaging communities to advance HGSF. How communities engage in HGSF differs depending on the type of the initiative and country particularities. This changes the participation of different stakeholders across the HGSF value chain.



3. Production

i. Food Procurement

The next step of the HGSF value chain benchmarking looks at procurement. The findings show that with the type of programme differing (as shown on Table 1), the set-up and compilation of the individual programmes in the countries also changed. The procurement procedure and the linkage with smallholder farmers in a HGSF programme can be either centralized or decentralized. Centralized refers to a top down approach, where the government directs the implementation. For example, in Nigeria, the government pays cooks working in each school district directly to buy from local smallholder farmers. Similarly, in Ghana, the government hires caterers from each community, usually women, whom receive cash allocations for their local purchases. Other models are formed around a decentralized methodology with community and smallholder farmers directly interacting and forming a bottom-up decision-making process. For example, in Guinea smallholder farmers distribute directly to schools depending on needs clearly defined by the parent groups that are linked to the schools.

Production

Countries in the region have adopted either a decentralized or centralized HSF initiative, dependent on context with an initial trend for decentralization,

Countries seem to lack specific guidance to procure from smallholders' farmers and to make options for this group to have easier access to markets,

Institutional procurement connecting local production from smallholder' farmers to school feeding appears an optimal solution to improve food and nutrition security and has been used in pilots in almost all countries in the region,

This differentiation in procurement modalities contributes to create unique linkages between smallholder farmers, the parents, and the school,

Although food availability is a constant challenge indicated by countries in the region, HGSF has continued to be used as strategy to motivate farmers to increase their production and to engage in school feeding,

Farmer's low capacity in the region to respond to schools' demands hasn't been preventing HGSF to expand in the region. Rather, it has been pushing for new technologies and solutions to allow farmers to reach the potential of HGSF,

4. Consumption:

Logistic and Processing: the use of fresh food

Although logistics and processing refer to different aspects, it is important to highlight the finding related to the use of fresh food in the region. The study has also found that across the region, 11 out of 19 countries have fresh foods in their school feeding food basket. This fresh food varies across countries and region as well as its procurement methodology. Some countries procure fresh foods from local markets whereas in other programmes this is provided by community gardens. With an increase in fresh foods in the food basket, the overall HGSF programme would enable access to more local and nutritious foods.

Meal Consumption

The study has found that there are limited governments who provide 100% locally produced foods, often having to import food. This is seen to be caused through numerous things, but countries have mentioned climate change, context, and financial resources. Across the 19 countries, five countries receive lean season assistance, for a period where farmers have difficulty to access enough foods between the seasonality's of harvests. This causes a lack of sufficient foods for all, particularly affecting HGSF programmes. Furthermore, post-harvest losses due to lack of storage facilities, technical understanding, or weather is another factor that the study has found affects the ability to finance the schools with sufficient foods.

Post-Harvest Loss Management

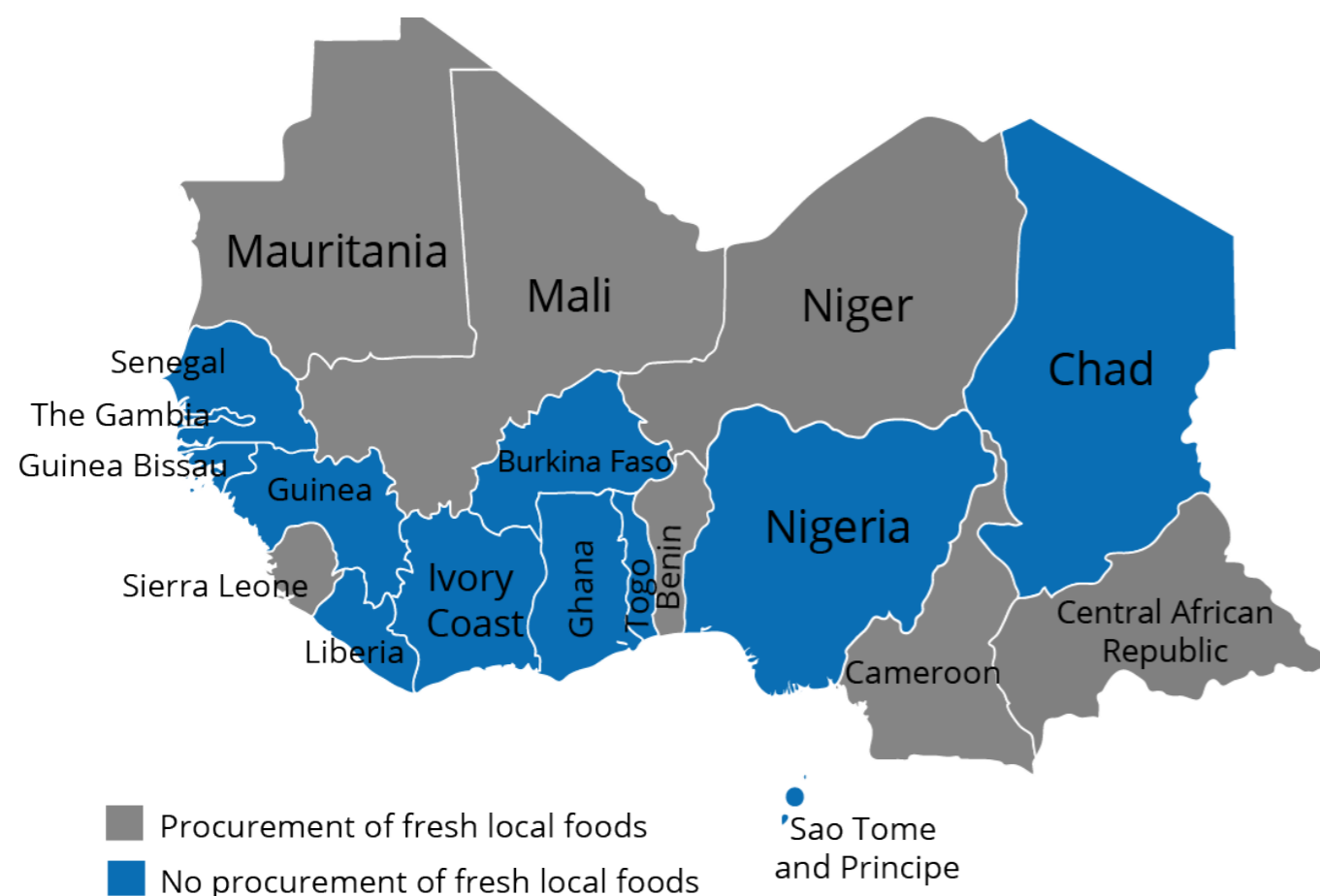
There are very few studies that go into detail on how much food loss is calculated in the West and Central

Africa regional basis due to post harvest losses but the FAO report (2019) estimates the PHL in 2016 solely from post-harvest to distribution in Sub-Saharan Africa to be over 15%. Nevertheless this is a pertinent issue that was mentioned during most of the interviews across the region.

Food Quality and Safety

The findings have shown that there is also a general lack of data and documentation on food quality and safety. There are individual pilot projects and programmes invested in throughout the region, for example investing in food controls in Nigeria or the new HGSP model in Liberia signing an agreement with the National Standard Laboratory to address issues around food safety and quality. However, nothing that covers the entire food quality and safety span as well as clear evidence of its solutions.

The findings have shown that there are clear commonalities across the HGSP programmes present in West and Central Africa, presenting opportunities for policymakers to grasp for the future. The findings have however also shown the lack of documentation and evidence present on HGSP in the region. This has resulted in the findings being based heavily on information provided by individuals who are working in the area. It will be important for the future landscaping of HGSP to have better focus on documentation. Nevertheless, the findings provide a solid base for an analysis on the current landscape of HGSP and recommendations according to the HGSP value chain.



Consumption

Despite the challenges in the region, 11 out of 19 countries in the region have included fresh foods in their HGSP food basket.

Climate change and conflicts plays a major role in limiting smallholders' farmers to be more active in supplying schools.

Government capacity and practical guidance to operationalize and guarantee application of food quality and safety principles are key challenges for countries in the region to expand their programmes.

Post-harvest losses across the region affects smallholders' farmers capacity to improve their production, to store it safely and to better supply schools' demands.

Individual countries have added some food and quality safety measures however in general, the region needs more strategic, evidence-based documentation.



Analysis based on the HGSF value chain



In general, the findings provided policymakers an indication of how to advance HGSF in the region and specifically within their own country on the timeline. These findings will be guiding our analysis throughout this session and will contribute to a better understanding of the recommendations. The HGSF value chain presented in the methodology will be the guideline of the below analysis. During the study, many commonalities were found, the below session highlights those that are pertinent for a successful HGSF programme and identifies the key points in each HGSF value chain component.

Planning

Within the first step, planning, the general findings have shown that there are large opportunities within coordination, having more assessments, better understanding of gender implications, and mechanisms to improve long term government engagement.

With the large varieties of government policies, and with its different methodologies of involving stakeholders, coordination in the planning phase presents a challenge of how well the HGSF programme is organized and executed. Furthermore, an increase in assessments across the board will provide better strategic opportunities and understanding of HGSF initiatives. Lastly, gender across the programme is not yet heavily thought about, it provides an opportunity of how best to integrate the entire community for a well-rounded planned HGSF programme, particularly when looking at the overall government policy and school involvement. These three ideas will be depicted further below.

1. Coordination

The overarching common challenge faced by countries is the lack of coordination in HGSF among the various stakeholders.

HGSF has a value chain that includes a line of actors from different sectors that need to interact to ensure a successful implementation of the programme, both on a technical level but also from an institutional perspective. To support the institutional level, it is pertinent to have a clear technical functioning working group with members from all relevant stakeholders of the government. Further, it is key that HGSF is integrated into all levels of sectoral policies and frameworks to allow for countries to demonstrate the stark interest and value add of HGSF. This will allow for the technical expertise and capacities to be put in place and enable a clear communication through joint actions, goals planning and performance measuring through agreed upon indicators and outputs.

2. Assessments

The findings have shown that a common challenge – as well as opportunity – is the need for an increase in assessments in the planning phase. This links very well to the need for more documentation of HGSF programmes. Assessments will provide a valuable exercise in understanding the planning phase, the context, and the need and capacity for a HGSF programme. It will enable the implementors to get an overview of the stakeholders, understand what communication lines are already in existence and need to be established, as well as understanding the feasibility of a HGSF programme. It will also expand into what type of HGSF programme is necessary (decentralized or centralized), what type of budget is required, as well as other resources (technical).

3. Gender

A common opportunity at the stage of planning is in the gender dimension of the programmes. For HGSF, the impact of gender and protection is viewed when looking at the role of women and the discrepancies between men and women throughout the entire value chain. At the production level, the role of women varies greatly depending on culture, context, socio-economic group, and age, as well as level of education. Inequalities are usually observed in salary differences, lack of access and control of resources including land, income, productive assets, financial assets, and education. At the planning stage, there is an opportunity to clearly define how to create equal opportunities and strengthen girl's and women's empowerment within HGSF. For example, in Nigeria, women are given employment opportunities by offering them catering roles (the interim between the smallholder farmers and the schools).

4. Government Policy

A further opportunity found during the findings is the government engagement during the planning phase. From the HGSF value chain, it was identified that at the planning phase, government context as well as the engagement of stakeholders is key for a successful HGSF programme. This refers to the engagement of the government from the beginning as well as the government having a suitable environment to take up HGSF programmes. The findings show that government willingness is key, for example in Nigeria the HGSF programme has been adopted to 100% full ownership by the government in less than 20 years solely through the clear engagement the Vice President's Office had during the entity of planning. It shows that not only financial incentives are key but also the willingness and contextual awareness of wanting to implement a HGSF programme.

Production

Within the production phase, the findings have shown that a critical challenge is the insufficient production by smallholder farmers at scale across countries in the region despite the different contexts and challenges that come with these contexts bring about. A definition of smallholder farmers is clearly an urgent step to be taken to support this group to better access government and partners' support. These topics will be discussed further below.

1. Agricultural Sector and Food Production:

Within the agricultural sector and food production phase of the HGFS value chain, food production at scale is both an opportunity and a challenge across the region. Smallholder farmers face a major challenge in engaging profitably in markets. Due to their physical, economic, social, and institutional marginalization, most smallholder farmers pursue low-productivity and subsistence-oriented livelihoods that support meagre and unhealthy diets. This results in high numbers of food insecure and vulnerable farmers. Particularly in the West and Central Africa region, climate shocks caused by poor water management systems or desertification have numerous dire impacts. In addition, countries could benefit from a clear definition of smallholder farmers, which it entails, and which programmes and benefits they could be eligible for. This will allow programmes to prioritize their needs and categorize these as an actor within the HGFS value chain. Through this they will be able to offer them the support they need to thrive.

Various countries such as the Ivory Coast have been supporting initiatives to overcome this challenge through 1) smallholder capacity building to produce at scale, 2) building local processing capacity, 3) stable institutional demands, 4) food quality and safety, and 5) building ownership. Climate smart agriculture including composting, mulching, crop rotation, and post-harvest processing is only one way in which this issue is being tackled. These supporting initiatives result in increased harvests to support school meals, and household consumption and sales, but they also create additional needs to transform value addition through processing and adequate storing of surplus produce. The country examples where this is provided are both WFP as well as government led.

Consumption

Within the last phase, consumption, the findings have shown a need to look at the preparation of food, particularly fresh foods, the post-harvest loss of the preparation of foods and the costs associated with these items to provide at capacity for the needs of the school children. As such the below will look at post-harvest loss and financial resources in more detail.

1. Logistics

Good infrastructure for HGFS appears as a common challenge across countries. Data and evidence on this point is still a challenge and more assessments to overcome this is urgent. The assessments would be crucial to help improve and expand HGFS initiatives in the region. Regional initiatives looking at these challenges could integrate HGFS perspective in their agenda to support governments in this discussion. A combination of efforts from national to local levels with increased participation of communities are clear paths to pursue for HGFS to improve logistics for HGFS.

An overview of the regional region? has also clearly stated that management of post-harvest loss is an area in logistics that most countries see as an opportunity in advancing HGFS programmes. Whilst post-harvest loss management can include various dimensions, strengthening storage capacities and storage management capacities is a key area identified as a main interest. Almost all countries mentioned their struggle to manage post-harvest losses effectively. The reasons for post-harvest losses vary between countries. In Chad for example, they are closely linked to storage capacity, whereas in humid countries the ability to keep harvest dry remains a challenge.

To overcome the challenge of storage, countries have been adopting different innovative technologies as solutions. In Rwanda, a system called Drycards is being used to assess the dryness of cereals for effective storage. In Ivory Coast, to overcome the issue of storage and post-harvest losses, they have been utilizing hermetic bags in communities to correctly store harvests.

2. Food Preparation and Meals Consumption

The last phase of the HGFS value chain, food preparation and meals consumption, found that the linkage between giving a nutritious meal and the cost of HGFS per child per day, is the primary topic discussed in the region in advancing HGFS. The ability of schools to receive fresh foods often depends on the amount of financial resources available. In most countries, or areas of countries where there are wealthier communities, parents are asked to contribute to the HGFS programme to allow for a more diversified meal for their children.

However, the question of whether school meals should remain free has been raised by many countries. To support this effort, WFP is currently developing and advocating for the use of a PLUS meal application – a support to countries to develop a context-based, balanced, cost efficient and nutritious meal plan. This is expected to help develop decisions on how to best provide and develop a balanced nutritious meal, and the optimal food basket to meet this objective in a cost-efficient manner.

The analysis has shown specific interests depicted from the findings among the West and Central African countries in different components of the HGFS value chain at the current state. It has enabled us to get a larger landscape image of the current common challenges and opportunities along the different components that feed into a HGFS programme. It has portrayed that the range of opportunities for policymakers is vast. The recommendations below will now go into detail what policymakers can do with these opportunities and challenges that were presented.





Recommendations based on the good practice criteria

Utilizing this analysis, the study will now link to CERFAMs criteria of capitalization and aim to understand how these opportunities and challenges can be linked to improve HGSF programmes in the future, and what individual policymakers can do to bring this forward.



As depicted in the methodology, the criteria: replicability, feasibility, and sustainability and scale up, present for this paper the three main criteria needed for a good, replicable HGSF programme. By linking the analysis of the opportunities and challenges to the larger picture within these three criteria, this section provides general recommendations to support countries in strengthening their HGSF programmes going forward. By taking the current challenges and opportunities that have been presented above, this paper now demonstrates these components at a larger scale to suggest recommendations of key items that will play a role in the future landscaping of HGSF programmes in West and Central Africa.

Feasibility

As described in the methodology, feasibility was found to be extremely valuable across the HGSF value chain (importance given to 11 components of the HGSF value chain), within planning, production and consumption. This has made feasibility one of the most important factors to have a successful HGSF programme. The questions of feasibility explore whether a practice demonstrates how its activities are concretely implemented.

Different factors, such as human, financial, and environmental, should be considered so that the target groups can better understand and benefit from the interventions more rapidly and easily. The findings and the analysis of the landscape of HGSF programmes in West and Central Africa, indicate that human and environmental factors are key. The human factor refers to the community acknowledgement, acceptance and

ownership of HGSF. The environmental factor refers to the difficulties resulting from climate change (particularly water management and desertification) and its effect on smallholder farmers' capacity to produce enough food at scale. With the limited documentation available these are the factors which will be considered for our recommendations for this study for the criteria feasibility.

1. Planning

Understanding the conditions and particularities of the context in which each HGSF will be implemented is key to its success. Therefore, the HGSF design is a critical phase and requires information and data to be used as baseline for the programme development.

Mapping and assessments of stakeholders, governments' capacity and political environment and implementation features (logistics, menu design, schools' capacity, communities' awareness and willingness to engage, farmers' capacity and products available) constitutes basic processes to plan HGSF programmes. This results in more documentation and evidence to guide the preparation of these programmes and consequently more integration with ongoing actions on the ground, increasing synergies and complementarities, while impacting positively the different outputs.

A consultative and participatory process is an important strategy to capture this required information for the design.

Recommendation to ensure feasibility:

- **Prioritize planning for the HGSF programme design so that it is customized and responsive as much as possible to countries' objectives, needs, conditions and particularities.**
- **The plan should encompass consultation to different stakeholders involved within an extensive participatory process, including existing assessments, documentation, mapping, studies or other relevant source able to provide information.**

2. Production

In West and Central Africa, food availability is indicated as key challenge to wholly fulfill the objectives of HGSF programmes that depend on the local production of smallholders' farmers and local markets. The combination of this with other challenges including post-harvest losses, lack of institutional, and structured markets or access to land has the causal effect of children not getting the recommended one meal per day. This issue is linked to numerous factors including poor post-harvest management, limited access to fertile land, or low technical knowledge in how to best utilize and harvest a certain product. Without empowered and resilient smallholders operating as competitive actors in food systems, HGSF will always face challenges to its expansion as these smallholders are key actors to support the supply chain being implemented.

Climate change and conflicts also plays a central challenge when preparing and planning a programme. To date, the needs of the countries are heavily framed by climate change and the challenges that come with it, such as water scarcity, desertification, soil erosion, drought, or flooding. The review found that countries such as Ivory Coast and Chad are already adapting to the needs and showing interest in investing in gaining a better understanding of such to address these challenges in scale. The value chain of HGSF is also linked to climate change factors, particularly deciding what can be grown, how much, and what to consume.

Recommendation to ensure feasibility:

- Invest in climate-smart agricultural technical training and knowledge.
- Invest in knowing smallholder farmers – who are they, what are their needs, and how can their capacity grow?
- Understanding climate-related challenges and opportunities should be factored in the development and implementation of HGSF programs.
- Prioritize HGSF programs that already deal with overcoming climate volatility and shocks as a platform that include other interventions such as lean season and resilience, climate smart agriculture programs.
- Invest in trainings of smallholder farmers in climate aware strategies to improve capacity of production.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure a multisectoral approach to the design which links different sectors to potentialize synergies and complementarities.

3. Consumption

Community Participation

The most feasible and sustainable HGSF programmes are those with very close community ties (such as Ghana, Nigeria or Sao Tome e Principe); those that understand and respond to the needs of the community, are locally owned, and offer support to the communities directly. Ownership by the community enables them to take on projects, in seeing the need and benefit to push for it and in the long run, take over the project entirely for their own benefit. The HGSF programmes reviewed show that community participation is created through a variety of avenues depending on context and type of HGSF study. These avenues can include giving the community economic and income opportunities (such as women through their role in the HGSF procurement procedure) as well as providing enough nutrition education for communities to understand the added value for their children and the community as a whole.

Recommendation to ensure feasibility:

- **HGSF should be built together with the communities, with inclusive and participatory processes which can ensure long term implication, a clear understanding of the benefits and opportunities on it.**
- **The design needs to enable inclusive communities' participation through context specific means, to ensure no discrimination based on age, religion, gender or disability.**
- **HGSF should be flexible to incorporate and adapt different implementation modalities and institutional collaboration and coordination, which can adapt to changing needs and capacities, captured through open dialogue with communities through for example social and behavior change communication (SBCC).**
- **Invest in trainings and well-functioning communication for communities to participate actively in monitoring, accountability and reporting in HGSF programmes is key to a successful programme implementation.**

**Replicability**

Replicability was found to be the third most important criteria for a successful HGSF programme (indicated 5 times across the HGSF value chain). Replicability refers to a programme or specific item being able to be adapted to similar environment. This could refer to being replicable in a different region or district in the same country or further abroad. Replicability links to having a clear strategy that is documented, where actors are aware of each other's roles and responsibilities and the value chain of the HGSF programme is well documented. Replicability also refers to a validation of the process and the design of the strategy. CERFAM recommends this to be completed through a lesson learnt exercise. Lessons learnt can support the understanding of good practices and opportunities but also challenges of a strategy. Over years and regular lessons learnt it will be easy to understand what items of the strategy are replicable and how this can be done. Clear and concise documentation of the learning process will be key for this process. Linking this to the findings and analysis, for replicability at an overarching level, capacity strengthening, and research will be deemed key for recommendations for policy makers.

1. Capacity Strengthening

Increasing learning, building knowledge and applying it to concrete actions in HGSF contribute to increase stakeholders' capacity on designing, managing and implementing HGSF. In West and Central Africa, this study finds that capacity building at all levels (government, technical staff) and actors within the HGSF value chain (smallholder farmers, women, children) is key, when looking at establishing HGSF programmes that are replicable. At the international level, building knowledge refers to understanding best how to

share practices across countries and common objectives and standards to achieve these. The Global Child Nutrition Forum (GCNF) and the Africa School Feeding Day are initiatives on the global scale that provide opportunities for building knowledge. At the national level, capacity building and documentation refers to technical staff understanding how to document HGSF programmes and having clear monitoring and reporting systems that can support local governments. Furthermore, it also looks at the implementors and stakeholders of the HGSF programme, such as smallholder farmers and how these are implicated in knowledge building and sharing. This study has found that whilst individually countries are conducting pilot phases, there are limited sharing practices and documentation of how to build capacity successfully.

Recommendations to contribute to replicability:

- **Prioritize comprehensive documentation of the HGSF strategy and value chain in place that are supported by lessons learnt exercises and validation processes.**
- **Across countries as well as the West and Central Africa region – invest in better knowledge building and sharing of good practices opportunities.**
- **Nationally – invest in solid digital documentation platforms, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, systems and tools, and technical capacity.**
- **Create more regional spaces for exchanges of experiences and learning to inspire and motivate countries to share their challenges and discuss innovative solutions and processes.**



2. Research and Evidence building:

Research is the second item that will allow for replicability. Linked with capacity building, research will enable growth of knowledge, adaptation of what capacity building is needed, and how to evolve HGSF as an entity. Investing in research at all levels (national and community) will support thorough engagement. This paper finds that the limitations across the HGSF section is the lack of documentation of HGSF programmes as well as knowledge of good practices. Implementation is often done through trial and error rather than backed up by factual understandings. Research with institutions such as CERFAM who are linked regionally will support growth in knowledge and sharing of documentation. Nationally research can focus on country specific interests as well as challenges and opportunities. Community level research will support direct implementation and direct programmatic support.

Recommendations to contribute to replicability:

- **Encourage research institutes to identify research topics which can help to improve HGSF programme implementation and can contribute to overcome concrete challenges.**
- **Governments and partners to increase investments in research on a national, and community level to support documentation of practices and advancement of knowledge sharing across the region in West and Central Africa.**
- **Reach out, share and disseminate your research practice to allow for interest of countries/ regions and potential replicability.**
- **Prioritize documentation of practices and processes in HGSF to contribute more efficiently for learning, improvement and expansion of such programmes and initiatives.**

Sustainability and scale up

Sustainability and scale up was deemed with feasibility as the most important criteria to have for a successful HGSF programme (also featured 11 times in the HGSF value chain). Sustainability and scale up in HGSF is to examine if the effects of the programme are likely to be long-lasting and effective. For this to occur there are different aspects that need to be taken into consideration, in addition to the above-mentioned items such as human and environmental factors as well as the financial and political backing of HGSF in a country.

As discussed, the HGSF value chain is a diverse and multi-sectoral stakeholder process. For long term success, coordination among these stakeholders both on a national and regional stage, will support having the financial and political support HGSF needs to succeed. On a national stage this refers to HGSF being on the agenda, recognized, allocated funding, and an interest to participate on an international and regional arena for example the Africa Feeding Day or the Global Child Nutrition Forum. On a regional and community stage, this means giving a voice to the communities – to women, and smallholder farmers – seeing the benefit of the programme through created employment and income generating activities and making sure they get the support they need to continue their work. With the limited documentation, the above are the key points which will be focused as overarching points for recommendations.

1. Financial Resources:

Meeting the financial resources needs is the backbone to support the sustainable scale up of a programme. Without the long-term financial commitment on international, national and community

level, there is a lack of vision as well as bidding towards the success of the programme. This is the area to be creative and invest in advocacy. This financial support can come through direct payments from the government, as well as proactive advocacy and fundraising strategies. HGSF private investors and the direct financial support of parents both play a role in making the system work. Only through a vision whereby the government stands behind the programme are others willing to invest.

The Gambia commissioned a fiscal space study to understand where resources could be found from their social protection portfolio and it helped to increase budget for school feeding during a period of crisis. Burkina Faso has a national budget dedicated for school feeding annually, which is also used to purchase milk locally and contribute to communities' local economy. Sao Tome and Principe has for a long-time prioritized school feeding nationwide and has tried to implement HGSF pilots. Many countries in the region are contributing from their national budget to school feeding, but discontinuity is still frequent. Engaging other financial sources could help to this goal.

Recommendations to ensure sustainability:

- **Develop a participatory national process within different sectors to discuss funding opportunities for HGSF as these programmes can generate multiple benefits for health, agriculture and social protection. School can become pools for these interventions and to help promoting local development when connecting to the smallholders' farmers production.**
- **Engage on national, regional and international advocacy for exploring funding opportunities, sharing practices and learning alternative financial mechanisms for HGSF.**
- **Create a specific budget line for HGSF, ringfenced, with stable and continuous allocation protected by legal and policy framework.**
- **Undertake fiscal space and other related studies to understand alternative funds available at the national budget, which can complement main implementer budget.**
- **Base financial contribution for HGSF programmes under legal and policy framework.**



2. Government Policy:

A second important aspect, besides financial resources, is to establish a strong support base at national level through policy dialogue and agenda setting, including having objectives, indicators and goals. This study finds that governments that have set their agenda to include HGSF clearly with set performance indicators and intended achievements have gone very far. This sends a strong message to stakeholders on government's commitment towards the programme. This aspect also ensures the financial commitments.

Recommendations to ensure sustainability:

Prioritize the development of HGSF implementation strategy, which includes clear national objectives and target, roles and responsibilities for communities, partners and different governments' sectors, different implementation modalities through a consultative and participatory process at all levels.

Develop a communication strategy for increasing HGSF awareness within communities, governments and partners. This will contribute to find alternative funding and needed technical support for improving and expanding the programme.

Establish permanent space for continuous dialogue between the national and regional level to support exchange for long-lasting and sustainable implementation of HGSF.

Base the HGSF programme implementation in existing governmental and communities' structures, which can be improved with capacity strengthening activities and can contribute to improve ownership and leadership at all levels for HGSF.

Insert HGSF into national strategies and plans for the different sectors to ensure that the benefits of its multisectoral potential is well disseminated and applied.



Conclusion

The West and Central Africa Region is in a unique space where opportunities are there to be grabbed. The landscape mapping of HGSF in the region has shown that whilst each country is in its own implementation phase of its HGSF strategy linked to their context and realities, there are many commonalities in terms of opportunities and challenges that joint regional endeavors can embrace and tackle.

Using the CERFAM selected criteria of good practices for HGSF value chain, this paper has presented an analysis and proposed recommendations aimed at contributing for a better understanding as to how to create feasible, replicable, and sustainable HGSF programmes that can support scale up. By linking the analysis to the original recommendations of the 2018 African Union study on HGSF, the paper notes how the landscape mapping of HGSF has evolved, and where it can go in the years to come.

The study finds that the region is showing a clear interest in pushing the agenda of HGSF and establishing groundwork on how to create sustainable and scaled up programmes both on the international and national stage. Through the consultations, it was however clear that the level of communication, coordination, sharing across countries – particularly for technical experts and implementers – is very limited. A further limitation of the study has been the lack of documented papers, both on an international and country level. Most information comes from direct consultations. Through this methodology, it is difficult to understand the level of bias and misinformation provided. Nevertheless, this study has shown that there are many points for engagement, including learning from each other on direct topics or sharing ideas, that will encourage the common goal for sustainable HGSF strategies.

For this reason, this paper suggests three main priorities for the next steps. The priority should focus on better documentation of HGSF strategies as well as individual components on the HGSF value chain. The second priority aims at conducting lessons learnt exercises and identifying specific validated good practices of HGSF strategies in specific contexts. Lastly, countries should aim to better utilize knowledge platforms to share, disseminate and publicize their work, to allow for continuous learning among the region and in a context. Utilizing existing platforms like CERFAM, with the technical expertise and knowledge they provide, will offer the services and exchanges that the region needs to strive.

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