Institute for Development and Peace
INEF

UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG ESSEN
Open-Minded

Karin Gaesing, Frank Bliss,
Candide Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun,
Maxime Dahoun

School meals in Benin

Players, progress and challenges

AVE-Studie 34c/2024

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE:

Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Candide / Dahoun, Maxime (2024): School feeding in Benin. Actors, progress and challenges. Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), University of Duisburg-Essen (AVE Study 34c/2024, Ways out of Poverty, Vulnerability and Food Insecurity).

Imprint

Publisher:

Institute for Development and Peace (INEF)
University of Duisburg-Essen

Logo design: Carola Vogel
Layout design: Jeanette Schade, Sascha Werthes
Cover design: Shahriar Assadi

Institute for Development and Peace

Lotharstr. 53 D - 47057 Duisburg
Phone +49 (203) 379 4420 Fax +49 (203) 379 4425
E-mail: inef-sek@uni-due.de
Homepage: https://www.uni-due.de/inef/

ISSN 2511-5111

Karin Gaesing,
Frank Bliss,
Candide Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun,
Maxime Dahoun

School feeding in Benin.
Actors, progress and challenges

AVE Study 34c/2024

Ways out of poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity

University of Duisburg-Essen Institute for Development and Peace (INEF)

AUTHORS:

Dr rer. pol. Karin Gaesing, geographer and spatial planner; research associate at INEF, University of Duisburg-Essen; many years of experience in development cooperation, including for GTZ (now GIZ) in Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire and as a freelance consultant in Africa and India. Expertise in regional planning, gender, participation and land use planning.

E-mail: karin.gaesing@uni-due.de

Dr phil. Frank Bliss, Professor of Anthropology (Development Anthropology) at the University of Hamburg and cooperation partner of INEF, University of Duisburg-Essen. Research work in Egypt, the Maghreb, Sudan and other Sahel countries as well as in Central Asia. Consultant mainly in the water sector, in the implementation of social safeguards in infrastructure projects and in policy advice.

E-mail: bliss_consult@t-online.de

Candide Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Geographer and Master of Public Health (University of Bielefeld); co-ordinator of Initiativen Afrika e.V. in Benin; representative of the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University in Benin for 4 years, where she was responsible for the introduction and promotion of the contraceptive method "Cyclebeads". Expertise in evaluation, gender and development for projects of the World Bank, the European Union and other technical and financial partners in the African region.

E-mail: cagbobat@yahoo.fr

Dr. Maxime Dahoun, sociologist; doctorate at the University of Bielefeld in Germany; collaboration with the Institut de Recherche et de Développement (IRD) in France on the conditions for the development of science in the Global South; specialisation in the management of development projects, project evaluations in Benin, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic for the EU, World Bank, African Development Bank and various governments; various publications.

E-mail: mdahoun@yahoo.fr

Project homepage: **https://www.uni-due.de/inef/projekt_ave.php**

The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as part of the special initiative Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems.

Table of contents

Abbreviations

ACMA	Administratie Consultants Management Advies
AME	Association des Mères d'Enfants
APE	Association Parents d'Élèves
AVE	Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit
CCS	Comité Cantines Scolaires
CEP	Certificat d'Études Primaires
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
DAS	Direction de l'alimentation scolaire
DC	Development Cooperation
EU	European Union
FADEC	Femmes Actrices de Développement Communautaire
FCFA	Franc der Communauté Financière Africaine (1.000 FCFA = 1.52 € in 11/2022)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FA	Financial Assistance
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNI	Gross National Income
ha	hectar
HDI	Human Development Index
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
hh/s	household/s
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
INEF	Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (Institute for Development and Peace)
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
l	Litre
MAEP	Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Elevage et de la Pêche
MEF	Ministère de L'Economie et des Finances
MFI	Microfinance institution
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official Development Aid
OPA	Organisation Professionnelle Agricole
p.a.	per year
PAM	Programme Alimentaire Mondial (=WFP)
p.c.	per person
p.d.	per day
p.m.	per month
PMU	Partenariat Mondial pour l'Education - Global Partnership or Education
PNASI	Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré

RdB	République du Bénin
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SF	School feeding
SME	Small and medium enterprises
TA	Technical Assistance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

Project Background

The Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen carried out a research project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) from October 2015 to early 2020. The research project was intended to help reach extremely poor, vulnerable and food-insecure population groups in the partner countries of German governmental development cooperation more effectively than before as part of primarily bilateral measures, thereby, helping to lift them out of poverty in the long term. The research project will continue until the end of 2023, focusing on holistic agricultural promotion, access to financial services for poor smallholder farmers, and school meals as a contribution to poverty reduction and social security.

Although extreme poverty has decreased worldwide in relative terms in recent decades, depending on the choice of indicators and calculation method, the absolute number of poor people has largely remained the same. This is despite numerous adapted national poverty reduction concepts, increased measures taken by many countries (above all Brazil, China and India, but also Mexico, the Philippines, Pakistan and other *middle-income countries in particular*) and, with a view to the Sustainable Development Goals, an increasing commitment by industrialised countries to finance development. This is partly due not only to poor governance and international power relations, but also to population growth, particularly in the world's poorest countries, where resources are often severely limited. The increasing effects of global climate change also play a role. On the other hand, there are also a number of reasons for inadequate poverty reduction, which can be found in the instruments of development cooperation in the particular situation of the poor themselves as well as in the interplay of both factors.

People living in extreme poverty and suffering from vulnerability and food insecurity have little capacity for self-help. As documented in the literature, they are also often unable to articulate their interests publicly, so that they and their ideas and wishes are not taken into account in the planning of development measures or are, at least, not the focus of the measures (cf. Bliss / Heinz 2009 and 2010). National and international planners must also increasingly ask themselves whether, for example, old people, households without available labour or people with disabilities can be reached at all with the means of traditional development cooperation, which focuses on helping people to help themselves and implements measures primarily with the aim of economic sustainability.

The research project has been located at this interface, the specific conditions of poverty and food insecurity, on the one hand, and the – possibly inadequate – instruments of development cooperation, on the other. Based on the analysis of previous problems in reaching the target groups mentioned above through development cooperation and successful examples of poverty reduction, promising projects (*good practices*) are to be identified and examined in detail. In doing so, it is important to precisely analyse the circumstances of the respective success in order to work out the transfer conditions for a broader circle of DC measures in other situations and countries and to make them usable for those responsible in the ministry and in implementing organisations as well as for non-governmental organisations, knowing full well that there can be no blueprints in DC.

Summary

Despite remarkable economic growth in recent years, which the African Development Bank attributes to reforms in the agricultural sector, among other things, poverty still prevails in large parts of the population in Benin, particularly in rural areas and in the northern *départements* of the country. In addition, poorer households are ten times more likely to be food insecure than others. Female-headed households also have a higher risk of food insecurity, while the increasing level of education of the household head has a positive effect on nutrition. A total of 45 % of rural households are vulnerable and can slip into food insecurity at any time. It is not only the general availability of food that is a problem in Benin, but also the nutritionally inadequate composition of the food available to many families. One consequence of the narrow food spectrum is iron deficiency, especially among children and women.

In this context, the introduction of school meals in Benin is intended as a contribution to social security. The school sectors previously included in school feeding programmes are the state preschools (*enseignement maternel*), consisting of two classes, and the primary school (*éducation des base scolaire 1* or *enseignement primaire*), which comprises six years (CI, CP, CE1, CE2, CM1 and CM2) and starts from a minimum age of five years. School feeding in Benin began in 1958 with CATHWEL, which later became CRS (Catholic Relief Services). The World Food Programme (WFP) began its work in Benin in 1967, feeding children from primary schools in disadvantaged areas and orphanages. Both organisations supported the most disadvantaged communities and provided food aid in the event of natural and other disasters.

The 2016 presidential elections led to the appointment of a new government that promotes the education sector and school meals in particular. Against this backdrop, the National Integrated School Feeding Programme, the *Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré* (PNASI), was launched, involving the Ministries of Education, Agriculture and Health, among others, in a cross-sectoral approach. The implementation of the PNASI was entrusted to the WFP, which works together with local non-governmental organisations to implement the programme. The government's goal with the PNASI is to cover 100 % of schools, harmonise the functioning of school meals and integrate all other forms of school canteens.

The programme has grown from 1,574 schools to currently around 5,500 schools with school meals in less than two years, covering 75 % of state primary schools in Benin. Although the declared aim of the programme is to procure food locally, Benin is still a long way from achieving this given the rapid increase in the number of schools. Only maize and beans are increasingly being purchased by the WFP from Beninese producers, while rice, oil and salt are largely procured abroad.

In June 2023, a team from INEF, together with two Beninese experts, conducted a qualitative study in 16 schools in seven *départments* to gain an insight into the implementation, actors and challenges of school meals on-site. The smallest of the schools surveyed had 135 pupils, the largest 601 children, whereby the number of boys and girls in the schools was roughly equal.

Only a very few of the schools visited had an electricity supply, and the supply of sanitary facilities and, above all, water was also inadequate, with water being needed for drinking, preparing food, washing dishes, washing hands and watering the school gardens, which are often present. Various parent committees manage the organisation of school meals and particularly the operation of the kitchen and the procurement of sauce ingredients at each school. The committees recruit cooks and set the amount to be paid by the parents per

schoolchild per school day: FCFA 25 or 50. In order to generate additional funds for school meals, school gardens are often planted, common fields are cultivated or other income-generating activities, such as the production of palm oil or soap or animal husbandry, are carried out. In many cases, women are involved in these activities.

The cooks often complained about too much work for too little pay, which is called "*motivation*". They sometimes have to work in closed kitchen buildings with open, smoky cookers that are hazardous to health. Most of the stoves encountered are energy-saving ones encased in clay, but traditional three-stone fires were also used, which require a lot of firewood. Innovative approaches, such as palm kernel or biogas-fuelled cookers, were rarely observed, and these systems were not always functional. Well-functioning logistics ensure that sufficient food is available in the WFP warehouses and is delivered to the right schools at the right time. The food for the schools is stored partly in purpose-built rooms, partly in the headteacher's office and partly in rooms provided for this purpose in the village.

The various stakeholders in the school meal programmes were asked about their assessment of the impact of school meals. The parents of the pupils at almost every school visited emphasised that the daily meals at school would give mothers particularly the freedom to spend the day in the fields, at the market or with an income-generating activity instead of having to be at home at lunchtime to serve their children a meal. School meals are a great help in feeding the children, especially in the period before the next harvest when food is scarce in poor families. The children would also learn better and miss fewer lessons thanks to regular school meals. Even children from families who are unable to pay the daily contribution for school meals are not excluded from the meals. Teachers confirmed the more focused learning of pupils, together with a general increase in enrolment figures and fewer dropouts. Members of the producer cooperatives interviewed welcomed the opportunity to sell their crops to the WFP at good prices despite the additional effort required to meet the high quality standards, but would like to see administrative processes streamlined and the harvest collected more quickly.

Above all, the energy situation, which leads to considerable environmental damage in the long term, the inadequate pay of the cooks and the procurement of ingredients for the sauces, which is left entirely to the parents, need to be improved.

Overall, it should be noted that the government's commitment to school meals is above average compared to other sub-Saharan African countries. However, despite significant increases, the share of the state budget is still far below the donor community's Official Development Aid funds and there is still no sign of the Beninese government taking over most of the funding.

1. Introduction[1]

This study focuses on school feeding (SF) in Benin, West Africa. School feeding, especially in primary schools, is increasingly proving to be an important and effective contribution to social security. Pupils from poor households (hhs) can particularly benefit from a hot meal during school hours. Many of these children might not be sent to school by their parents without this offer. It has been shown that girls are especially able to attend school significantly more often where school meals are available and also stay at school longer and are later allowed to transfer to middle or secondary school.

The COVID-19 pandemic has noticeably increased the importance of school meals in many national social programmes, and SF has brought children back to school who have practically given up attending school or been forced to do so by their families. After all, according to the African Union in a 2021 report, the pandemic has triggered one of the biggest education crises in recent history, with devastating effects on the lives of children, and around 50 million pupils in 42 countries on the African continent alone having to interrupt their school attendance (cf. AU 2021).

While many countries relied primarily on external funding before the pandemic, a change has taken place since COVID-19. An increasing number of countries are now paying for school feeding primarily or at least proportionately from their own budgets, and almost all countries have developed national strategies as the pandemic subsides to help turn the current accelerated development into a long-term commitment.

In addition to the effects on the beneficiary schoolchildren, the World Food Programme (WFP) points out the importance of the additional jobs created by SF. Four million direct jobs have been created worldwide as a result; statistically speaking 1,377 per 100,000 pupils. In most cases, these mainly local jobs relate to food preparation and small-scale suppliers of the food required, in both cases mostly women (Ibid. WFP 2022b).

However, as will be shown later, these figures should not be overemphasised. Regarding the case studies analysed by INEF in Ethiopia, Benin and Cambodia, the work performed by women is more or less precarious (Cambodia), in some cases not paid at all or, at best, symbolically paid (Ethiopia and Benin), which can even put them at a disadvantage in terms of their income compared to their previous economic activities.

Local procurement (*home-grown*) has been gaining in importance in the provision of the food required for the preparation of SF for some years now. Whereas wheat, rice, maize or cooking oil used to be purchased en bloc for entire countries on the international market, in some cases, donated from production surpluses in North America and Europe, the countries involved are now increasingly endeavouring to purchase food nationally, regionally or even locally. This model of *home-grown school feeding* (HGSF) not only has the advantage described of increasing and securing school attendance, but also achieves economic effects by supporting local value creation and, if planned correctly, participatively and well organised, can also strengthen social cohesion in and around the schools.[2]

[1] We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the WFP staff who provided us with advice and support during this study and, thus, contributed to the success of the research work.

[2] The FAO study by Luana Swensson et al. (2021) takes a comprehensive and up-to-date look at public procurement in the design and implementation of school meals. Numerous country-based case studies are also cited here. Also see WFP et al. (2018) on the HGSF. For a summary of the status of SF worldwide, see WFP 2022b.

School meals have been offered in Benin since the 1980s as part of projects organised by various donor organisations. This has mainly taken place in primary schools, and the donor organisations have generally chosen the poorer regions of the country. It has only been with the new government under President Patrice Talon, who is still in office today, that SF has been given greater priority since 2017. On 20 July 2017, under the name "*Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré*" (PNASI), the provision of all primary school children in state schools became a declared government goal. In the meantime, around 75 % of all primary schools (5,356 schools by the end of 2022) have actually been reached as part of the PNASI by establishing "*cantines scolaires*" there. Since then, around 1.165 million children in grades 1 to 6 have received a hot meal daily.

Fig. 1: Discussion with the parents' committee and teachers about the effects of school meals on the children

The present study "School feeding in Benin" should actually bear the additional title "– with special consideration of local procurement", as is the case for two parallel studies currently in progress.[3] However, when familiarising ourselves with the topic, it became apparent that although local procurement of the main foodstuffs has been an important secondary objective of the nationwide PNASI since 2022, for various reasons, the purchase of maize, rice, beans or oil – all foodstuffs that are produced in the country itself – continued to take place mainly on the international market in mid-2023, and national products are only slowly gaining in importance and local products from the village environment of the schools have hardly played a role to date. Therefore, although a certain amount of space is devoted to these initial contributions to "local procurement" in the presentation, too little experience is available so far to be able to seriously evaluate the "local component".

The research was conducted in May and June 2023 by two INEF teams in different parts of the country: by Karin Gaesing and Candide Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun in the south-west and central *départements*, and by Frank Bliss and Maxime Dahoun in the north and south-east of Benin. Even though the research work was not an evaluation, both teams received a great deal of support from the WFP country team in Cotonou and the *départements* in gaining access to the schools and preparing the visits and interviews with all key stakeholders, including the state administration, for which we would like to express our thanks. However, we would also like to thank those involved in the schools, first and foremost, the teachers and parents' representatives, but also the generally very young pupils with whom we were able to talk about the school meals and compare them with the meals prepared by their mothers.

[3] See Bliss / Gutema (2023) on Ethiopia and Bliss / Neumann (2023) on Cambodia.

2. Socio-Economic Fundamentals of Benin

Despite remarkable economic growth in recent years, which the African Development Bank (AfDB) attributes to reforms in the agricultural sector among other things, poverty still prevails in large parts of the population in Benin. Poverty is particularly high in rural areas. Poorer hhs are ten times more likely to be food insecure than the rest of the population. Female-headed hhs also have a higher risk of food insecurity. Conversely, the increasing level of education of the hh head has a positive effect on nutrition. Overall, 45 % of all rural hhs are considered vulnerable and could, therefore slip into food insecurity at any time.

A large part of the Beninese population lives from agriculture, which is still characterised by low productivity despite all the reforms. The reasons for this include the difficult access to agricultural inputs and land, the often depleted soil, the absolute clear-cutting, particularly in the area of cotton production, the low level of mechanisation, and insufficient and inadequate financing of the agricultural sector. Agricultural advice from the state has also almost ceased in recent years.

2.1 Demography, Geography and Poverty

Benin is one of the smaller countries in West Africa, with a population of around 13.4 million inhabitants in 2022 (World Bank 2022b), 3.34 % population growth according to the CIA (see World Factbook 2023) and an area of 112,662 km². However, the colonial border demarcation has ensured that despite the small land mass, the long north-south extension (approx. 660 km) with a relatively short east-west axis (in some cases only 125 km) makes transport and communication more difficult and expensive. Conversely, the location between Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria means that Benin, with its deep-sea port of Cotonou, acts as an important transit country for goods, especially to western Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger, and can generate considerable income from this.[4]

Neighbouring Nigeria plays a very important role in Benin's economy due to the transit of goods from Benin to western Nigeria and a considerable interdependence in the cross-border movement of goods – export as well as reimport, taking advantage of considerable governance weaknesses on both sides and correspondingly porous national borders. Illegal trade in goods is, therefore, more the rule than the exception.

Benin's special ***geographical situation*** as a transit country means that the tertiary sector is relatively strong (with a share of around 50 % of gross national income: GNI). However, agriculture generates around 70 % of employment in the country despite its comparatively low share of just under 30 % of GNI. Industry, particularly cotton ginning, oil mills, some food industry and manufacturing are underdeveloped, with informality dominating in the latter and the tertiary sector in particular. The World Bank estimates that 65 % of GNI is generated in the informal sector.

The ***Human Development Index*** ranks Benin 166th out of 189 countries worldwide, placing it in the group of countries with *low human development (*UNDP 2018 and 2022).

[4] Sources on the economy, socio-economy and governance can be found, for example, at CIA (2023), Tradingeconomics (2023), UNDP (2022) and World Bank (2022a, b, c and d). It should be noted that the statistics for Benin, similar to most countries in West Africa, are inaccurate and often outdated. Population figures, for example, are often extrapolated a decade after a census.

The sustained economic growth of the last two decades has done little to reduce poverty in the country. The national growth rate was 3.8 % in 2020, 7 % in 2021 and an estimated 6.1 % in 2022 and 6.4 % in 2023. According to the AfDB, this was mainly due to reforms in the agricultural sector, which led to improved production, as well as strong growth in the tertiary sector, which can be attributed to the performance of the port in Cotonou and the opening of the borders with Nigeria, among other things (see AfDB 2023).

The official ***unemployment rate*** for young people aged between 15 and 24 of just 3.9 % belies the fact that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among well-educated young people, especially university graduates, as they rarely find employment that is commensurate with their education. In addition, most of the employment relationships are precarious. The lack of employment is also leading to an exodus of young men particularly from rural areas to the cities and neighbouring countries, such as Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger.

By contrast, **poverty rates** in Benin have not fallen as hoped. A significant reduction has only been achieved in recent years: according to national criteria, it was 37.5 % in 2006, 35.2 % in 2009, 40.1 % in 2015 and 38.5 % in 2019. Measured against the international threshold of US$ 1.9 per day, the poverty rate was 53.2 % in 2011, 49.6 % in 2015, then fell considerably to 19.2 % in 2018 and has remained consistently around 18 % since then, whereas the national criteria led to a significantly higher poverty rate. Accordingly, the rural poverty rate in 2019 was 44.2 %, which was also significantly higher than the urban poverty rate of 31.4 % (World Bank 2022b).

Fig. 2: A very traditional homestead in northern Benin (Atakora *département)*, which is particularly affected by poverty. The oval clay structures covered with millet straw are used to store the extended family's maize, millet or peanut supplies.

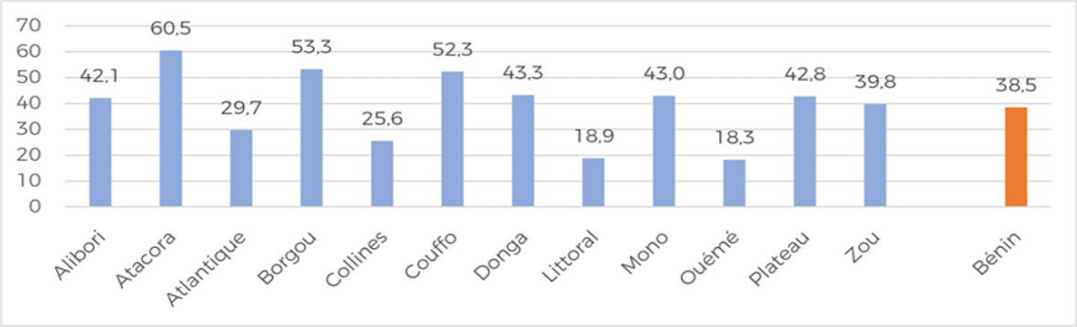
Nominally, the ***gross national income*** (GNI) for Benin (2021) is around US$ 1,214.08 (see Tradingeconomics 2023). Taking purchasing power equalisation into account, the same source gives a value of US$ 3,321.55, i.e. around 2.7 times higher. The United Nations Development Programme even shows the adjusted amount of US$ 3,407 in the Human Development Report. In reality, the purchasing power of the majority of the population is probably somewhere between the two figures.[5]

[5] Both values were calculated on the basis of an adjustment by *purchasing power parity* and in relation to the year 2017. In practice, however, parity is often determined on the basis of abstract baskets of goods, which often take insufficient account of a country's national circumstances. The calculation, for example, almost always ignores the fact that both energy and basic food prices (e.g. wheat flour, oil, sugar) in any country in the world, including Benin, cost the same as in Western high-price countries. In addition, the poorer a hh is, the more money it has to spend on basic foodstuffs (for extremely poor people, around 70 % of their disposable income), for which a *purchasing power parity* would be 0 % at best. Accordingly, the nominal GNI for Benin of around US$ 1,214 p.c./p.a. is certainly not equivalent to a purchasing power of 2.7 times that of the World Bank as the "originator" of the *purchasing power parity data*, but, at most,

The minimum wage in Benin is currently FCFA 52,000 (i.e. around EUR 79; as of August 2023)[6]. A family cannot live on this. In the cities, all family members who are reasonably able to work are forced to contribute to the hh income, which has a negative impact on school attendance. Boys may have to do adult labour, while girls have to look after small children at home so that their mothers can work full-time. In rural areas, employment at minimum wage is just sufficient remuneration if the hh farms and can benefit, at least partially, from its subsistence economy.

Poverty is also distributed differently from region to region, as can be seen in Figure 3. The poorer *départements are*, therefore, located mainly in the north of the country. Living conditions in Benin are characterised, on the one hand, by mass poverty and, on the other, by a relatively poor social infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, despite long-term international support. Although the supply rate of 'safe' ***drinking-water*** was 74.7 % according to reports in the CIA Factbook in 2019 (see CIA 2023), urban drinking-water (supply rate 79 %) is not really always microbiologically flawless, and the majority of rural water supply (70.8 %) is not smooth, even for connected hhs. Fortified but open dug wells, which are often included in the supply statistics, are anything but a reliable source of hygienically safe drinking-water, and many of the wells are no longer functional[7]. Only 36.6 % of the total population have access to good sanitation. Here, the gap between the urban population with 56.3 % access and the rural areas with only 18.1 % is even greater (CIA Factbook 2023).

Fig. 3: Proportion of poor population (< US$ 1.9 p.c./p.d.) in the *départments* in Benin 2019.



Source: INSAE, EHCVM 2019.

Regarding ***education,*** the Human Development Report 2021/2022 assumes that children in Benin can currently expect to stay in school for 10.8 years when they start school. By contrast, adults over the age of 25 have only attended school for an average of 4.3 years, with men having significantly more years of schooling (5.4 years) than women (3.3 years) (UNDP 2022). The rate of people over the age of 15 who have never received any education at all was 54 % for men and 31.1 % for women in 2018 (CIA Factbook 2023). Therefore, considerable progress must be generally assumed in terms of literacy and the school system.

half of it. The equalisation factor is particularly low for the urban population, which has hardly any access to food for its own subsistence production.

[6] https://www.sikafinance.com/marches/benin-le-smig-augmente-a-52-000-fcfa-des-janvier-2023_38236 [08/2023].

[7] This can be confirmed from our own experience for the 24 survey villages from an AVE study in 2022. In around a fifth of the study villages, there were wells and hand pumps decorated with plaques from donor organisations that had not been working for some time at the time of the visit. In some cases, the women were forced to draw water from contaminated water points (Gaesing et al. 2023).

2.2 Nutrition and Food Security

Poverty and food insecurity often go hand in hand, as is the case in Benin. According to a comprehensive study in 2017, poorer hhs are ten times more likely to be food insecure than others. Female-headed hhs also have a higher risk of food insecurity, while the increasing level of education of the hh head has a positive effect on nutrition (RdB 2018: 29).

A significant proportion of Benin's population is affected by food insecurity, especially in rural areas and urban enclaves of poverty. According to Adjimoti / Kwadzo (2018: 2), who refer to national statistics, a few years ago, 25 % of all rural hhs were unable to secure their food without third-party support and were, therefore, *highly food insecure*. In addition, 45 % of rural hhs were vulnerable and, thus, at risk of slipping into food insecurity at any time.

Nationally, the proportion of the population affected by food insecurity was highest in the *dèpartment of* Atacora during the same period: 20.9 % of the population there was moderately affected and 2.7 % was severely affected. In the *départments of* Collines, Zou and Couffo in central Benin, 10-20 % of the population suffered from food insecurity, while in the remaining *départements* in the north and south of the country, the figure was 5-10 % each (République du Bénin 2018: 22ff.).

Fig. 4: Village volunteers are being trained in Natitingou (Atakora *département*) to give nutrition and cookery courses for mothers with underweight children in their villages. Remarkably, young men are also actively involved in the project implemented by GIZ.

Overall, however, the proportion of ***undernourished*** people has fallen steadily over the years from 17.2 % (2000 to 2002), to 11 % (2005 to 2007), 7.9 % (2011 to 2013) and, finally, 7.6 % in 2018 to 2020 (Von Grebmer et al. 2021: 42).

It is not only the general availability of food that is a problem in Benin, but also the nutritionally inadequate composition of the food available to many families. A national study conducted in 2017 found that, at the time of the survey in the Atacora *département*, 22 % of all hhs surveyed had only consumed four or fewer of eleven different food groups[8] in the last 24 hours. It was 14.3 % of all hhs in Mono and Zou and 13.7 % in Couffo. All other *départements* fared slightly better in comparison.

A total of 90 % of these hhs consumed cereals (98 % of which were maize), vegetables, oil/fats and condiments for sauces. Households that consumed fewer than four food groups lacked mainly animal proteins (meat, eggs, milk and dairy products) and vegetable proteins, such as those found in pulses. A lack of vitamin A and iron was also found (République du Bénin 2018: 37ff.). The reports from the 100 or so children we interviewed in the schools

[8] These groups are: cereals, roots and tubers, pulses, vegetables, fruit, meat, fish and seafood, dairy products, fats, sugar and sauce seasonings.

revealed similar restrictions. One consequence of the narrow food spectrum is iron deficiency in children. This is also common in just over 50 % of all women (see IFPRI 2015 and FAO 2021: 133).

In an interview during an earlier INEF study in Benin in 2018, FoodAfrica cited maize, which is rich in energy and serves as a basic food, especially in the south and centre of the country, as an example of poor-quality food, but which contains hardly any calcium, iron and zinc and is combined with only a few animal foods in everyday life. The latter mostly consist of fish (extremely small fish, often from by-catch) in rural areas, which is only used in very small quantities and (occasionally) included in the diet of 16 % of the children surveyed in the sample of a study from 2016, although this was no longer entirely up-to-date. Although many hhs in the villages keep chickens or other poultry, only 2 % of the children ate eggs more or less regularly (see Bioversity International 2016)[9]. However, only around 10 % of around 100 children in our surveys had also eaten eggs "once in the last week".

Accordingly, only one-fifth of all children under the age of two had optimal nutritional physiology, which meant that, at least until a few years ago, at least one-third of all children under the age of five had growth retardation (2014 = 34 %) due to malnutrition. Twelve per cent of children were even severely stunted in their growth (see Fogny / Trentmann 2016). The FAO (2021: 133) states that 5 % of children under the age of 5 will continue to be affected by wasting and 31.3 % will suffer from stunting in 2020.[10]

Several factors come together to explain why many hhs focus on the one-sided diet described above. One cause is probably the extreme workload of women, who are virtually solely responsible for cooking and providing food. In theory at least, many families would have access to freely available, sometimes very valuable food supplements in nature almost everywhere in the country. Experts speak of up to around 150 edible plants and a similar number of animals that could be added to the diet (see Bioversity International 2016). Some of the former, such as the baobab, kapok or moringa tree, whose (young) leaves are rich in vitamins and abundant in at least some areas, would help thousands of hhs to feed their children much better than is currently the case. However, women often have no time to look for and collect this food due to their very heavy workloads.[11]

The prestige of different foods can also play a role here if the "fruits from the bush" are not regarded as equal and of equal value to "modern" foods (Figs. 5 and 6).

[9] Also see the study by Bliss (2019b) on food security in Benin.

[10] *Stunting* refers to stunted growth, while *wasting* refers to very high weight loss. The values stated above and the high anaemia levels in women are unfortunately quite common in West Africa (FAO 2021: 133).

[11] This is also the result of an INEF study on a German GIZ food security project in northern Benin (see Bliss 2019).

Fig. 5: The fat obtained from the shea nuts shown here, which are mainly used by women, is by no means just emergency food, although it has not yet been included in school meal plans. The free food from the bush, on the other hand, includes the leaves, nuts and roots shown here.

Fig. 6: Nuts, seeds, powder from roots, dried leaves, etc. from edible "wild" plants collected in the Natitingou area.

In any case, however, hh poverty is a major cause of malnutrition and malnourishment. Eggs and chickens, for example, which are available in most hhs, are sold rather than consumed. For women in particular, selling eggs, small livestock or home-grown vegetables is often the only way to obtain cash, which, in turn, is needed to buy cooking oil, salt and other ingredients that are also important for the kitchen – an obligation that men in Benin usually avoid.[12]

Finally, grandmothers also have traditional upbringing and nutritional beliefs that can have a negative impact on nutrition (e.g. the repeated statement: "When children are given eggs to eat, they start stealing them"), which is why grandmothers are particularly important contacts for change because of their influence on daughters and daughters-in-law (cf. Bliss 2019b).

2.3 Socio-Cultural Aspects and Gender

Socio-culturally and also as a result of colonialism, Benin is a multi-ethnic state in which 55 different languages are spoken and French is used as a lingua franca. With a population share of 38.4 %, the predominantly Christian Fon represent the largest ethnic group in the south. They are followed by the Adja and related groups with 15.1 %, Yoruba and related groups with 12 %, Bariba and related groups with 9.6 %, Fulbe/Peulh and similar groups with 8.6 %, Ottamari and related groups with 6.1 %, Yoa-Lokpa with 4.3 %, Dendi with 2.9 % and others with 0.9 % (CIA 2023 estimates for 2013). Almost half (48.5 %) of the population are considered Christians, 27.7 % Muslims and 16.8 % members of traditional religions (see CIA 2023 and Dossoua / Dagan 2016).

Gender inequality is quite pronounced in Benin, with a Gender Inequality Index of 0.612 in 2019, which ranks Benin 8th out of 162 countries (see BTI 2022). In practice, the gender roles of women in Benin correspond little to the preconception that often characterises West African women as economically strong, self-confident and well-organised. When the World Bank states that, contrary to trends in many other countries, the proportion of hhs headed by women in Benin at "only" 28 % in 2015, significantly lower than the proportion of hhs headed

[12] For this reason, it would be important to not only address education about good nutrition for children (and all other hh members) to women, but also to include men (see Bliss 2019).

by men (38 %), this should not obscure the fact that women and girls continue to be at a considerable disadvantage. They perform the majority of all (even heavy) labour in agriculture, the commercial sector and, of course, in the hh, whereas they have no political or social equality within either modern or traditional society.

The apparently better position of hhs headed by women is also corrected by the fact that, within this group, hhs headed by divorced women in 2011 were significantly more often poor (23 %) than those headed by divorced men (14.8 %), and hhs headed by widows (30.1 %) were also significantly poorer than those headed by widowers (21.4 %) (cf. RdB / Banque Mondiale 2013).[13]

In addition, women are excluded from ***land ownership*** in almost all ethnic groups in Benin, and only receive rights to use fields through their husbands upon marriage. As a rule, women are allocated a piece of land by their husbands for cultivation after marriage. However, this right of use can be withdrawn at any time and is not taken into account in the modernisation of land use rights. Women are given fields to use for life only among the Fulbé. They retain this right even in the event of the husband's death or divorce. In the case of the Bariba, who live in the same area, the woman is deprived of the field in both cases. The husband can also reclaim the woman's field at any time for other reasons (see Gaesing / Bliss 2019).

However, there have recently been some improvements in the ***political representation of women.*** In January 2023, for example, voters in Benin's parliamentary elections elected 25 % female representatives to the national parliament for the first time.

2.4 Governance and Security

In terms of ***governance***, Benin has been considered an anchor of stability in West Africa over the last three decades. However, after several years of significant political relaxation, Patrice Talon, President of Benin since 2016 and re-elected in 2021, is now prioritising the country's economic development over the goal of alleviating the precarious social situation of large sections of the population. In addition, the development of democracy, the scope for contributions from civil society in political discourse and general freedom of expression are increasingly falling behind, even though a relatively free press landscape can still be observed, which, above all, also addresses the endemic corruption in the country (see RdB 2018, USA.SD 2022, World Bank 2022).[14]

The social problems are accompanied by the drastically deteriorating ***security situation*** in some parts of Benin. Islamist terrorists from Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria have recently been making increasing inroads from the north, with banditry spreading in their wake as free riders and conflicts between farmers and semi-nomads over resources are also increasing.[15] As the country's security apparatus is a burden on the meagre national budget, there is a lack of funds for investment in the economy and social affairs, which, in turn, increases the risk of

[13] Later reports also refer to this 2011 study.

[14] By contrast, the AfDB's report (BAD 2022) sees rather positive developments, both in terms of the political situation and regarding the "governance issue" (meaning corruption in particular).

[15] On the conflicts over resources, see de Bruijne (2021). Also see the homepage of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a situation map at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs/conseils-par-pays-destination/benin/ [8/2023].

unemployed and increasingly hopeless young people being susceptible to recruitment attempts by Islamists.

2.5 Environment and Agriculture

In principle, the ***ecological conditions*** for agriculture with a wide range of crops and integrated animal husbandry are relatively favourable in Benin. However, the conditions vary considerably between the individual parts of the country, and previously fertile soils are now heavily depleted and, therefore, less productive. Despite the effects of climate change, rainfall is, at least theoretically, sufficient everywhere for the agriculture practiced to date (between almost 2,000 mm p.a. in Cotonou on the coast and over 1,000 mm p.a. in Atakora in the north). However, negative changes are particularly noticeable regarding the variability of rainfall, especially at the beginning and end of the rainy season.

The rainy season normally lasts from May to the end of October, but now often starts much earlier or later and often ends prematurely or it rains intermittently. The former leads to a shortened vegetation period, which often only allows cereals to ripen in an emergency and prevents optimum yields. Interruptions can cause the seed to emerge but then wither, resulting in a total crop failure. Sometimes it is at least possible to reseed, although an optimum yield can never be achieved.

A large part of the Beninese population lives from ***agriculture***. In terms of importance, the crops with the largest area shares are maize (with more than one million hectares under cultivation), cassava (with more than 500,000 hectares) and then, in decreasing order, yams, rice, peanuts, soya, chilli peppers (*piment*), tomatoes, cotton and cashew nuts (with 300,000 hectares and less)[16]. The soil quality in the south and centre of the country is generally much more productive than in the north. The degree of organisation of farmers in *Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles* (OPA) is also relatively high in Alibori (43.0%), Atacora (25.5%) and Borgou (19.3%), although OPAs are also important in the *département of* Zou (12.8 %).

The proportion of female-headed hhs on farms averages 15.8 % in Benin, with Couffo, Mono, Collines and Zou being slightly predominant and Alibori having the lowest proportion at just 2.3 % (cf. RdB 2021).

Only 3.42 % of farming hhs have access to irrigation, and the proportion of irrigated land in the agricultural area utilised is correspondingly low at 1.76 %. Access to agricultural inputs varies. As examples, 12.41 % of farms have access to mechanisation, 36.49 % to pesticides, 28.64 % to high-quality seeds or seedlings, 28.4 % to organic fertiliser and 51.24 % to mineral fertiliser (Ibid.).

Benin's agricultural sector should actually be a catalyst for accelerating the country's economic growth and development. However, the reality is different, as the figures above show, resulting in low productivity overall. The government under President Patrice Talon decided in 2016 to turn Benin into a modern and prosperous agricultural country. However, among the priority *filières*[17] in crop cultivation (maize, rice[18], cassava, vegetables, cotton, oil palm, yams, pineapple, cashew nuts), only the cultivation of vegetables and cashew nuts managed to achieve and even exceed the targets set in 2008 for 2015. The cultivation of all

[16] With an approximate total area of 3.95 million hectares (World Bank 2023 for the year 2020).

[17] In the context of this study, best translated as "value chains".

[18] See Gaesing / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun (2019) on the promotion of rice cultivation in Benin, especially in swampy lowlands (*bas fonds).*

other crops fell significantly short of expectations in some cases (see RdB 2017: 4). In order to meet Benin's needs, rice and vegetables still have to be imported, as do milk and eggs. Accordingly, it is not always possible to supply the SF programme with national and certainly not with local production, especially if traditional tubers and especially manioc semolina (*gari*) are not included to a greater extent than in the past.

Anthropogenic deforestation is another problem for Benin's agricultural development. It is the cause of climatic changes and soil degradation. The expansion of arable land, on the one hand, coupled with the complete clearing of all trees (including useful trees such as *karité*, i.e. sheanut) in the fields to avoid shade, which is still propagated in the cotton growing areas, and the high demand for firewood and charcoal, especially around the cities, on the other hand, are leading to the progressive deforestation of tree populations. This also has considerable consequences for SF if firewood becomes increasingly expensive and its procurement has to continue at the expense of nature.

Livestock farming is practiced by many farmers in combination with arable farming. Cattle are kept mainly in the northern *départments of* Alibori, Borgou and Atacora. The problem of transhumant cattle farming by the Fulbé herdsmen (Peulh), who drive their herds from the north, often from Niger or other neighbouring countries, to the grazing grounds in Benin, has recently come to a head. Conflicts with local farmers are becoming increasingly frequent, as the cattle often devastate their fields and eat away the harvest (Fig. 7). As a result, at least in the centre of the country and especially in the north, no school garden or field can do without expensive fencing.

Fig. 7: Not far from a school, a herd of Fulbé transhumant cattle, guarded only by small boys, roams through the bush. Fields are often touched and crops damaged.

3. School Meals in Benin

3.1 Introduction[19]

The school sectors previously included in SF programmes are the state preschools (*enseignement maternel*), consisting of two classes, and primary school (*éducation de base scolaire 1* or *enseignement primaire*), which comprise six years (CI, CP, CE1, CE2, CM1, CM2) and start from a minimum age of five years. It is completed with the *Certificat d'Études Primaires* (CEP). This is followed by secondary school or *éducation de base scolaire 2* (also: *premier cycle de l'enseignement secondaire général*) in *colléges,* which lasts a further four years (see RdB 2018).

The school enrolment rate in Benin is currently estimated at around 95-97 %, although the dropout rate was extremely high until the start of nationwide SF in 2020/2021. The poor quality of state schools is cited as a reason for absenteeism for both genders, especially the large classes, some of which had between 70 and 85 pupils in our study. In addition, girls are taken out of school when their mothers need help in the hh, especially with the supervision of smaller children. Child marriages also continue to occur among girls. Individual ethnic groups, such as the Fulbé with a transhumant economy, often do not send their children to school at all. But boys are also often taken out of school abruptly from the teachers' point of view. The former may have to help out on their parents' farms (e.g. herding cattle) and are, therefore, by no means always better off than girls. Extremely poor hhs particularly cannot afford to send children of both sexes to school because they often have to earn their own food in such families and there is no money available for the small expenses incurred at school, for example, for decent clothing, school bags, exercise books and pens (despite free basic education in state schools).

3.2 School Meals as a Contribution to Social Security

According to the UN World Food Security Report 2022, presented on 12 July 2023, hunger is the most serious problem for around 735 million people in the world, who suffer from it all the time (see FAO et al. 2023). In addition, according to the report, 2.4 billion people or 29.6 % of the world's population are currently food insecure. Of these, 900 million people suffer from severe food insecurity. In view of the trend of increasing food insecurity due to and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is, therefore, questionable whether the goal agreed by all countries of the world at the United Nations General Assembly to eradicate hunger worldwide by 2030 is still realistic.[20]

Against the backdrop of climate change, social security contributions are also becoming increasingly important for the poor countries and their populations that are particularly affected by the changes. Without a minimum level of social protection, food insecurity, undernourishment and malnutrition and, thus, poverty, as well as the often less recognised social inequality, cannot be ended or reduced (see WFP 2011). Against this background, SF,

[19] Chapter 3 is based on the sources cited in the text and discussions with those responsible at the WFP and the ministries involved.

[20] For an introduction to the content of the 2030 Agenda, see UN (2015) and Martens / Obenland (2015); for the current implementation status, see the SDG Tracker at https://sdg-tracker.org and the official annual report on the 2030 Agenda at SDSN (2023).

especially in primary schools, are increasingly proving to be an important and effective contribution to social security and particularly to combating hunger and malnutrition.

3.3 Development and Institutionalisation of School Feeding in Benin

The beginnings of SF in Benin can be dated back to 1958, when the activities of CATHWEL, which later became CRS (Catholic Relief Services), began in Benin. CATHWEL's first operations in Benin were characterised by rural projects in the areas of SF, health and nutrition.[21] The WFP began its work in Benin in 1974 by feeding children from primary schools in disadvantaged areas and orphanages.[22] The CRS and WFP supported the most disadvantaged communities and provided food aid in the event of natural and other disasters. In 1975, WFP launched a SF programme with the aim of contributing to improving food security and human capital development and strengthening national emergency preparedness capacities. By 2017, the WFP had covered a total of 618 schools with its programme. However, it was not yet possible to speak of institutionalising SF (Adekou 2019).

The year 1990 marks the beginning of the institutionalisation of "Education for All"[23] in Benin. The World Conference on Education for All, jointly initiated by UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO and the World Bank, took place in Jomtien, Thailand, from 5 to 9 March 1990. Delegates from 155 countries, including Benin, and representatives from 150 organisations agreed to universalise primary education and reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade. In December 1990, education for all, including free and compulsory primary education, was enshrined in law (RdB 2010).

However, the law was not followed by any concrete measures. It was not until 2000 that several social measures in favour of the disadvantaged classes were adopted during an extraordinary Council of Ministers. These included (Adekou 2019):

- the strengthening of school canteens in rural areas with an amount of FCFA 1 billion;
- aid for girls' education totalling FCFA 500 million; and
- covering the school fees of all pupils in all public primary schools for the school year 2000-2001 with a subsidy of FCFA 2 billion.

In addition to free education, the aim was to achieve equal opportunities, gender equality and interregional balance. The government set up a department for SF (*Direction de l'Alimentation Scolaire*), which was attached to the Ministry of National Education. Capacity weaknesses in this structure meant that the school canteens did not function optimally and this government project ended in 2015 with an unsatisfactory result.

Another notable initiative to institutionalise school meals were the school canteens that have been supported by the CRS since 2002. These canteens fed 42,000 schoolchildren in 144

[21] The history of the CRS can be found at www.crs.org.

[22] https://www.gouv.bj/article/2211/alimentation-scolaire-reunion-representants-afrique-ouest-centre-benin-partage-experience-avec-directeurs-pays/

[23] At first glance, there is no connection between "Education for All" and "S". However, we can easily deduce that the decision in favour of "Education for All" implies an implicit commitment to: i) build schools in all rural and urban areas, ii) provide all these schools with qualified and well-trained teachers, iii) encourage school-age children to attend these schools, and iv) develop strategies to keep these children in school. One of the strategies to keep children in school in a developing country is the establishment of a functioning school canteen.

public primary schools in the *départments of* Borgou and Alibori. The CRS has innovated through the establishment of school fields or community plantations. It also introduced the use of local food for a balanced diet for children. The CRS has been supporting the *Government School Canteens Programme* (ProCaS) in collaboration with the World Bank and the Swiss Cooperation projects PASDeR (*Support Programme for the Rural Development Sector*) and ASGoL (*Support Programme for the Local Governance Sector*) since 2017.

The government decided in 2006 to "completely abolish school fees" and "abolish the special fees paid by parents of pupils to contribute to the running and equipping of schools". This was accompanied by the granting of a subsidy for kindergartens and primary schools amounting to FCFA 150,000 per course/year. This means that a school with six classes receives FCFA 900,000 (Adekou 2019).

The first national forum on school nutrition took place in Cotonou in April 2010. The aim of this forum was to draw up an inventory of existing practices and prioritise and harmonise them. The policy paper "*National School Feeding Policy – Document de Politique Nationale d'Alimentation Scolaire*" was developed and resulted in 2,566 out of 8,169 public primary schools being equipped with school canteens in the period 2015-2016, which corresponds to a nationwide coverage rate of 31 %. The second national forum on SF took place in November 2015, at which a model, multisectoral SF programme was adopted on the basis of previous experience, integrating education, health and nutrition, agriculture, hygiene and sanitation. An action plan for the national SF policy was developed.

The 2016 presidential elections led to the appointment of a new government that promotes the education sector and school meals in particular. Against this backdrop, the National Integrated School Feeding Programme, the PNASI, was launched, the implementation of which was transferred to the WFP by the government. According to the WFP, a draft law on school meals was recently passed by the Council of Ministers and sent to parliament for approval.

3.4 Implementation of School Meals by WFP and Local NGOs

3.4.1 Programme Objectives

The government launched the PNASI in 2017. This programme essentially aims to correct the weaknesses of previous SF programmes. The following were identified as such:

- insufficient financial resources,
- the cumbersome procedure for awarding contracts,
- problems in connection with the transport of food,
- the delayed start of school canteens at the beginning of each school year,
- the small number of days on which the canteens actually functioned,
- poor food management,
- a lack of monitoring and surveillance instruments, and
- the low performance of the players.

The overall objective of PNASI is to strengthen SF in Benin through a multisectoral approach that favours local purchases in the long term in order to improve school performance and food diversity in schools. The specific objectives of the programme are as follows:

1. to ensure a regular supply of SF for pupils in public primary schools in order to improve their academic performance;

2. to use the school as a focal point to bring together support from education, agriculture and health; and
3. to invest in the development of the institutional framework and improve the governance, co-ordination and monitoring of the SF programmes in Benin in order to take the subsequent national lead in the implementation of the programme.

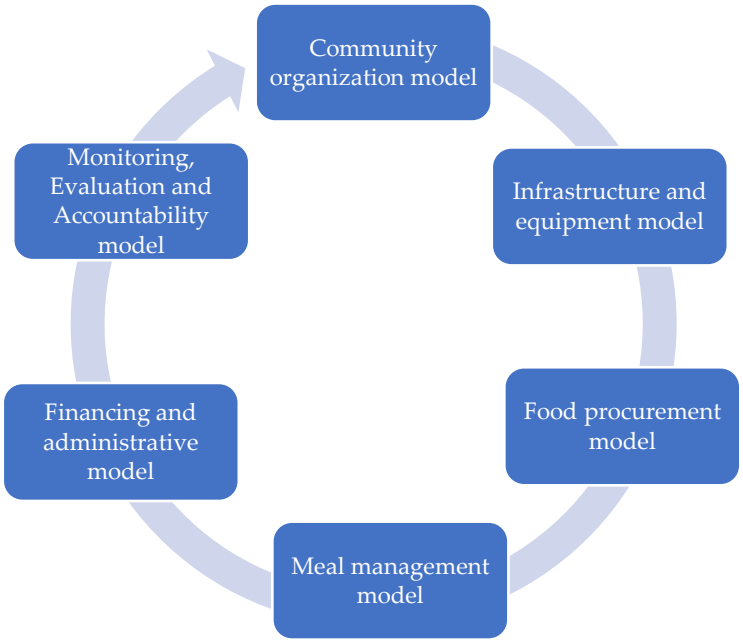
The implementation of the PNASI has been entrusted to the WFP, which is working with local NGOs to implement the programme. The government's goal with the PNASI is to cover 100 % of schools, harmonise the way canteens function and integrate all other forms of school canteens.

Apart from the initiatives already mentioned above, it should be noted that before PNASI, there were isolated small school canteen projects financed by individuals or associations, such as the canteens in 396 schools in 17 municipalities financed by the *Partenariat Mondial pour l'Èducation* (Global Partnership for Education) from 2014-2015.

3.4.2 A National School Meals Model

Recognising that the establishment of an efficient SF system requires the synergy of several sectors, the Beninese government has opted for a cross-sectoral approach and attempted to develop a SF model specifically tailored to Benin. The model is currently being developed and consists of six pillars, each under the supervision of a sector ministry. The six pillars of the model are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Diagram of the school meals model currently being developed.



Own illustration, according to WFP Benin.

The model under construction is the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance through its *Direction Générale du Financement du Développement* (Directorate General for Development Finance). The latter works on the model together with the WFP and the sector ministries for agriculture, health, social affairs and finance. The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for converting school meals to local food supplies over time. To this end, producer cooperatives

are organised, training for producers is initiated and their capacities are expanded in terms of cultivation techniques and harvest storage. The Ministry of Health is responsible for deworming campaigns and the medical and nutritional monitoring of children, while the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for raising community awareness and hygiene and sanitation measures in the school environment. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the model and mobilising financial resources (WPF 2022e).

3.4.3 Implementation of the Technical Advisory Component by NGOs

The WFP uses several NGOs (including international NGOs) to implement the technical component (TC) of SF, i.e. primarily the school canteens. The WFP service contracts with a total of ten NGOs assign them the role of social mobilisation within the community and the supervision of the operation of the canteens in the schools.

The NGOs provide three types of positions for this task: the programme manager (*chargé de programme*), the supervisor (*superviseur*) and the *mediator* (*médiateur/médiatrice*). The tasks of the TC include, among others, (i) the training of the individual groups of actors at the schools for the organisation of the *cantines scolaires*, such as the cooks (e.g. in occupational hygiene), the headteachers, the stock managers and the various committee members involved, (ii.) the monitoring of kitchen operations and food distribution, (iii.) the management of the storage of basic supplies as allocated to the schools by the WFP, and (iv.) support with all accounting and reporting.

The programme managers are responsible for monitoring 300 schools each. He/she works together with the supervisors and mediators who, in addition to providing counselling, also collect data. This data is used to monitor the canteen activities, especially the accounting of the food provided by the WFP. The managers are also responsible for analysing data, summarising the activities carried out and providing regular reports to the WFP. These include weekly and monthly activity reports and a year-end report. The reports always include the functional status of the canteens and the condition of food stocks in order to prevent any imminent food shortages.

The mediators are involved in supervising the activities and counselling of the school community. They initiate and support the formation of committees and income-generating activities and school gardens among the parents of the schools. Each mediator has at least ten schools under his/her responsibility. They report to the supervisors on their activities. The mediator is always employed in his or her area of residence. He or she is, therefore, also informed about the things that happen around the canteen. This includes food intake, the regular operation of the canteen, the work of the cooks and any problems that arise in the canteen. The mediator regularly informs the parents of the pupils and makes them aware of the importance of giving the children their own daily contributions (i.e. FCFA 25 or 50), which they need to buy spices and other sauce ingredients.

3.4.4 Food Procurement and Logistics[24]

Tab.1: WFP sub-offices and their locations.

Sub-offices	*Départements*
Sub-office of Cotonou	Littoral Ouémé Atlantique Plateau
Sub-office of Bohicon	Mono Couffo Zou Collines
Sub-office of Parakou	Donga Atakora Borgou Alibori

The procurement of high-quality food in sufficient quantities and the constant availability of this food in school canteens are major challenges that need to be overcome in the SF programme, particularly with the aim of quickly switching to a nationwide supply. The programme has grown from 1,574 schools to 5,500 schools with school meals in less than two years. The PNASI has clearly stated in its objectives that it favours local purchases. However, several challenges limit local purchasing. In most cases, the quality of locally produced food does not meet WFP standards, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.6.1.

The WFP procures food at international, regional and national levels to overcome local procurement problems and be able to provide the increasing amount of food for the rapidly growing number of schools involved. The programme purchases cereals (rice and maize), pulses (cowpeas and yellow beans), oil and iodised salt. The WFP has nine warehouses spread across Benin as well as three sub-offices and eight field offices (see Table 1) to facilitate the proximity to schools and supervision of activities.

In order to provide food, the programme does not provide cash to the schools, but instead arranges for the purchase of food, its storage and delivery to the various schools. To this end, the WFP concludes contracts with transport companies to transport the food to the schools. Rice, yellow beans, oil and iodised salt are ordered internationally. Cowpeas and maize are increasingly being purchased from national suppliers. These are large orders of 500 to over 4,500 tonnes. In addition, oil production factories are supported in complying with quality standards. One of the local oil production plants has recently started to meet these standards and is currently taking care of the necessary packaging (4 litres) to become a WFP supplier.

The rapid increase in the number of schools with school meals has led to certain restrictions, particularly in the area of logistics, which could not keep up with this pace:

- Suppliers complain about delays in receiving and unloading freight. Due to a lack of free storage capacity, some loaded lorries wait between three weeks and two months before they can unload the food they are transporting. This is at the expense of the suppliers, most of whom have rented the lorries. According to the WFP, these problems are now a thing of the past, but we were able to identify precisely this problem in one case during the field research.
- Deadlines for the chemical treatment (*fumigation*) of foodstuffs, which is the responsibility of the suppliers, are not always met. There is sometimes a wait of

[24] Chapter 3.4.4 is largely based on discussions with WPF managers and a focus group discussion with major suppliers.

several weeks before the authorities responsible make an appointment to fumigate the grain before it is dispatched to the WFP warehouses.

The main problem with locally produced food is that, firstly, it rarely meets the quality standards required by the WFP and is often rejected when purchased and, secondly, it is sometimes not available in sufficient quantities at a certain time. Small-scale producers, therefore, have two fundamental problems in gaining access to WFP orders. On the one hand, they do not have products whose quality is acceptable to the WFP and, on the other, they do not always fulfil the administrative eligibility criteria for tenders. A strategy to promote local procurement has been developed (WFP 2020) to address these problems and a department has been set up within the WFP to involve small producers, working with the Ministry of Agriculture. In order to remove the various restrictions that prevent smallholder farmers from participating in tenders, the department has taken certain measures:

- This department has, with the help of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, identified small producers and small producer cooperatives. These were trained, and those that were not organised were encouraged to set up a cooperative. They were supported in the process of gaining access to institutional markets for school canteens.
- Donations of equipment were given to the cooperatives. Each cooperative received a sewing machine to sew sacks, a 500 kg scale and a moisture meter.
- Training courses were organised for the cooperatives on better storage, improved techniques along the value chain and the preparation of a tender for SF. Partner organisations, such as the Beninese Agency for Food Safety (*Agence Béninoise de Sécurité Sanitaire des Aliments*), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Dutch ACMA (Communal Approach to Agricultural Markets), supported the training courses.
- Some eligibility criteria for WFP tenders have been relaxed or cancelled, for example:
    - for small producers, the food is collected by the WFP; for large producers, transport is at their own expense;
    - the bank guarantee for small farms has been abolished;
    - the bags for packing maize are provided free of charge to ensure that the products are packed properly and without risk of contamination;
    - the deadline for payment of invoices is shortened to up to one week; and
    - small producers who do not have a bank account are authorised to use their accounts at microfinance institutions.

On the basis of these facilitations for small producers, the unit responsible initiated a pilot phase of direct food deliveries to schools in five municipalities: Banikoara, Boucoumbé, Ouinhi, Copargo and Dangbo. While 300 tonnes of food were delivered by small-scale producers in 2021, the amount of food delivered by smallholder farms increased to 900 tonnes in 2022, part of which was delivered directly to schools and the other part to WFP warehouses. Food deliveries from small-scale producers increased to 7,500 tonnes in 2023. The WFP's goal is to strengthen small producers in the long term in order to decentralise food supplies and enable each location or region to deliver food of a quality acceptable to the WFP. However, there is still a long way to go.

4. Practical Report: The "*Cantines Scolaires*" in Benin

4.1 Methodology of the Study

The study presented here was carried out by the AVE team, Karin Gaesing and Frank Bliss, in cooperation with the national Beninese experts Candide Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun and Maxime Dahoun in May/June 2023.

Methodologically, the field phase was preceded by a secondary analysis of important reference literature, which, in addition to official publications by important actors, also includes a series of so-called "grey literature", i.e. documents that are not intended for publication by their authors or editors. Regarding the socio-economic summary, the authors were able to refer to the recently completed study on the microfinance sector in Benin.

Considering the total of 16 schools visited, despite the breadth of the interviews conducted, a number of results must be regarded as narrative or anecdotal evidence. Exemplarily, even the almost universal core statement from teachers and parents that "the children are healthier now because of the school meals" does not prove that the children are actually in a significantly better state of health than before the SF were introduced, even if this was a consistent statement in the discussions with teachers and parents. Additionally, without a very complex data analysis of several hundred schools, it is not definitely certain that girls and boys really have the same success at school as a result of SF and are allowed to go on to secondary school without substantial restrictions. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the actual effects of the *cantines scolaires* go in the directions described, even if the confidence level here is unlikely to reach peak values.[25]

Initially, the various ministries and authorities involved in SF were interviewed in Cotonou and Porto Novo, as well as staff from the various departments of the WFP working in the area of SF. The aim of the interviews and discussions was to find out about the role and activities of the individual stakeholders, as well as their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

The field study took place in a total of 16 state primary schools in seven of the twelve *départments* in Benin: in the north in Borgou, in the centre in Zou and in the south of Benin in Atlantique, Couffo, Littoral, Mono and Ouémé (see Fig. 3). The schools were scattered across various *communes* and selected for comparison taking into account their relatively easy accessibility, the use of innovative approaches and a relatively high level of commitment on the part of the school community as well as approaches that were not working well. The aim was to work on one school per day and not to spend too much time "on the road". The safety criterion also played an important role in the selection of the *départments* and excluded, for example, the Atacora *département* in the north and the northern areas of Alibori.

[25] With currently around 4,700 schools with *cantines scolaires*, a quantitatively orientated study would have to include a sample of almost 360 schools in order to be representative and to achieve a high degree of confidence with a standard deviation of 0.05 (cf. Krejcie / Morgan 1970).

Fig. 9: Survey of teachers and school headteachers.

The facilities such as the kitchen, food storage room, classrooms, dining hall or dining hall hangar (if available), school garden, equipment for income-generating activities, water supply and the like were inspected in each of the schools visited. Families whose children attend the school were also occasionally visited at home and interviewed. In addition, focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with people from the committees responsible for managing the school meals, cooks, pupils and teaching staff with the help of a guideline. The visits were each accompanied by WFP staff and their respective NGO partner (e.g. *Chargé de Programme, Superviseur, Médiateur/Médiatrice*). The WFP and NGO staff were also interviewed about their role in the SF programme, their assessment of the activities and their future plans.

At the level of the respective *communes* in which the schools were located, the mayors and, in some cases, their representatives were asked about their role in school meals and cooperation with the programme, and in one *département*, also the prefect. In addition, employees of the ministries involved, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture, were also interviewed sporadically at *commune* level.

The regional WFP warehouses were also visited where possible and discussions were held with local staff in the *départements* in which we visited schools. These discussions centred mainly on the functioning of the warehouses, the modalities of purchasing, receiving and delivering food, and quality control.

Another important group of people and institutions interviewed were the producer cooperatives that sell food to the WFP for SF. Discussions were held with producers and the management of the cooperatives and with buyers about the process of selling to the WFP for school meals, pricing, quality control and the cooperatives' future plans and wishes. If available on-site, warehouses and administrative buildings of the respective cooperatives were also visited.

4.2 Basic Data and Equipment of the Schools Attended

The survey was carried out in 16 schools in seven of the twelve *départements* in Benin, as shown in the table in Appendix I.

All of the schools visited generally had six classes, which corresponds to the six years of primary school in Benin. Only two schools in Borgou also had a preschool class. One of the schools in Atlantique had two groups, one with six classes and one with three classes. In three of the 16 schools, pupils from different classes either had to share a classroom because there were not enough classrooms, or they were taught in rooms built by the community itself using makeshift materials, such as walls made from palm fronds.

The smallest of the schools surveyed had 135 pupils, the largest 601 children. In most cases, the number of boys and girls was roughly equal. The bottom line is that out of a total of 4,843 pupils, 52.4 % were male and 47.6 % female.

Only a very few of the schools had an electricity supply: Two schools close to the city were connected to the electricity grid, while another school was at least able to generate light in the classrooms with the help of a few solar cells on the roof.

In theory, all of the schools visited had latrines. In one school, however, the toilets available were no longer usable and had not yet been replaced by new ones. As a result, the pupils had to leave the school and go "into the bushes" to attend to their needs. Another school had a good and functioning latrine facility; however, according to pupils and teaching staff, it was always locked and the key was kept by the headteacher (see Fig. 10). As a result, most of the pupils there also go to the neighbourhood around the school to relieve themselves. Another school only offers a shared urinal for girls and boys, i.e. an area where urine seeps away (see Fig. 11).

The supply of water is problematic in most schools, especially for the organisation of school meals and the hygiene aspects in this context. This important issue is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.5.

Fig. 10: A new, exemplary latrine, a tippy-tap was even set up for the team's visit, but they forgot to unlock the doors.

Fig. 11: A particularly strange situation in the capital: the old latrine filled with rubbish (left in the picture), the halfway functional one (top right) closed, but in the centre, a "urinal", i.e. a floor sprinkled with charcoal, poorly covered with corrugated iron.

4.3 The Players Involved in School Meals

School meals are organised and managed by various committees within the primary schools. There are guidelines formulated by the WFP or the NGOs involved for these committees, but, in practice, the impression was gained that the schools or the parents and teaching staff involved sometimes adapt these guidelines to the reality experienced in daily practice. The following comments are based primarily on the statements received from parents, pupils and teaching staff and our own observations.

Subsequently, actors from the municipal and village administration are analysed separately as groups and their role and commitment regarding SF are presented.

4.3.1 The Association des Parents d'Élèves (APE)

The APE should be mentioned here in the first place because it represents all parents of the children attending the school and supports all other committees in their work. This committee is not set up specifically for the organisation of SF or entrusted with their organisation, but exists independently in every school in Benin and manages the fate of the respective school. Regarding SF, for example, the APE hires the cooks who prepare the meals for the children together with the general assembly of parents. As they have a say in the school budget, they also determine the contribution that each child has to pay per day for the SF programme. This contribution is set at FCFA 25 in some schools and FCFA 50 in others. This budget is used to pay for the cooks and sauce ingredients, among other things. The personal contribution is a nationally desired requirement, which is taken into account with varying degrees of strictness from school to school and has a considerable influence on the meals ultimately served to the children due to the rather monotonous basic supply of the schools.

The APE calls parents together to encourage them to pay their contributions and sometimes to make additional voluntary payments that are necessary for the functioning of the school and the SF. One such collection (FCFA 700 per family) was used to buy wood in one school and give it to a carpenter who used it to make urgently needed school furniture. The APE of another school built a classroom on its own initiative, which was not financed by the state despite several applications to the authorities.

The APEs also endeavour to obtain support for the schools from NGOs, the mayor of the respective *commune* or Beninese companies. Funding, for example, has been obtained for the construction of a wall surrounding the school grounds, a school library and, in several schools, a water pump and/or a water tower.

In some villages, APE board members (French: *bureau*) also provide the storage facilities for the supplies needed for the SF and are actively involved in collecting the daily contributions for the food and the purchase of sauce ingredients.

4.3.2 School Meals Committee

The *Comité de la Gestion de la Cantine Scolaire Intégré*, commonly known as the *Comité Cantine*, is the body that organises and maintains the school meals at each participating school. The specifications for the *Comité Cantine* state that it should have seven members. In reality, however, in addition to a committee with only five members, we also found committees with ten or eleven members. Ideally, these committees are made up of the president, vice-president, treasurer (*trésorier/trésorière*), canteen manager (*maître* or *maîtresse cantine)*, storekeeper (*magazinier/mediatrice*), secretary (*secrétaire*) and a student representative.

According to WFP guidelines, at least two of these people should be female. In the committees we encountered, these were often the deputy president, the treasurer or the storekeeper, and sometimes also the *maîtresse cantine*. A teacher is also a mandatory member of the committee. In the schools visited, this person was often the secretary, because they could read and write, but sometimes also the storekeeper. According to the latest evaluation of the SF programme, 27.3 % (= 5,332) of the 19,524 parents active in the *Comités de Cantine* were women. Of these, 460 hold the position of chairperson, 909 are *magazinière* and 2,217 women are treasurers (*trésorières*) (RdB / PAM 2022: 143).

One of the tasks of the *Comité Cantine* is to organise all the processes involved in running the school meals. This begins with the receipt of the food supplied by the WFP, i.e. maize, rice, beans, oil and salt. Their receipt is signed off and the food is stored in the room designated. It is the responsibility of the *Comité Cantine* to ensure that the food is stored in a clean, lockable, well-ventilated room. The *magazinière* (often a woman) takes the weekly rations for the children from the stock and, where possible, keeps them in a smaller storage room. She takes the daily rations from this room and hands them over to the cooks in the morning. In other schools, rations are also distributed from the storeroom on a daily basis, which requires the presence of the person responsible for the storeroom and makes the (still largely voluntary and unpaid) job a considerable burden. The amount of food to be distributed per child is precisely defined by the WFP and documented in a booklet, but ideally also on boards in the storerooms. Each child is entitled to 150 g of maize or rice, 30 g of beans, 10 g of oil and 3 g of salt per day.

The *Comité Cantine* organises and controls the quality and quantity of school meals, the hygiene in and around the kitchen, the provision of firewood or other fuel, such as oil palm kernels, the provision of drinking-water and the procurement of ingredients for the daily meals that are not contributed by the WFP. The implementation of income-generating activities and the cultivation of school gardens can also be organised by this committee, but also by other ad hoc groups. In one case, a teacher with a background in vegetable growing felt particularly responsible for managing the school garden.

The ingredients for lunch, i.e. tomatoes, onions, chillies and the like, are bought at the local markets or taken from the school garden. In some schools, the committee also organises a morning breakfast for the children, which consists of (unsweetened) thin *bouillie* (maize porridge) and is served at around 10 a.m.

4.3.3 Association des Mères d'Enfants

There is also a special committee set up by the mothers of the schoolchildren, the *Association des Mères d'Enfants* (AME), in some of the schools visited, in addition to the *Comité Cantine*. The AME in one school in the *Département* Atlantique consists of 28 women of different ages. This AME has a board of five women. Several of the women no longer have children at the school, but have older children who attend secondary school (*collège*). This indicates that membership of the AME can be of a longer duration and expresses a higher-level sense of responsibility, but can also have a communicative character.

By their own admission, the members of the AME ensure that the children attend school on time, keep the schoolyard and buildings clean, and work in the school garden. They also organise the procurement of firewood. They visit those families who do not send their children to school and try to convince them of the necessity of school attendance. The AME of the school in the *Département* Atlantique organises itself into small groups to carry out the work that needs to be done. This AME also carries out various income-generating activities that

benefit the school meals. These are the processing of oil palm fruits into palm oil, the processing of manioc into *gari* and *attiéké*, as well as the production of washing-up liquid and liquid soap. All products are both used directly in school meals and sold. In the latter case, the proceeds are invested in the SF.

4.3.4 School Garden and School Field Committee

A school garden is run in 13 of the schools we visited, and a field belonging to the school is also cultivated in three of the schools. These activities are managed by the *Comité Cantine* in some of the schools we visited, in others a so-called *Comité Jardin*, i.e. school garden committee, or *Comité de Champs*, i.e. a school field committee, has been set up specifically for this purpose.

These special committees have the sole purpose of managing the activity for which they are responsible. They organise the work in the gardens or on the school fields, but do not necessarily carry it out themselves. The garden committees we encountered were all male. In two cases, there was also a man associated with the committee who was familiar with horticulture and made his expertise available, but was not a member of the committee. The members of the committee plan the garden and usually also create it. They then often organise and delegate the work involved.

In only one case were the school fields supervised by a *Comité de Champs* set up specifically for this purpose; the activity was co-organised by the *Comité Cantine* and the APE in the other two schools. The *Comité de Champs* consists of three men and two women who jointly plan the establishment of the school field or, in this case, several fields, decide which crops are to be cultivated, procure the expertise and inputs for this, organise the work involved and, in some cases, carry it out themselves.

4.3.5 The Cooks

The WFP advises schools to employ a total of four cooks, who alternate in teams of two on a weekly basis. In reality, however, we only encountered this ideal staffing (from the WFP's point of view) three times. The schools we visited worked with 2, 3, 4, 6 or 12 female cooks, and one school even had 20 women taking turns to cook in groups of four. However, we were also able to see for ourselves on-site that the work is difficult to manage by two women alone. The cooks in almost all the schools had organised reinforcements, at least for our on-site visits, so that they could show us how a school meal runs smoothly. Two cooks from a neighbouring school and a former cook were asked for help in one of the schools we visited. In another school, snack vendors helped out, and in yet another school, staff from the NGO in charge. This raises the question of how cooking is managed in normal operation, i.e. without a visit from a research team.

The work usually starts at 8 a.m. with the cooks cleaning the kitchen, the cookers and, if necessary – if there was not enough time the day before – the pots. They are then allocated the daily rations of food that are available at the school. The other ingredients, such as chilli peppers and tomatoes, are usually bought at the local market by the cooks or people appointed by the canteen committee. They sometimes do this at the weekend before their shift and bring the necessary ingredients to school every morning.

The women finish cooking the meals by 11.30 a.m., at the latest, so that the food distribution can be completed by 12 noon. The cooks distribute the food into small portion bowls for each child, mostly supplied by the WFP, load these small bowls with lids onto large trays and carry the food on their heads into the classes or – where there is one – into the dining hall. The cooks

sometimes place the bowls with spoons on the tables in front of each child, or occasionally a teacher does this work for them. Rarely, older children also help (although we only observed girls doing this). Starting with the youngest children, the food is carried to each class and distributed. The pupils eat their meal at 12 noon.

After the meal, the cooks collect the bowls and spoons used, rinse them and store them in the shelves or cupboards provided. The pots and other cookware are then cleaned of the often heavily encrusted and stuck-on food residues and rinsed. The cooks' working day usually ends between 2 and 4 p.m. It is not uncommon for the women to be asked to water the beds in the school garden afterwards, "as they are there anyway".

Fig. 12: One of the cooks carries the food to a school class, here served in tin bowls with lids donated by an NGO and not in the blue plastic bowls normally used by WFP.

Fig. 13: A teacher helps to distribute the food, here half a small orange in addition to the maize porridge.

Fig. 14: Washing the pots and serving bowls after the meal.

The cooks in each of the schools we visited complained about the hard and laborious work and the inadequate pay. Typically, this remuneration is called "*motivation*" and not a fee or salary. This maintains the impression of voluntary work, which, however, far exceeds the women's workload. The "*motivations*" in our sample amounted to between FCFA 350 and 500

per woman per day, i.e. an average of FCFA 1,750 to 2,500 per week, which corresponds to a weekly wage of between 2.66 and 3.80 euros for an average working day of seven to eight hours and possibly more.

If not all pupils are able to pay their daily fees, which is often the case, the cooks' wages may well be lower, but in some schools, they are topped up by the headteacher and APE from the school budget[26]. The cooks are not paid if they are absent due to illness. The women also complain that they are not paid for medication, although cases of illness are quite frequent. The evaluation report of the SF programme from 2022 already criticised this shortcoming and advised separating the voluntary work from the work of the cooks and, instead, remunerating them appropriately for their work (RdB / PAM 2022).

The cooks receive further training in nutrition and hygiene from the supporting NGOs. They also receive work clothes. The WFP also carries out deparasitation treatments for the cooks in the model schools.

The cooks are elected by the APE as part of a general meeting of the parents or volunteer there. They are usually women whose children attend the school in question. Some of them previously sold snacks, such as *bouillie* or doughnuts, before school for the 10 a.m. breakfast. Other female cooks stated that they go to the fields on other days or after work and farm, process and sell food or trade in general. However, the time available during the week after school was far too short for this.

4.3.6 Village Dignitaries

During a number of school visits, the WFP organised meetings for our team with the various stakeholders involved in SF through the NGO working for the school. The people invited to the meeting usually included the village chiefs (*chef de village*), the councillors (*délégués*), sometimes the *chefs d'arrondissement* and often older men who were introduced as "the wise men of the village" (*sages du village*). Their roles in relation to school meals did not differ significantly from one another. These village dignitaries – we only met men – use their influence on the village population to promote school meals. One *chef d'arrondissement* said that he had benefited from SF in the past and had only been able to go to school and then become a teacher because of them. He would tell the people in the village about his own experiences and, thus, encourage them to send their children to school, on the one hand, and to actively support SF, on the other. He is also committed to the sustainability of the activity by having a maize field planted to produce maize for *boullie.*

The village wise men and village chiefs listen to the problems of the villagers regarding SF and try to identify solutions. One village head also stated that one of his roles was to help formulate and sign submissions from the school board to the administration. At the meeting with us, another village head accused the women present of constantly complaining to him about the school meals, but had not yet said a word. Prompted and encouraged in this way, the women raised a whole series of criticisms about which they would like to see improvements in the SF.

[26] As the budget is the joint responsibility of the headteacher and APE, this is possible, but even basic things such as chalk, the cost of electricity, if necessary, and a new coat of blackboard paint can hardly be covered by the funds provided by the state, which in the 2020/21 school year, for example, amounted to FCFA 16,416 (equivalent to around EUR 25) per pupil (GCNF 2021).

4.3.7 Mayor and Prefect

The prefects (*préfets*), who are in charge of the *départements*, and the mayors, who administer the *communes*, support SF with varying degrees of commitment and budgets. Some prefects are very committed and oblige the mayors to include a budget for SF in their budgets. No budget, no signature on the budget, is the motto there. In the *Département* Atlantique, the prefect obliged the councils (*élus*) to donate at least FCFA 1,000 each for SF, raising FCFA 8,000,000. A further fundraising campaign to raise FCFA 14,000,000 is currently underway. The prefects are also trying to mobilise money for school meals through appeals on the communal radio (*radio communautaire*).

The budgets provided by the mayors for SF vary. We were given a range of FCFA 200,000, FCFA 1,000,000 and even FCFA 15,000,000 to 20,000,000 in the respective *commune.* Some town halls (*mairies*) also bear the electricity and water costs of the schools, sometimes only occasionally, as evidenced by hand pumps that have not been repaired for a long time. The construction of a wall around the school grounds, a dining hall and a kitchen were mentioned in individual schools as previous support provided by the *mairies*. When asked for what investments the *mairie* budget should be used, some of the mayors interviewed stated that the money was mainly used to buy sauce ingredients (*condiments*).

However, some mayors also wanted a more intensive dialogue with the NGOs responsible for SF or the WFP in order to identify sensible investment opportunities for the individual schools. The representative of the mayor of Cotonou also hoped for better involvement in the further planning of the programme, which, so far, only comprises seven schools in the capital.

4.3.8 NGOs as Service Providers for the WFP

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 3.4, the WFP uses several NGOs (including international NGOs) to implement the TC of the SF programme based on the *cantines scolaires*. This is currently the Catholic organisation Caritas, for example, in the centre of Benin, in the Borgou *département* around the city of Parakou. In the south, in the three *départements* of Atlantique, Ouémé and Littoral (Cotonou), the NGO FADEC (*Femmes Actrices de Développement Communautaire*) was entrusted with the TC of the PNASI at the time of our investigation.

Caritas has divided the schools in the Borgou *department* into two zones for operational reasons. With four *communes* each, a total of 62 employees look after 598 schools in Borgou. In addition to a manager (both are women here), the zone team includes five supervisors and 27 or 30 animators, who function under the term "mediators" (*médiateurs/médiatrices*). Caritas' contract with the WFP has been running since 2019 as a result of tenders, although, for a long time, only very short-term agreements were made (i.e. of 2, 3, 6 and only recently 11 months). The latter represents a highly unsatisfactory situation for the employees and is hardly conducive to a high level of work motivation.

The NGO FADEC has contracts with the WFP that allocate it 250 schools in the *Département* Atlantique in southern Benin, 283 schools in Ouémé and the 7 pilot schools in Cotonou for the implementation of TC.

It was noticeable during the school visits that the NGO staff obviously maintain good contacts with the school headteachers and teachers. The interaction with all groups involved at the schools is friendly. However, the mostly younger women and men did not notice the intolerable situation of the cooks in the closed kitchens, nor the unusable *tippy-taps* or the

latrines in some schools that were locked and, therefore, not usable by the children. Our question about the overuse of women's goodwill and labour was also answered in the affirmative, but dismissed with the argument that the men had to earn money and the women were more available. However, it must be taken into account that there were hardly any specialists in the organisation of SF and the staff all had to be trained at short notice and in a hurry due to the extremely rapid expansion of the PNASI.

In principle, the question also arises as to why the WFP has engaged NGOs as implementation agencies and is not working through its own structures, which are committed to slowly reducing their activities and ultimately handing them over to local state institutions and their definitive departure. This results in a partly overstretched personnel apparatus with difficult communication processes[27] and additional costs.

4.4 Kitchens, Dining Rooms, Food Storage and Hygiene

The most important infrastructure for SF are the ***kitchens***, i.e. the rooms in which the food is prepared. As a rule, the kitchens have been built by the schools themselves, sometimes financed by the *mairie* or – exceptionally – by an organisation supporting the school, such as the mobile phone provider MOOV. The WFP has also financed the construction of individual kitchens and has now developed a kind of model kitchen.

We found kitchens in the form of hangars with a half-height clay wall and a tin roof in most of the schools. The floor is often made of rammed earth, very rarely cemented. Energy-saving stoves clad in clay are typically installed on one side of the wall in the schools in the south and centre of the country; they are heated with firewood from outside the kitchen (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16). We found that school meals are often still cooked on the traditional three-stone stoves in the Borgou *département* (Fig. 17).

[27] Depending on the importance of the information, the chain is at least four-linked: Mediator ⇨ Supervisor ⇨ Manager ⇨ WFP SF Officer Cotonou; but also possibly further, for example, for impact data ⇨ WFP Co-ordinator Cotonou ⇨ Country Manager Benin ⇨ WFP Rome (etc.). In addition, the WFP must be able to rely on the NGO data (including problem identifications and, to a considerable extent, evaluations), which is questionable given the expertise of the staff deployed.

Fig. 15 and 16: Frequently encountered type of kitchen with energy-saving wood-burning stoves built into the wall and fuelled from the outside.

Fig. 17: Three-stone stove in a school, partly used alongside, but also instead of improved cookers.

Depending on how they are loaded by the cooks, these cookers consume up to three times as much firewood as the clay-lined, energy-saving stoves adapted to the pot sizes.[28] In addition, they emit more smoke into the room than the clad cookers, although there are also more energy-efficient and less efficient, but also easy-to-use and completely impractical and even dangerous (risk of burns for the cooks) models of the latter. We were also able to observe a more advanced model in one school, with a chimney that leads the smoke out of the kitchen.

We found kitchens that were completely walled in and roofed over, with only small ventilation holes in the walls, in several schools (Figs. 18 and 19). The cooks had to go outside for fresh air every few minutes because they could not stand the acrid smoke in the completely overheated room. Eye diseases and respiratory infections are inevitable with this type of construction, which certainly none of the cooks and no woman generally would have planned in this way. The argument in favour of this closed building at one of the two schools was that the pots and bowls could be safely stored and enclosed here. Where the slits in the walls were, windows were to be installed later. They also wanted to improve the casing of the cookers so that the smoke would be drawn outwards and not remain in the room.

[28] The clay-lined, energy-saving stoves, which can be built by people themselves, have been widely used throughout West Africa since the 1990s and exist in numerous different designs. Newer models represent an improvement, particularly regarding potential diseases, as they serve to protect cooks and contribute to reducing the risk of illness from smoke and soot (Phillip/ Langevin/ Davis et al. 2023).

Fig. 18: Completely unhealthy, completely walled kitchen from which the smoke cannot escape.

Fig. 19: The wall in this kitchen is also far too high for the smoke (heavier than air) to escape.

An interesting alternative to the energy-saving stoves was observed at two schools in the *département of* Mono and at one school in the *département* of Ouémé: the so-called *foyer atingan* (Fig. 20 to 23). The stone shells of the oil palm kernels (*coque de palme*), a waste product from the production of palm oil, are used there as firewood (see also Meyer / Börner 2002).

Box 1: *Foyer atingan*

The two cooks are delighted with the *foyer atingan*. This cooker was developed by three young Beninese inventors and is now even being subsidised by the President of Benin. Cooking would be quicker with this cooker. They would also like to have a cooker like this at home, but they say it is too expensive to buy. At 8 a.m., they initially clean the metal cookers and remove the ashes from the previous day from the drawers under the cookers. To light the cooker, a small amount of palm kernel shells and some dry palm nut fibres are first placed at the bottom of the cooker in the container provided for the heating material. The fire needs an air supply. The bellows are set in motion by a solar panel on the roof of the kitchen in this school. In other schools, the women have to do this manually with a flywheel. Once the fire is lit, the container is filled with more palm kernel shells. You need 12 small cups full of the heating material for a 30-litre pot of rice or maize. The women buy the palm kernels in the village. There are enough palm kernels in their region, in other regions, the fuel is sometimes scarce and the cooks have to resort to the firewood-fuelled, three-stone cookers that have been built next to the kitchen for such cases.

Fig. 20 and 21: *Foyer atingan* with solar operation to regulate the air supply.

Fig. 22 and 23: Clay-built kiln fired with oil palm kernel shells, where the air supply is regulated by means of a manually operated flywheel.

We found one school each in the *départments* of Borgou and Atlantique with biogas-fuelled cooking facilities or abandoned attempts to install them. The biogas plant had been installed in one of the schools, but an associated cooker had not been set up and the plant had probably never been put into operation due to a lack of conditions (clearly too little potential biomass). The equipment in the other school was no longer functional. It emerged in discussions with the cooks that an NGO had built the latter facility. Although the cooks had received instruction on how to use the cookers, they did not know how to repair them.

The maize or rice is usually cooked in round, 30-litre cast-iron pots, the sauce in smaller, often 10-litre pots (see Fig. 15 and 16), which are provided to the schools. Serving bowls for the pupils, spoons and other kitchen utensils are also provided to the schools (Fig. 24 and Tab. 2), but broken crockery should be replaced by the school itself. The APE or *Comité de Cantines* take care of replacements in some schools, in others, they wait for the WFP. The serving bowls, spoons and drinking cups for the pupils are kept either in large baskets in the respective classes or in the kitchen if storage facilities are available there. If there is a dining hall, the crockery is stored there.

Table 2: Utensils provided to each school.

Cooking pots	Drinking cup
Cooking spoon	Spoon
Ladles	Forks
Foam ladles	Hoes
Bucket	Machetes
Large bowls	Shovels
Portion bowls	Watering cans

Only a few kitchens have tables or other work surfaces on which, for example, vegetables can be cut or crockery placed. Although this corresponds to the customs of a traditional Beninese kitchen in the countryside, with the amount of food and crockery that has to be handled and kept clean on a daily basis, some kitchen furniture would be very practical and help the cooks save time.

Fig. 24: Serving bowls provided by the WFP for the pupils.

Meals in most schools are eaten by the pupils in their classrooms at their seats. Only a few schools have ***dining rooms***, so-called *réfectoires*. Where these do exist, pupils are invited to eat in the dining room on a class-by-class basis. The food in some schools is placed on the table in front of the pupils by the cooks (sometimes with the help of teachers or delegated children), in others, the children collect their portions from the food counter.

There are water points with taps where the children wash their hands before eating in front of some dining halls. There are also sometimes washing facilities in front of the entrance to the dining hall or directly in front of the classrooms. These are either water containers with taps, as can now be found in many African countries and are also provided on a large scale by UNICEF, for example (Fig. 25), or they are so-called *tippy-taps*. These are very easy to make yourself from materials available locally. They consist of a canister that is filled with water and suspended from a pole. A floor-length rope is attached to the handle of the canister and a stick is tied to the lower end. You have to step on this stick to bend the canister and let the water run out. The device can, therefore, be operated without help (Fig. 25 and 26). During our visits, however, some of these practical devices – when introduced with good explanations – turned out to be non-functional. They were broken after a single use or set up in such a way that the children were obstructing each other and the water was being wasted. This suggests that *tippy-taps*, at least, are not used regularly here, but were set up for our visit.

Fig. 25: Children use tippy-taps to wash their hands.

Fig. 26: The children line up in front of the tippy-taps in a disciplined manner, but the three installations next to each other make absolutely no sense, as the steps get tangled up with each other.

Regardless of the technology used, we observed that the mandatory handwashing before eating is carried out in very different ways in the schools. While this seems to be a well-established process in some schools and the children line up in a disciplined manner and help each other to wash their hands, we observed a chaotic mess in other schools and children who were clearly untrained in using the washing facilities.

The food provided by the WFP is stored in lockable rooms used exclusively for this purpose in around half of the schools. In others, for example, a back room of the headteacher's office or the headteacher's office itself is used as a storage room. The food is then stored there together with school materials, equipment supplied by the WFP that has not yet been put into operation and other items (Fig. 27). The food is ideally stored in a separate, well-ventilated room on pallets, i.e. not standing directly on the floor, separated according to the type of food (Fig. 28). Where storage rooms are not available within the school or cannot be created (schools often lack classrooms), adequate storage facilities are sought in the village near the school. In two cases, the APE heads even provided a small lockable room.

Fig. 27 and 28: Storage room in the headteacher's office; ideal storage room for food in a school according to WFP standards.

4.5 Water and Energy

The supply of water and energy to schools is generally completely inadequate. According to WFP data, only a third of the schools involved in the SF programme have access to water. Of the 16 schools visited, four did not even have an open well in the schoolyard. Water had to be hauled to the school from outside, with one school quoting a requirement of ten buckets per day. This appears to be an underestimate in view of the need for drinking-water, for washing hands and for cooking itself and the subsequent washing of bowls, cups, spoons and cooking pots for around 300 pupils. The water for watering the school garden is certainly not included here.

A number of the schools visited have a drilled well in the courtyard with a functioning hand pump, usually the India Mark-II, which is widely used in Africa (Fig. 29). A few have a water tower into which water is pumped up from a borehole using solar energy (Fig. 30). We were able to observe a system that collects rainwater from the roof and channels it into reservoirs at a school. However, the supply pipe was damaged and the system was out of order, although the downpipe that had fallen off could easily have been repaired (Fig. 31). At another school, we were told of plans to build a cistern.

Fig. 29: A bore well with an India Mark-II hand pump donated by a private organisation from Benin on the edge of the school grounds, just 20 m from the kitchen.

Fig. 30: A drilled well, initially equipped with a hand pump, was upgraded by a European foundation with solar panels, an electric pump and a small water tower. It is, unfortunately, over 75 metres away from the kitchen.

Fig. 31: Rainwater collection device with defective downpipe.

Even where a water source was available, the cooks often complained about the extra work of carrying water from the pump or even from the remote tap to the kitchen when connected to the mains. Some headteachers also complained that they had to buy water and organise transport to the school. Even teachers with motorbikes were sometimes involved in the procurement of water. The mayors interviewed as well as representatives of the WFP and the NGOs involved

also named the water supply as one of the main problems to be solved at the schools in connection with SF.

The electricity supply to schools is even worse than the provision of water, although electricity is not as essential for schools as the water supply. Only the urban or peri-urban schools visited are connected to the electricity grid at all; just two in our sample. One rural school had no connection, although the power line ran directly past the school. Another school had solar panels on the roof, which were used to power the water pump. Yet another school mainly used solar cells to power the air supply for the *foyer atingan* (see Fig. 20 and 21). We rarely found any lighting in the buildings, at most, in the headteacher's office.

4.6 The Provision of Food

The provision of food at the schools is ensured, on the one hand, by the WFP – both through food purchased from abroad and food produced by Beninese producers. On the other hand, the committees at the schools mainly contribute to the sauce.

4.6.1 Provision of Food by the WFP

Food produced abroad

The WFP currently buys a significant proportion of the food provided for school meals in Benin from abroad: 100 % of salt, almost 100 % of oil and rice, and 100 % of yellow beans. By contrast, 100 % of the maize and white beans come from Benin. Salt is procured from Senegal and Ghana, while rice comes mainly from Asian countries. These imported foodstuffs are collected from the port by hauliers contracted by the WFP and transported to one of the nine regional programme warehouses for storage (Fig. 32 and 33). Today, a well-developed and documented sequence of processes and controls ensures that there are no losses or thefts, which, according to WFP officials, occurred in the past. Well-functioning logistics also ensure that there is sufficient food in the warehouses and it is delivered to the right schools at the right time.

Fig. 32 and 33: Regional WFP warehouses with cartons of cooking oil and sacks of rice and maize.

Nationally and locally sourced food

According to the WFP, 11 % of the maize used for school meals in 2022 came from local cultivation; the proportion will be 100 % by 2023. The aim in the long term is to procure all of the staple foods for the SF from local, or at least national, production. However, the WFP only buys food for which production in Benin is higher than demand. In contrast to maize, the procurement of rice, oil, salt and beans from local production is still in its infancy. This is due mainly to the poor quality of local food according to WFP criteria. It is criticised, for example, that locally produced maize is often contaminated with aflatoxins due to poor storage.[29] The situation is similar with rice produced locally.

According to WFP officials, local food was delivered directly from producers to schools on a pilot basis in five *communes* in 2022. In all other *communes* in the country, the WFP primarily buys maize from producer cooperatives, stores it in its warehouses and then distributes it to the schools. The WFP supports the cooperatives in the process of working together. The cooperatives send their offers to tender for the quantities required per region. The WFP always remains one of many market players and should not be the only customer of the cooperative in order not to destabilise the market. The cooperatives we visited greatly appreciate the opportunity to sell to the WFP. Despite numerous requirements and quality controls as well as a lengthy process, they are able to sell large quantities of maize at once and achieve a higher price per kilo than is possible on the local market.

Box 2: Price calculation of a municipal cooperative

The cooperative produces a total of 40,000 tonnes of maize, 700 tonnes of which will be available for the SF programme in 2023. Some of the producers can only deliver 0.5 tonnes of maize to the WFP, while others deliver 25 tonnes or more. Each cooperative proposes a selling price to the WFP. This is done individually because, for example, transport costs vary from region to region. The cooperatives have to calculate in such a way that they still make a profit after all deductions. An amount of FCFA 280 per kilo of maize is the total price paid to the cooperative by the WFP. After deducting three types of fees to be paid, FCFA 260 remains. From this, the cleaning of the maize by the women (see Fig. 33) must be deducted, as well as the remuneration of young men who fill the maize into the sacks provided by the WFP, weigh it and then sew up the sacks and load them onto lorries; after deducting these costs, FCFA 225 remains. This price is paid to the producers by the cooperative.

Maize fetches FCFA 160 per kg on the market at the beginning of the season, which rises to FCFA 200 per kg over time and is, thus, still lower than the WFP price.

[29] Aflatoxins are toxins produced by moulds that are considered carcinogenic and cannot be destroyed during cooking.

Fig. 34: About a hundred women are gathered in the warehouse of a cooperative to winnow and sort the maize.

The cooperatives are supported by the Ministry of Agriculture in the production of food for school meals. They receive training to guarantee the quality of the products during production and storage. The WFP has developed instructions (*fiches techniques*) with the Ministry for the various production steps and the storage of the products. However, WFP not only buys directly from the cooperatives, but also through suppliers who buy maize, beans and rice from the cooperatives and also from individual producers. It is then up to the suppliers to ensure the quality of the food.

The actual traditional foods of the Beninese, cassava and yams, are not included in the procurement plan for locally or nationally produced foodstuffs. Although maize has become very popular in the diets of many hhs in recent decades, rice particularly has also established itself among the more affluent families. However, cooked cassava or in various processed forms, such as *gari* and *attiéké*, is still a popular staple food[30] which can be produced in a much more environmentally friendly way than especially maize, which requires a considerable amount of chemical fertilisers and depletes the soil. In addition, cassava can be stored for a long time and, once ripened, can be left in the ground for months and is hardly susceptible to pests.

4.6.2 Provision of Food by the Parents

The WFP provides the schools with a limited supply of basic foodstuffs. Parents are responsible for procuring the remaining food, primarily the sauce ingredients. They manage the provision of the extended food necessary for school meals in different ways. On the one hand, many schools plant vegetable and herb gardens for self-sufficiency. In addition, food such as onions, chilli peppers, garlic, tomatoes, fish and, more rarely, eggs are bought directly at the local markets, whereby the principle of low prices (possibly at the central market location) usually takes precedence over village production. The money for this is generated, on the one hand, from the daily contributions for school meals, and, on the other, through income-generating activities by the parents. Occasionally, during school visits, we were also told that an NGO had donated cartons of eggs, a company had donated tins of tomatoes or a politician had donated other foodstuffs.

School gardens are an important source of food for SF (see Fig. 35 and 36). According to the WFP, 30 % of schools have a well-functioning school garden. Only two schools in our sample did not have a garden, but not all gardens were well-maintained. The gardens are run

[30] Women particularly are important producers, making an important contribution to the income of tens of thousands of families in Benin.

by the parents and used to produce ingredients for the pupils' daily meals. These ingredients are mainly spice plants, various traditional leafy vegetables and onions. Tomatoes and lemongrass are also grown in some of the gardens visited, as well as papayas, bananas, oranges and avocados. During school hours, the produce is used directly to feed the pupils, while the garden fruits are harvested and sold during the holidays. The proceeds are then reinvested in the SF programme.

Fig. 35: School garden with chillis, bananas and papayas – and a very rare net-based irrigation system.

Fig. 36: The traditional leafy vegetable plant amaranth (also known as foxtail), one of the oldest food plants known to mankind, is grown in this garden.

Schools in Benin can also have fields in addition to the actual school grounds. Some of these are cultivated by parents, in other cases, they are leased. Some of the home-grown crops go directly to the SF programme, while others are sold so that the proceeds can be used to pay for school meals. One of the schools we visited initially planted *niébé* ("black-eyed peas") on a piece of land. Some of the FCFA 51,000 from the sale was used to plant more fields to grow peanuts and manioc, while others were used to pay for the expansion of the SF programme. Another school has adopted the slogan "no additional purchase of chilli peppers from 2024" and the committee responsible is planting chillies on a large scale between the rows of cassava. In another school, a maize field was planted to ensure the production of maize for the children's morning maize meal soup (*bouillie*) and to keep maize on hand in case the WFP deliveries for the school failed to materialise, which did happen.

Other schools run income-generating activities themselves or with the support of village members, such as fish farming (see Fig. 37), breeding chickens, rabbits, snails or goats. The processing of shea nuts into butter, the production of palm oil, soap, the manioc products *attiéké* and *gari*, and much more is carried out by very committed parents. The production is often divided into three parts: one-third is used directly in the school, one-third is sold for the school's benefit and one-third is sold for the producers' own profit. However, too little attention is paid in these activities to the way in which the mothers (and also the female committee members) are especially challenged in terms of time in addition to their multiple responsibilities in the family. A woman who already produces *gari* with a lot of effort and little net profit cannot invest additional time for this and certainly not share the previous small profit with the school.

Fig. 37: Fish pond adjacent to the school garden for breeding high-priced catfish.

4.7 Effects of School Meals from the Stakeholders' Perspective and Their Evaluation

From the perspective of the ***parents*** involved in the discussions in the schools, three areas of impact can be identified, which were mentioned almost everywhere:

(i) The release of mothers (fathers are rarely obliged to do this) from the obligation to come home at lunchtime so that the children can be fed before they have to go back to school in the afternoon. This allows mothers to continue working or save time for long journeys.

(ii) The knowledge of the regularity and relatively good quality of the food that the children receive as part of the school meals. This eases the parents' situation somewhat, at least during the hungry season (*saison de soudure)*, when many poor hhs are hungry and it is not uncommon for only one meal a day to be served. According to the parents, the children look forward to the food at school, talk about it at home and demand food similar to that served at school (e.g. rice or a dish of yellow beans with maize flour).

(iii) The improved health of the children, who would, therefore, not be absent from school as often as before. The children would also learn better than without school meals.

Some parents also mentioned that setting up *tippy-taps* at home would encourage children to wash their hands. One father also reported that his children had recently planted a small garden at home with his help to grow vegetables. They would bring seeds of plants from the school garden and would enjoy looking after the garden.

The information provided by parents largely coincides with that of ***teachers and school administrators***. Above all, the observation that the children are healthier overall and, therefore, absent less often is repeated. First and foremost, the increased enrolment figures at the schools are noted in unison, which in one village are said to be almost 100 %, in another all boys and girls with the exception of a village district inhabited by transhumant Fulbé. Of the latter, only two children from a single family attend school.[31]

[31] The transhumant Fulbé (also known somewhat pejoratively as Peulh) sometimes move with individual families to accompany large herds of cattle for several months a year on pastures in northern Benin and also further into Burkina Faso and Niger, while other families remain in the village. However, it is also

In second place and of almost equal importance is the finding that the dropout rate at the schools visited, i.e. the dropouts during the school year with the complete withdrawal of children from school[32], has fallen sharply until, in some schools, there was a complete absence of dropouts in the 2022/2023 school year.

Unjustified absences during lessons have also decreased significantly, especially when children go home after morning lessons and then do not return for afternoon lessons (partly because they have not been given anything to eat at home). Teachers have also observed a significant improvement in the health of many children and associate this with their reduced absence from school. If children are absent from lessons, this is more likely to be due to unusable or insufficient toilets.

Better class participation (i.e. more active children) is also mentioned several times, in connection with less disruption to lessons if the children can be sure that food will be served on time at 12 noon.

The financial relief for parents and particularly the poorest hhs does not really seem to exist, as the frequent failure to make the daily payments required shows. However, the question remains as to what role the FCFA 25 or 50 co-payment for SF plays in the family budget of the extremely poor.

A further indication of how well school meals are received by families is the fact that parents mentioned three times that even younger siblings of schoolchildren, who are not yet of school age or able to go to school, are begging to be allowed to go to school – precisely because there is a daily meal there.

It was mainly the ***village authorities and the representatives of the administrations and authorities*** interviewed who stated that all stakeholders involved in the SF programme were adequately involved and would do their part. The government's unconditional support for school meals was also emphasised time and again, which would promote and encourage the cooperation of all stakeholders in the implementation of the PNASI. The opinion was also occasionally expressed that buying the sauce ingredients at the village markets would boost the local economy a little.

The representatives of the ***producer cooperatives*** are very satisfied with the opportunity to sell large quantities of maize to the WFP for school meals at a good price. However, they would like to see the administrative processes streamlined and the collection and payment of the stored harvest speeded up.

Employees of the NGOs contracted by the WFP emphasised that the SF mostly ran smoothly and had a very positive effect, especially on the pupils. However, they emphasised more than any other party involved that working with the parents was very difficult and it was not easy to motivate them to actively participate in the organisation of SF. It was positive to note that children who did not hand in their daily contribution at school in the morning still got to eat like all the other children, but the missing money would tear a big hole in the budget.

common for only the young men to travel with the herds, while children, women and older men stay in the village. In both cases, however, many children from families who are settled all year round are not sent to school. This reduces the school enrolment rate significantly, at least in villages with Fulbé quarters.

[32] This is in contrast to a change of school, which is recorded by the schools and noted separately in the leaver figures.

Last but not least, the ***WFP employees*** themselves also commented on the effects of the SF programme. They emphasised the positive effects on school performance and school attendance in general. They also stressed the good cooperation between the various stakeholders. Above all, however, it was repeatedly emphasised that the loss of food and the theft rate at the schools had fallen dramatically thanks to clear regulations, increased control mechanisms and reporting.

The fact that some of these statements lack at least more narrowly defined empirical evidence and are instead based on narratives has already been mentioned in the section on the methodology of the study. What is verifiable on the basis of the school statistics available (not necessarily on the basis of enrolment figures at the beginning of the year with the school authorities), however, is the ***increased school attendance rate*** in recent years and the sharp ***fall in the dropout rate***. The teachers involved can also be believed when it comes to the statements on attendance, which has now become much more regular, especially as many schools record the daily absence rate precisely on a class-by-class basis (see Fig. 38).

The time relief for parents can also be considered certain, as the teachers state that the vast majority of children stay at school after lunch, which can, at least, apply to the 16 rural schools in our sample. This argument was also put forward by many parents. It must also be accepted by the teachers that the children follow the lessons better and are less disruptive. However, with occasional class sizes of over 80 children or the use of the same classroom by two different year groups, it is almost impossible to provide productive well-structured lessons, no matter how good the school meals are.

A ***cost-benefit analysis of SF*** carried out by the WFP and the government of Benin in 2018 came to a total cost of US$ 130.75 per child or US$ 21.79 per child per year for six years up to the 2017/2018 school year, which would be offset by a benefit of US$ 679.58, calculated over its lifetime with reference to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Benin (see WFP / RdB 2019).[33]

[33] Figure 5 of the study cited explains the benefits in US$: US$ 175 transfer value, US$ 74 income from hh investment costs, US$ 300 from improved (labour) productivity, US$ 54 from better health and nutrition and US$ 77 from gender equality. Such an economic calculation seems adventurous if, for example, gender equality or gender equity is assessed in US$ and not primarily from a human rights perspective. The other figures are also highly questionable in a country where the informal economy dominates.

Fig. 38: The school attendance of this class is precisely recorded on the blackboard every day (G = boys, F = girls).

The other statements very clearly reflect the interests and priorities of the stakeholders concerned. Despite short contract periods and inexperienced, often very young staff, for example, the NGOs are entrusted with the difficult task of mobilising the parents' own contributions, i.e. active cooperation, the provision of manpower, time, and financial and material resources. It is, therefore, not surprising that they do not join in the hymns of praise from politicians and representatives of the authorities, who emphasise the good cooperation between all those involved.

It was also interesting to hear from parents that children would like to recreate the washing facilities at home and also make a garden. A dedicated teacher in one of the schools visited incorporated work in the school garden into the children's lessons. According to the teacher, the children's labour was not used to cultivate the garden, but the pupils were taught practical knowledge about the plants, their benefits and how to grow them. However, this is frowned upon by UNICEF and, therefore, also by the WFP, as child labour. We consider the practical treatment of vegetable and fruit cultivation in the classroom to be very useful, but it should be ensured that the pupils are not, in fact, simply exploited as labour.

Finally, in the context of the very rapid expansion of SF in Benin, it is important to point out the predominantly very great commitment of the population, especially parents, but also many teachers and headteachers, without whose voluntary (labour) contributions the inclusion of almost 5,000 schools at the end of the 2022/2023 school year would not have been possible.

5 Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations for German Development Cooperation

In a departure from previous INEF-AVE reporting practice, relevant findings, conclusions and recommendations have not been dealt with separately by sub-chapter in this paper, but rather – organised thematically – in a coherent manner. This was done because Chapter 5, in a slightly modified form, is also intended to serve as a short summary paper for the Government of Benin.

5.1 State Commitment Versus Sustainable Financing?

The state's commitment to SF in Benin is above average compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This is also documented by the establishment of a staff unit for the monitoring of SF within the presidential apparatus. However, there is still no legal regulation that would permanently secure SF as part of the country's social security system. In addition, despite an increasing budget between 2019/2020 and 2021/2022, the state's share of SF funding is still significantly lower than the ODA funds from the donor community and it is not yet clear when funding will be predominantly taken over by the national budget.

The current deliveries of basic foodstuffs for the *cantines scolaires* are arriving on time and in the quantities announced to the school kitchens. According to the WFP, they are of controlled good quality. However, these assured deliveries only cover the daily requirements in a rudimentary way, i.e. in addition to the porridge, semolina or rice and possibly beans. The package does not include the ingredients for the sauce, which in Benin, is always part of a meal, even for the poor, although it may be in an extremely simple form. Regarding these sauce ingredients, the principle of self-help has been imposed, i.e. the collection of at least FCFA 25 by each pupil, with which the school management and the committees are to procure the necessary ingredients themselves. The money is also to be used to pay the cooks. There is no compulsory means of collecting this contribution. Accordingly, children whose parents pay the contributions and those who do not receive any money on their way to school are served equally by the *cantines scolaires.* In view of the explicitly desired equal treatment of all pupils in the SF programme, this is also correct, but the moderate to very poor payment behaviour of parents in practice[34] means that the schools can de facto only decide from day to day how much money they can spend. There are no reserves, which means that school meals live from hand to mouth in the truest sense of the word:

> *"Yesterday we had corn porridge as well as sauce with tomatoes and onions, and the children also got a piece of pineapple. Today it's just plain rice with just the 10 g of WFP oil and a pinch of salt and 1 kg of onions divided into 300 portions."*

And what raises the question of gender equality in the entire SF approach in Benin is that if only little money is collected in a month, for example, during the hungry season (*période de soudure*), the female cooks may not receive any compensation at all for up to 160 hours worked in the school kitchens.

The conclusion and recommendation to be drawn from the summary is to place SF in Benin on a legal basis and provide for a fixed, annually increasing budget for SF in the national

[34] In some cases, teachers and school management also reported that many children would receive the money from their parents, but would spend it on snacks in the morning and then have nothing left when the lunch money was collected.

budget. According to the detailed calculations of the GCNF Global Survey, the cost of school meals is US$ 35.44 per year per child (GCNF 2021). According to these calculations, more than three quarters of SF could be covered by the national budget by 2028/2029.

The cooks must not be forgotten in the discussion about financial requirements and the budget. Including two cooks per 250 pupils in the school staff could be a good solution here (with the salary level that is intended for less qualified staff and currently amounts to FCFA 52,000, which may even be sufficient in rural areas (see chapter 2.1)).

5.2 Punctual Delivery of Basic Food – Difficult to Secure the "Sauce"

In contrast to other countries in our study, the supply of the WFP's basic food package to schools in Benin is very well organised. We also found that the delivery deadlines were always met, i.e. the logistics worked well, from the invitation to tender to delivery to the WFP warehouses and onwards to the school.

Storage is also well-organised and continuously documented in the schools and thanks to the massive technical support from the NGOs. According to statements from the more closely involved stakeholders in the schools visited, there are obviously no losses due to theft or incorrect storage. However, the example of the school in Cotonou shows that considerable security measures are necessary to prevent frequent break-ins in an urban environment.

In contrast to the supply of basic foodstuffs for the *cantines scolaires*, the situation is different when it comes to the other important nutritional components that the school and parents have to provide themselves. Even in a poor country and with an above-average poor population, maize porridge, prepared without flavour, is not necessarily attractive enough to ensure that the children attend school throughout the year. In practice, the majority of those involved in all the schools visited manage, albeit with considerable effort, to buy additional spices (especially chillies), garlic, small fish (used even in the kitchens of poor families) and, where possible, tomatoes, local aubergines and traditional leafy vegetables, albeit usually in modest quantities and, if the daily income from personal contributions is poor, only symbolically.

A solution to this reality, which we describe as a "hand-to-mouth" situation, could be found by having the school administration pay the cooks, as suggested in the last section. The "sauce" could be brought up to a good standard with FCFA 25 – the majority of which is actually paid – and even some fruit could be bought for the children.

5.3 School Gardens can Only Supplement the Menu

The creation of school gardens seems to us to be a sensible measure to supplement the provision of ingredients for the sauces and a vitamin-rich dessert. However, the gardens have not been able to provide all pupils with sufficient sauce ingredients every school day. In schools where the water supply is guaranteed, leafy and other vegetables, spice plants and fruit can be watered in the dry season and when there is not enough rain. A garden should not be planted in schools where there is not even water for the children and the kitchen. The establishment of a water supply is the absolute top priority here. Only when this is guaranteed can the construction of a garden be considered.

A school garden can also be used to introduce ingredients that are not generally known and used in local cuisine, such as carrots, cabbages and the like, with adequate advice from trained staff from the Ministry of Agriculture or NGOs. Interesting approaches have already been found in some gardens. The plants grown in the garden will not be sufficient for the

entire student body every week. Therefore, a rotation principle organised by class could also be considered. Of course, it must be ensured that all children in a school can enjoy the food within a defined period of time. This must be communicated transparently and adhered to reliably.

Planting fruit trees in the school garden, as we have already seen in some gardens, can lead to a sensible supplement to the children's daily diet with vitamin-rich fruit. Oranges, mangoes, papayas, avocados and other fruit can be planted in the school playground or at the edge of the schoolyard, even if there is no garden.

Work in the school garden, the creation of beds, the care of crops and knowledge about the various plants are included in the lessons in some schools. In this way, pupils learn in practice how to create a garden and grow vegetables, spices and fruit. This could also be supplemented by a nutritional component in the lessons. In one case, we were even told that children had asked to plant a garden at home and were taking care of it devotedly. However, this is in contrast to UNICEF's demand, which was made known in schools by the WFP and NGOs, among others, that child labour should not be permitted. A distinction must be made here between the permanent use of children for labour in general hh agriculture and their periodic meaningful involvement in running a school garden. In the long term, this can also lead to young people becoming interested in vegetable growing and investing in it in the future.

School gardens are created by men and then mainly left to women in some schools. When organising the work, more attention should, therefore, be paid to ensuring that the work is divided more or less equally between fathers and mothers and that men also take part in the watering. The latter would also be important when planting fruit trees and trees for firewood, which are generally not located near the watering hole.

5.4 Great Acceptance of the Food

Despite its simplicity, the food can generally be rated as good. The children surveyed almost everywhere found the food to be just as good as that of their mothers at home. They even found special meals better and some said that they often asked their mothers to cook meals like those at school. The pupils also said that they appreciated having something different to eat at school than at home, such as rice, which is rarely served, especially in poor families, because they cannot afford it. Pupils also stated that they wanted a dish made from maize flour and yellow beans. It was also reported several times that children who were not even taught there would come to school at lunchtime to ask if they could have something to eat.

5.5 Obvious Broad Positive Impact of the *Cantines Scolaires* on Schoolchildren, Their Families and Other Local Stakeholders

The positive effect on the health and academic performance of schoolchildren is not only attested to by statements from teachers, headteachers, parents and representatives of the authorities, but is also reflected in concrete figures from the individual schools, which are summarised in the statistics from the Ministry of Education. An increase in the number of pupils in all of the schools visited compared to the years before the introduction of SF can be observed, which goes beyond the demographic development. In one school, it was even stated that pupils had been turned away this year and referred to neighbouring schools. The school had become so attractive due to the well-functioning SF that capacity had been exceeded.

Apparently, pupils are no longer as distracted in class or simply as tired and hungry as they were before the introduction of school meals. In addition, more pupils are apparently graduating from school than before: according to the head teacher, 42 to 47 % of pupils at one school passed the *Certificat d'Études Primaires* (i.e. the sixth grade) in 2019. However, the figure in 2023 was 92 %.

The higher enrolment rates and, above all, the lower dropout rates among girls later on are certainly not only due to the relief of parental hhs through SF, but are also the result of general political support for girls' education in Benin. An additional reduction in the dropout rate of girls at schools could be achieved through good and accessible toilet facilities. Girls are dependent on clean and lockable toilets especially during menstruation. A law that was recently introduced, which handles the regulation of pregnancies of schoolgirls differently than before, also encourages girls to stay in school. A teacher will be severely penalised if he is the father of the baby. A pupil who impregnates a girl has to repeat the school year missed due to the pregnancy, just like the girl. Previously, only the girl had to bear the negative consequences of the pregnancy.

The argument of relieving the hh budget of poor families could also be used to target ethnic groups such as the Fulbé, who are normally reluctant to send their children to school or only do so for a short time.

Mothers in particular, according to many stakeholders, would benefit from SF, as they would no longer have to keep a meal ready for their children at home at lunchtime, but could go to the field or market or carry out other economic activities throughout the day. Parents generally may also be relieved financially by providing a midday meal for one or more children, as they do not have to be fed at home throughout the school day.

According to numerous statements in group discussions, the school meals also have positive effects on the social cohesion of the parents and, beyond that, on the village community. The previously not necessarily very active APEs have been activated by the organisation of the *cantines scolaires.* The joint endeavour to make the school a better place of learning for their children unites the majority of parents and, as a result, the dignitaries of a village also become more involved. Solutions, for example, are being sought together for water problems and the provision of sauce ingredients for SF.

Creative initiatives to generate income for the schools or to build the necessary infrastructure themselves are emerging, as the research team was able to establish at some locations, and certainly with the support of the NGOs involved. The involvement of the local authorities in supporting these initiatives is the responsibility of the NGOs commissioned by the WFP, in addition to the village authorities and the school management. Their staff could act more than before as a relay to the local administration and provide the often unimaginative, because insufficiently informed, authorities and the mayor of the *communes* with information about the challenges at the individual schools so that any budget already earmarked can be used sensibly. However, this would require additional training, especially for the supervisors who are responsible for this task.

5.6 The Timing of School Meals

Despite the evidently positive effect of the school meal programme on pupils overall, we would still like to address the timing of meal distribution at this point. At present, food is distributed at around 12 noon in all the schools included in the study. This is also when the children who can afford the snacks (due to pocket money from their parents) offered at almost

every school (some doughnuts and *bouillie*, but also full portions of rice with sauce, see Fig. 39) are hungry again. However, a further relevant proportion of children have not eaten anything by then, namely, in all families where breakfast is only served after the parents' first period of work in the fields, by which time the children must already be at school.

The time at which food is served was not discussed at any point during our interviews. However, the presence of snack vendors in front of each school who have food ready for the children before the start of lessons and at 10 a.m. indicates that the 12 noon meal comes very late for some children. Attempts are, therefore, made in several of the schools visited to serve the children a thin maize *bouillie* at 10 a.m. on a fairly regular basis. A maize field was set up at one school especially for this purpose. In most schools, however, access to snacks and, thus, to a first meal before 12 noon is only provided if the parents' financial means allow it.

The SF programme in Cambodia, where many hhs are also unable to offer their children breakfast because school starts very early at 7 a.m. and the majority of parents have to go to work just as early (factory or field work), school meals are usually provided before lessons so that the children do not have to go to class on an empty stomach (see Bliss 2018 and 2023). Those who then receive money from their parents can buy some of the snacks also offered by vendors at every school later in the morning, but this does not play a role in following the lessons. The children in Cambodia do not have to worry about whether they will get something to eat at home after school (or not), as is the case in Benin in schools that are not yet connected to the SF programme.

Fig. 39: Two women offer snacks in front of a primary school.

Accordingly, the question arises for Benin (as with SF in general) as to whether serving meals at lunchtime is not less productive in terms of healthier nutrition and regarding the children's educational behaviour than serving meals in the morning. Local cultural (eating) customs must also be taken into account in this discussion and decision. Serving meals early in the morning is much more stressful for the cooks in Cambodia than in Benin, as some of the women have to be at the cooker at four a.m. or even earlier. Without a minimum wage, this is likely to be even more difficult to enforce than it already is and the number of "volunteers" is likely to fall even further.

5.7 Inadequately Secured Funding for SF

On the one hand, it seems contradictory to want to relieve the burden on poor hhs by introducing SF across the board and, thus, also promote school attendance by children from poor and very poor families and, on the other hand, to demand a daily contribution of at least FCFA 25 from them for their children's school meals. It is very clear that a considerable proportion of children in the majority of schools are unable to pay this amount in the morning. Nevertheless, these children do take part in school meals, which is very welcome. However,

there is still the problem that poor hhs are particularly exposed to high social and financial pressure as a result of, for example, the daily contributions, additional appeals for donations from the APE, demands for labour for the school gardens and income-generating measures by parents. The international discussion about the possibilities for poorer countries to increase revenues to finance social security contributions such as SF was recently supplemented by Evans et al. (2023) to the effect that there is less potential for tax increases to finance them than is generally assumed. However, the group of authors' argumentation relies more on theoretical assumptions than on a more precise analysis of the question of why the existing tax provisions are not implemented in practice, i.e. why the tax money required for social security expenditure is not collected. In the case of Benin, governance is, primarily, responsible firstly for the unrealised tax revenues and, secondly, for the prioritisation of expenditure. Here, the state administration's magnificent buildings and expensive monuments stand in contrast to social responsibility. In this particular case, the president's commitment to SF, which has been evident for three years, gives hope for a change in budget planning. The donor community can support this politically and with conditional (budget) aid.

5.8 Focus More Strongly on Technical Equipment in Schools, Energy and Water Issues

When it comes to the technical equipment of the *cantines scolaires,* the "optimal" technical solution and the "best solution" repeatedly contradict each other. Optimal means, for example, a fixed, i.e. closed, kitchen that is also secured against break-ins to protect the cooking equipment or a storage room that is also well-secured. Firstly, however, the optimum solution leads to the generous use of funds that may be lacking elsewhere. Secondly, it has led in more than a few cases to kitchen buildings which, to put it mildly, are extremely unhealthy for the cooks and to storerooms that are far away from the kitchen or, for example, are repurposed classrooms that are not in any way available.

As a consequence, compromises should be considered, especially regarding the storage rooms that need to be secured: a small partition in an otherwise open kitchen or a larger partition in an existing room to create a burglar-proof storage area for food supplies.

When it comes to introducing energy-saving cookers, the best solution is also sometimes opposed to the optimal solution. Biogas plants that could replace the scarce, expensive and often environmentally damaging firewood would be ideal. Practice shows that schools are almost always unable to compete with private hhs with livestock when it comes to biogas production due to the lack of biomass to ferment. The green waste produced during food preparation is also not sufficient for the operation of a biogas plant. The cooks lack the knowledge and experience to adequately fill and maintain the plants. Innovative solutions, such as the *foyer atingan*, which is fuelled with the shells of oil palm kernels, are only conceivable on a regional basis. Here too, the solution would be more of a compromise, i.e. continuing to use firewood but using energy-saving cookers.

This leads to a second dilemma: technically optimal solutions – in this case the *foyers améliorés* improved stoves, which save up to 70 % firewood – require considerable organisational input, which also affects the attitude and technical skills of the cooks. Firstly, the women need to be convinced that the stoves, which generally bring liquids to the boil more slowly than three-stone fires, compensate for the perceived inconvenience of cooking by saving energy. Secondly, they need to be trained to use the cookers in such a way that the amount of firewood really is optimised. In any case, both of these require significantly more

time and persuasion, which must not be done top-down in order to achieve success. The latter, in turn, requires qualified personnel from the stakeholders supporting the *cantines.*

One of the biggest problems in the implementation of SF at primary schools in Benin is the very high proportion of schools without a water supply on the school grounds or, at least, in the immediate vicinity. Priority should, therefore, be given to ensuring a supply of water before establishing school gardens or promoting other income-generating activities. This can consist of repairing existing pumping systems or drilling new wells. In order to ensure their own supply of drinking-water, pupils can be encouraged to bring it to school in the morning in a small canister or plastic bottle, as is common practice in Ethiopia, for example. However, preparing food for the pupils, washing their hands before eating, and rinsing cooking utensils and dishes requires a lot of water daily, which should be available on-site and not be brought in from further afield by parents, teachers or children.

Last but not least, every school should have a sufficient number of latrines, preferably separate for girls and boys. It is in no way acceptable for a child to have to collect the key from the headteacher every time they go to the toilet. The facilities must be freely accessible and lockable from the inside with a simple latch – a bent nail is often sufficient.

It may please the eyes of visitors from donor organisations and other institutions to see tiled kitchens, spacious dining halls and well-tended school gardens in a few schools. However, in view of the limited resources available for school meals, it is strongly recommended that the water supply and the installation of energy-saving stoves (*foyers améliorés*) in all schools be given a higher priority than equipping a few schools with what is – from the donor's point of view – the optimum.

5.9 Inadequate Consideration of the Gender Impact of SF

An important gender effect of SF is the relief that a regular lunch programme at school provides for the mothers of the pupils. On the one hand, mothers, especially in poor hhs, save the expense of providing meals for their schoolchildren five days a week; on the other hand, they can use the time saved on preparing meals for income-generating activities. The psychological aspect is perhaps just as important: In hhs in rural Benin, which are generally around 50 % poor to very poor, it must be relieving for mothers to know that their children are getting a good meal most days of the year, even if they barely have the means to do so.

As far as the children themselves are concerned, the thesis that girls benefit more than boys from SF cannot be confirmed by statements from the teachers.[35] The underlying idea that they benefit more than boys is based on the assumption that girls are generally more hard-working than boys, provided they are supported in the same way as boys (in this case, through food). Accordingly, they would impress their parents by performing better than their brothers and then not be taken out of school after Year 6 – as was actually planned. Instead, the teachers interviewed in Benin emphasised that boys and girls were equally punctual in the mornings, followed lessons better, were less likely to be absent from lessons on their own initiative and hardly ever dropped out of school during the school year. Almost all of the headteachers and teachers interviewed particularly referred to the fact that dropouts in the current school year were almost non-existent.

[35] One of the main statements made by the headteachers and teachers interviewed (not published) as part of an impact analysis of German FC conducted in 2007 by co-author Frank Bliss on the role of access to electricity for school education in rural areas of Morocco.

While no differences in gender effects were observed here, some components of the SF programme have rather negative effects on women. These include a) the utilisation of the voluntary work of the female cooks without fair payment and b) the above-average workload of women and girls in the context of SF-related activities compared to men and boys: extra work in the procurement of (drinking) water and firewood; greater involvement than men and boys in the area of garden maintenance; auxiliary work incurred in the kitchen context (e.g. transport of utensils, distribution of food), and also regarding support packages to generate income for the schools in favour of the *cantine scolaire*, for example, in the form of a distribution of equipment for *gari* production.

While a motorised maize mill donated to the school is unlikely to be operated by women and should, therefore, not be a burden on them, at least in terms of time, *gari* is usually prepared by women in Benin. If they are to generate income for the schools by using the machines, this means that they have to forego part of the already low yield from *gari* production. The women invest a lot of time in this, which they do not have for other income-generating activities.

Despite the importance of the *cantines scolaires* in the work of the various school associations and committees, it was found that women are hardly represented in the structures and even less in their decision-making boards (*bureaux).* They were also clearly not involved in the planning of the kitchen buildings and cookers.

Unfortunately, the dysfunctionality of a number of kitchens built, for example, by the *commune* or with funds from the school administration in the context of the *cantine scolaire* had to be recognised. It is particularly alarming that kitchens were built without ventilation, despite having open fires inside, with considerable risks to the health of the cooks, but also the distance to water sources or the installation of these water sources even in recent times far away from the schools and the kitchens.

The *cotisation* as parents' own contribution to the SF has so far been rather opaque in terms of who pays it (mothers or fathers). Allegedly, at least according to most of the men in the interviews, it is mainly the fathers who give money. We were just as often told that it was the mothers if the fathers had no money. However, in many cases, neither seems to have this money. It would, therefore, be important to ensure that the mothers do not have to transfer the few francs they usually have for SF directly from their home lunch money to the school coffers. As some mothers have told their children that they cannot pay for extras such as "yellow beans" at home, even the small amounts of *cotisation* of FCFA 25 or 50 from the hands of women could potentially lead to hunger in the family.

Recommendation: School kitchens must be designed in the future together with representatives of involved and experienced women. In the interests of the cooks, important planning objectives would be the simplicity of kitchen utilisation, time savings (proximity of the kitchen to the water points) and, regarding women's health, above all, ventilation and sufficient light for working.

Active gender work can also be carried out in schools in connection with SF by involving boys and girls equally in the transport of the food portions to the classes, clearing the dishes and, as is usual in some schools, in washing the dishes.

5.10 Technical Implementation by NGOs

As is so often the case in development cooperation, the example of Benin clearly shows that national NGOs are used as service providers for the implementation of measures and ODA. The only difference between them and the private sector is that they are treated differently from private companies in terms of tax privileges. Accordingly, the state forgoes income taxes, among other things. They are not involved in the conceptual work on SF and the planning and decisions on procedures within the framework of their contracts. As a result, they are forced – albeit by choice – into a conflict between their own objectives, insofar as these are specified, and the requirements of the client (cf. Nana / Moyenga 2023). However, there may be no or hardly any suitable private sector alternatives to NGOs for the implementation of measures such as SSF, at least not in Benin, where there is a lack of corresponding service companies.

In addition to the lack of room for manoeuvre and decision-making, only short-term contracts are awarded to the NGOs, which, in turn, only provide their employees with a maximum of "annual contracts" lasting 11 months. After a maximum period of two years, the NGOs have to reapply for cooperation with PNASI, which, in addition to the impossibility of longer-term (personnel) planning, means an administrative burden for the NGOs that should not be underestimated. It is, therefore, not surprising that the staff recruited by the NGOs to support the SF programme are often considered insufficiently qualified, experienced and committed. Most of them are young women and men who, at best, have completed a degree in nutritional science or agriculture. However, we were also frequently told that they had studied office management, geography or economics. In any case, the young people are happy to have landed one of the few jobs available. Staff turnover is correspondingly high due to the precarious working conditions and the strenuous and demanding nature of the work. Only a few employees benefit from a promotion in the NGO hierarchy in connection with the SF programme. Nevertheless, many NGO employees make up for their lack of experience and qualifications with a great willingness to learn and a high level of commitment.

Regarding the sustainability of the implementation of SF with the help of NGOs, a concept should be developed that provides for the continued financing of this model after the Beninese state has taken over the financing of SF. It is not to be expected that the participation of parents and communities in SF will become an established success in itself. This element particularly will continue to require counselling, motivation and follow-up, which the NGOs have provided so far.

Literature

AfDB. African Development Bank (2023): Benin Economic Outlook. Source: https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-west-africa-benin/benin-economic-outlook [8/2023].

AU. African Union (2021): African Union Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding (2019-2020). Addis Ababa.

BAD. Banque Africaine de Développement (2022): République du Bénin. Document de Stratégie Pays 2022-2026. Cotonou.

Bliss, Frank (2017): Home Grown School Feeding as a "Good Practice" for Poverty Alleviation and Nutrition Security in Cambodia. AVE Study 4/2017. INEF: Duisburg.

Bliss, Frank (2019): BENIN: "Positive deviance": Poor households and yet healthy children. Combating malnutrition. Good Practice Series 15. INEF: Duisburg.

Bliss, Frank /Gaesing, Karin (1992): Möglichkeiten der Einbeziehung von Frauen in Maßnahmen der ressourcenschonenden Nutzung von Baumbeständen. Forschungsberichte des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Vol. 104. Munich, Cologne, London.

Bliss, Frank / Gutema, Tamene Hailegiorgis (2023): School feeding with local procurement in Ethiopia. AVE Study 35/2023. INEF: Duisburg.

Bliss, Frank / Heinz, Marco (2009) (eds.): Disadvantaged socio-cultural groups and indigenous peoples in development co-operation. Development Anthropology 17th Vol. (1-2).

Bliss, Frank / Heinz, Marco (2010) (eds.): Who represents the poor in the development process? Development Anthropology 18th Vol. (1-2).

Bliss, Frank / Neumann, Stefan (2023) (in print): Home Grown School Feeding: The Experience of Cambodia Revised. AVE Study 36/2023. INEF: Duisburg.

Brothwell, Patricia and Don (1969): Food in Antiquity. London.

BTI / Bertelsmann Transformations Index (2022): Benin Country Report 2022. Source: https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BEN#pos12 [8/2023].

CIA. Central Intelligence Agency (2023): The World Factbook Benin. Washington, D.C.

De Bruijne, Kars (2021): Laws of Attraction: Northern Benin and risk of violent extremist spillover. CRU Report. The Hague.

Dossou, Simon / Dagan, Omer (2016): Le Christianisme au Bénin. In: Phiri, Isabel Apawo / Werner, Dietrich (eds.): Anthology of African Christianity, pp. 473-480. Oxford.

Economist Intelligence (2023): Benin. Source: https.//country.eiu.com/benin [8/2023].

Evans, Martin et al. (2023): Financing social assistance in lower-income countries post-COVID-19: An exploration of realistic options. ODI Working Paper. London.

Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Candide / Dahoun, Maxime (2023): The situation of agricultural finance in Benin: Needs, challenges and actors. AVE Study 33/2023. INEF: Duisburg.

GCNF. The Global Child Nutrition Foundation (2019): GCNF Global Survey of School Meal Programmes: Benin (for school year 2017/2018). Seattle.

GCNF. The Global Child Nutrition Foundation (2021): GCNF Global Survey of School Meal Programmes: Benin (for school year 2020-2021). Seattle.

GCNF. Global Child Nutrition Foundation et al. (2023): 23Rd Annual global child nutrition forum. Cotonou, Benin.

Krejcie, Robert V. / Morgan, Daryle W. (1970): Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. In: Educational and Psychological Measurement 30: pp. 607-610.

Leisering, Lutz (2017): Global social security policy. In: Yeates, Nicola (ed.): Understanding global social policy, pp. 319-344. Bristol.

Makiwa, Henry (2022): Benin global forum echoes calls for greater commitment to school meals. Source: https://p0dg [8/2023].

Meyer, Rolf / Börner, Jan (2002): Bioenergy sources - an opportunity for the "Third World": Process - Realisation - Effects. Studies by the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag 11. Berlin.

Nana, Ezaï / Moyenga, Paul-Marie (2023): ONG et Etat: le sens d'un partenariat de développement. In: Hahn, Hans Peter et al. (eds.): L'Avenir des ONG en Afrique de l'Ouest : Etudes africaines. Paris.

Phillip, Eunice / Langevin, Jessica / Davis, Megan / Kumar, Nitya / Walsh, Aisling / Jumbe, Vincent / Clifford, Mike / Conroy, Ronan / Stainstreet, Debbi (2023): Improved cookstove to reduce household air pollution exposure in sub-Saharan Africa: A scoping review of intervention studies. In: PLOS ONE 18(4): pp. 1-40.

RdB. République du Bénin (2018): Plan Sectoriel de L'Education Post 2015 (2018-2020). Tome 1 (Ministère des Enseignements Maternel et Primaire). Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin (2010): Forum National sur L'Alimentation Scolaire. Actes du Forum. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin. Ministère d'Etat Chargé du Plan et de Développement (2018): Plan National de Développement 2018-2025. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin. Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et de la Pêche (2021): Recensement National de l'Agriculture. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin (2015): Deuxième Forum National sur l'Alimentation Scolaire 16 - 18 Novembre 2015. Rapport General. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin / WFP. World Food Programme (2022a): Benin's National School Feeding Model and Transfer Strategy. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin / WFP. World Food Programme (2022b): WFP Benin: School Feeding Factsheet. Cotonou.

RdB. République du Bénin (2023): Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré (PNASI). Rapport d'activités Janvier - Décembre 2022. Cotonou.

RdB, République du Bénin / Programme Alimentaire Mondial (PAM) (2022) : Évaluation décentralisée conjointe finale du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré (PNASI) au Bénin - 2017 à 2021. Rapport d'évaluation décentralisée - version finale. Cotonou.

Soglo, Mahougbé A.-G. (2023): Pauvreté et scolarisation des enfants au Bénin: une analyse suivant le genre. In: International Journal of Strategic Management and Economic Studies. Source: https://t1p.de/sab0m [8/2023].

Swensson, Luana F. et al (2021): Public Food Procurement for Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets. 2 Volumes. Source: https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7969en [7/2023]. FAO et al.: Rome.

TradingEconomics (2023): Benin GDP. Source: https://tradingseconomics.com/benin/gdp [8-2023].

UNDP. United Nations Development Programme (2022): Human Development Report 2021/2022. New York, NY.

UN SDSN. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2022): Rapport sur le Développement Durable pour le Bénin 2022. Rapport pilote de référence. New York, NY.

World Bank (2023a): Country Data Benin. Source: https//data.worldbank.org/country/BJ [8-2023].

World Bank (2023b): The World Bank in Benin. Source: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/benin/overview [8/2023].

WFP. World Food Programme (2020) : Bénin, Stratégie d'approvisionnement des cantines scolaires en vivres à partir de la production locale et son plan d'action 2020-2021, Octobre 2020. Cotonou.

WFP. World Food Programme (2021): World Food Programme Strategy for Support to Social Protection. Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme (2022a): Benin. Annual Country Report 2021. 2019-2023 Country Strategic Plan. Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme (2022b): State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme (2022c): Réponse de la direction du PAM Bénin aux recommendations de l'évaluation conjointe du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré au Bénin (DE/BJCO/2018/031) de 2017 à 2021. Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme (2022d): Introduction à l'analyse "Combler le déficit en nutriments". Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme (2022e) : Rapport d'évaluation décentralisée conjointe finale du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré (PNASI) au Bénin - 2017 à 2021, July 2022. Cotonou.

WFP. World Food Programme et al. (2018): Home-Grown School Feeding. Resource Framework. Technical Document. Rome.

WFP. World Food Programme et al. (2023a): Les achats locaux au Bénin. 11 Etapes du processus des achats locaux. Cotonou.

WFP. World Food Programme et al. (2023b): Appui aux petits producteurs au Bénin dans le cadre des achats locaux. Cotonou.

WFP / RdB. World Food Programme / République du Bénin (2019a): Evaluation Décentralisée. Evaluation conjointe à mi-parcours du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré (PNASI). Rome.

WFP / RdB. World Food Programme / République du Bénin (2019b): Programme d'alimentation scolaire du Bénin. Analysis Coût-Bénéfice.

WFP / RdB. World Food Programme / République du Bénin (2022): Evaluation du PAM. Evaluation decentralisée conjointe finale du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré (PNASI) au Bénin - 2017 à 2021. Final version (par Institut de Recherches et d'Applications des Méthodes de Développement IRAM). Cotonou.

Appendix

Appendix I - Tab. 3: Basic Data on the schools visited.

Département	Littoral	Couffo	Zou	Borgou	Zou	Borgou	Borgou	Borgou	Borgou
Students	189	351	366	140	418	135	251	355	
Boys	104	162	184	77	205	76	132	165	
Girls	85	189	182	63	213	59	119	170	
Source of Water	Hand Pump	Open Well	Water Tower	No (removed Pump)	No	Hand Pump with E-Engine and Tank	Hand Pump	Hand Pump with Storage	
Electricity	No	No	Power Supply System	No	No	Solar	No	No	
School Garden	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (new)	Yes	Yes (new)	Yes	In Preparation	
Income-Generating Activity		Agric. Cultivation, Chicken Rearing				2 ha for Cultivation in Preparation		Soy Cultivation Manioc Processing (gari)	

Sum	Mono	Mono	Atlantique	Atlantique	Atlantique	Ouémé	Ouémé	Littoral
4.843	297	259	601	454	221	162	457	187
2.516 = 52,4%	151	126	304	269	120	83	268	90
2.307 = 47,6%	146	133	297	185	101	79	189	97
	Water Tower with mit Solar Pump	No, Hand Pump defect	Water Tower	Well, Purchase during Dry Season	Hand Pump, Water Tower	Hand Pump	n.s.	Connection to Power Supply System
3	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Power Supply System
9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
		Palm Oil, Corn-Grinder			Rabbits, Collecting of Snails, Palm Oil, Soap		Corn-Grinder	

Previously published in the series:

AVE-Study 1/2017	Mahla, Anika / Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin: Wege aus extremer Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit. Begriffe, Dimensionen, Verbreitung und Zusammenhänge
AVE-Study 2/2017	Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin / Mahla, Anika: Die Verstetigung von Armut in Entwicklungsländern. Ursachen-analyse und Gegenstrategien
AVE-Study 3/2017	Hennecke, Rosa / Schell, Oliver / Bliss, Frank: Landsicherheit zur Überlebenssicherung. Eine Studie zum Kommunalen Landtitelprogramm für indigene Bevölkerungsgruppen in Kambodscha
AVE-Study 4/2017	Bliss, Frank: Home-Grown School Feeding as a "Good Practice" for Poverty Alleviation and Nutrition Security in Cambodia
AVE-Study 5/2017	Heinz, Marco: Benachteiligte Gruppen in der internationalen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit
AVE-Study 6/2017	Mahla, Anika / Gaesing, Karin: Der Selbsthilfegruppen-Ansatz am Beispiel von Kitui in Kenia. Armutsbekämpfung durch Empowerment
AVE-Study 7/2017	Hennecke, Rosa / Bliss, Frank / Schell, Oliver: Landzuteilung für die Ärmsten. Untersuchungen zu Sozialen Landkonzessionen in Kambodscha
AVE-Study 7b/2017	Hennecke, Rosa / Bliss, Frank / Schell, Oliver: Land Allocation for the Poorest. Investigations into Social Land Concessions in Cambodia
AVE-Study 8/2018	Mahla, Anika / Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank: Ernährungs-sicherung: Eine entwicklungspolitische Bewertung ausgewählter Handlungsfelder
AVE-Study 9/2018	Bliss, Frank / Hennecke, Rosa: Wer sind die Ärmsten im Dorf? Mit dem ID Poor-Ansatz werden die Armen in Kambodscha partizipativ und transparent identifiziert
AVE-Studie 10/2018	Gaesing, Karin / Mahla, Anika: Hunger Safety Net Programme. Soziale Sicherung in Turkana County im Norden Kenias
AVE-Study 11/2018	Bliss, Frank: Gesundheitsfürsorge für die Ärmsten: Der „Health Equity Fund" (HEF) in Kambodscha
AVE-Study 12/2019	Mahla, Anika: Förderung von Agropastoralismus. Armuts- und Hungerbekämpfung durch integrierte ländliche Entwicklung in Samburu/Kenia

AVE-Study 12b/2019	Mahla, Anika: Promotion of Agropastoralism. Combating poverty and hunger through integrated rural development in Samburu, Kenya
AVE-Study 13/2019	Gaesing, Karin / Gutema, Tamene Hailegiorgis: Bodenfruchtbarkeit und Ernährungssicherheit in der Amhara Region in Äthiopien
AVE-Study 14/2019	Bliss, Frank: Zum Beispiel Soja. Eine erfolgreiche Wertschöpfungskette im westafrikanischen Benin
AVE-Study 15/2018	Heinz, Marco: Verstetigte Armut als Herausforderung für die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Gibt es eine Kultur der Armut?
AVE-Study 16/2019	Bliss, Frank: Soziale Sicherung in Dürregebieten in Äthiopien durch das Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)
AVE-Study 17/2019	Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank: Entwicklung, Landrecht, Gender und Bodenfruchtbarkeit in Benin
AVE-Study 18/2019	Gaesing, Karin / Gutema, Tamene Hailegiorgis: Reduzierung der Vulnerabilität durch nachhaltiges Ressourcenmanagement: Das Sustainable Land Management Project (SLMP) in Äthiopien
AVE-Study 19/2019	Herold, Jana: Improving Smallholders' Food Security and Resilience to Climate Change: The Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) Programme in Burkina Faso
AVE-Study 20/2019	Gaesing, Karin / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Candide: Förderung der Bewässerung im Tal des Flusses Ouémé in Benin
AVE-Study 21/2019	Herold, Jana: Förderung der Reisproduktion durch die Inwertsetzung von Talauen in Burkina Faso
AVE-Study 22/2020	Gaesing, Karin: Zugang zu Land und Sicherung von Landrechten in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Analysen und Empfehlungen
AVE-Study 22b/2020	Gaesing, Karin: Access to Land and Securing of Land Rights in Development Cooperation. Analyses and Recommendations
AVE-Study 23/2020	Herold, Jana: Landwirtschaftliche Wertschöpfungsketten in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Analysen und Empfehlungen
AVE-Study 23b/2020	Herold, Jana: Agricultural Value Chains in Development Cooperation. Analyses and Recommendations
AVE-Study 24/2020	Bliss, Frank: Soziale Sicherungssysteme als unverzichtbarer Beitrag zur Bekämpfung von extremer Armut, Vulnerabilität und Ernährungsunsicherheit. Analysen und Empfehlungen

AVE-Study 25/2020	Bliss, Frank: Soziokulturelle Aspekte von Entwicklung, Partizipation und Gender. Analysen und Empfehlungen
AVE-Study 02/2021	Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin / Mahla, Anika: Die Verstetigung von Armut in Entwicklungsländern (2. aktual. Auflage)
AVE-Study 02b/2021	Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin / Mahla, Anika: The Perpetuation of Poverty in Developing Countries (2nd updated edition 2021)
AVE-Study 26/2022	Rieber, Arne / Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin: Nachhaltige finanzielle Inklusion im ländlichen Raum
AVE-Study 26b/2022	Rieber, Arne / Bliss, Frank / Gaesing, Karin: Sustainable Financial Inclusion in the Rural Area
AVE-Study 27/2022	Rieber, Arne / Kiplagat, Andrew / Gaesing, Karin: Sozialunternehmen in der Landwirtschaftsförderung – Das One Acre Fund Modell in Kenia
AVE-Study 27b/2022	Rieber, Arne / Kiplagat, Andrew / Gaesing, Karin: Social Enterprises in Agricultural Promotion – The One Acre Fund Model in Kenya
AVE-Study 28/2022	Gaesing, Karin / Koumaré, Mamadou / Koné, Yacouba / Rieber, Arne: Sozialunternehmen in der kleinbäuerlichen Landwirtschafts-förderung – Das myAgro Modell in Mali
AVE-Study 28b/2022	Gaesing, Karin / Koumaré, Mamadou / Koné, Yacouba / Rieber, Arne: L'entreprise sociale dans la promotion de l'agriculture paysanne: le modèle myAgro au Mali
AVE-Study 29/2022	Bliss, Frank: Ganzheitliche Landwirtschaftsförderung in Madagaskar. Ein Fallbeispiel aus der deutschen Technischen Zusammenarbeit
AVE-Study 30/2022	Bliss, Frank: „Mikro“finanzierung in Kambodscha: Entwicklungen, Herausforderungen und Empfehlungen
AVE-Studie 30b/2022	Bliss, Frank: "Micro" Finance in Cambodia: Development, Challenges and Recommendations
AVE-Study 31/2022	Rieber, Arne / Okech, Moses: Der Nexus Formalisierung von Landrechten und Zugang zu Finanzdienstleistungen – Private Mailo und traditionelle Landrechte in Uganda
AVE-Study 31b/2022	Rieber, Arne / Okech, Moses: The nexus between formalisation of land rights and access to financial services – Private mailo and traditional land rights in Uganda
AVE-Study 32/2023	Bliss, Frank: Mikrofinanzierung in Usbekistan. Das Länderprogramm der deutschen Sparkassenstiftung
AVE-Study 33/2023	Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank: Die Situation der Agrarfinanzierung in Benin. Bedarf, Herausforderungen und Akteure

AVE-Study 34/2023	Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Candide / Dahoun, Maxime: Schulspeisung in Benin. Akteure, Fortschritte und Herausforderungen
AVE-Study 34b/2023	Gaesing, Karin / Bliss, Frank / Agbobatinkpo-Dahoun, Candide / Dahoun, Maxime: L'alimentation scolaire au Bénin: Acteurs, progrès et défis

The Institute for Development and Peace (INEF)

The Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), which was founded in 1990, is an institute of the University of Duisburg-Essen (Faculty of Social Sciences) with a strong focus on policy-related and policy-relevant research. It closely collaborates with the Development and Peace Foundation (SEF), Bonn, established in 1986 at the initiative of former German chancellor and Nobel peace prize winner Willy Brandt.

INEF combines basic research with applied and policy-related research in the following areas: Global Governance and Human Security, Fragile States, Crisis Prevention and Civilian Conflict Management, Development, Human Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility.

The specific approach of INEF, as the only German research institute to combine basic with applied research in peace and development research, is also reflected in the range of third-party funding bodies. INEF carries out research programs and systematically explores available international expertise and world reports, often in cooperation with national and international partners. INEF also conducts smaller projects for NGOs and NGO networks. The institute is integrated in a strong and viable international research network.

UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG ESSEN

Open-Minded

Institute for Development and Peace INEF

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF)
Lotharstr. 53 47057 Duisburg, Allemagne
Tél. +49 (203) 379 4420
Fax +49 (203) 379 4425
E-mail : inef-sekcgimi-due.de Site
Homepage: www.uni-due.de/inef

AVE Study 34c/2024

ISSN 2511-5111