



Mobilising communities around school feeding:

A public restitution in Dogoni, Mali

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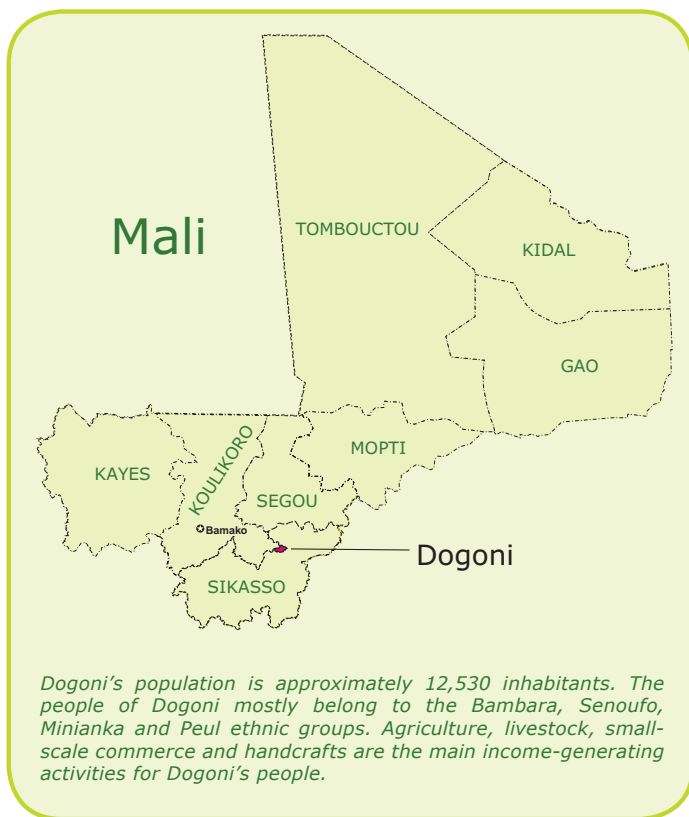
Introduction

Starting in 2009, Mali's national school feeding programme established criteria for the regions and, within them, schools to be funded by the state. Dogoni Second Cycle¹ was one of a handful of schools in the *cercle*² of Sikasso that joined the programme for the 2011–2012 school year. Dogoni is the capital of the eponymous rural commune that lies on the northern side of Sikasso. Despite the agricultural potential in the *cercle*, Dogoni has one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the country. Furthermore, the students at Dogoni Second Cycle

SNV is an international non-profit development organization. Through our expertise in Agriculture, Renewable Energy and WASH, we use local solutions to tackle global challenges.

The Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is a 5-year programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by SNV USA in Ghana, Kenya and Mali. In Mali, PG-HGSF is implemented in 51 municipalities with the goal of involving 6,000 smallholder farmers in local school feeding programmes, including at least 30% women.

This document is part of a series of PG-HGSF learning cases that capture lessons from pilot interventions linking smallholder farmers to school feeding programmes. To find out more about PG-HGSF, contact Katherine Casey, Learning Manager, at kcasey@snvworld.org or visit www.snvworld.org/en/procurement-for-hgsf



travel long distances to attend class: 2–4 kilometres, or 1.2–8.7 miles, each way. According to the school's director, the distance often causes students to be absent or late to class. Thus, the opening of a canteen at Dogoni Second Cycle was welcome news to students and teachers alike, who received their first grant for a school feeding programme through Dogoni municipal authorities in January 2012.

However, at about the same time, the National School Feeding Programme identified 166 vulnerable communes as priority zones for state funding, excluding the *cercle* of Sikasso. As a result, funding for school feeding programme at Dogoni Second Cycle was abruptly suspended in March, bringing an end to the hope created during the few months that the canteen operated.

Reflecting on the funding suspension, Dogoni authorities acknowledged that they faced management challenges during the few months in which the school feeding programme was operational. For example, authorities lacked a way to share information with local stakeholders, or involve them

in the management of the canteen. As the mayor of Dogoni observed, *"The management of the grant, worth 1,785,600 CFA [approximately USD 3,640], took place in a very disorderly manner on the brink of bad management...the canteen's life was managed by a few people who established practically no reports...This situation has not only created a lack of trust, but also demotivated and even disinterested some members of the Comites de Gestion Scolaire [CGS or School Management Committee]."*

To address the interruption of school feeding and to resolve management issues stemming from poor information flow and a lack of transparency, elected officials from Dogoni and members of the Dogoni Second Cycle CGS worked with SNV to apply Mali's tradition of *restitutions publiques*, or public restitutions, to a school feeding context. This case study illustrates the first public restitution conducted for the school feeding programme in Dogoni.³

Public Restitutions in Mali

The government of Mali initiated a nationwide decentralisation programme in 1992 to strengthen state administration and provide public services⁴ at the *cercle*-level.⁵ Public restitutions were introduced as part of the decentralisation process to mobilise citizens around local public affairs, enforce government transparency and accountability, and help communities understand how their taxes are spent and how they



Dogoni Town Hall

- 1 Primary education in Mali is divided into two levels: grades one through six are in the first cycle, grades seven through nine are considered second cycle.
- 2 A *cercle* is an administrative unit. Mali is divided into eight *régions* and one capital district (Bamako); the *régions* are subdivided into 49 *cercles*, and each *cercle* is composed of local administrative units called *communes*.
- 3 All the phases and stages of the public restitution process in Sikasso were facilitated and conducted by advisors of SNV Mali in partnership with local partner DIGNAFRIC NGO.



can participate in local government initiatives. The use of public restitutions is intended to strengthen mutual communication and trust between local communities and decentralised authorities.⁶

Decentralised government authorities are in charge of organising an annual public restitution for their constituents at the commune, *cercle*, and regional level. Communities are encouraged to attend through announcements on TV, radio, newspapers, and word of mouth. One or two representatives from the local government, vetted by community members, facilitate the restitutions and disseminate recommendations to participating community members. Six months after the public restitution, facilitators are encouraged to conduct a follow-up meeting to monitor progress.⁷ While annual public restitutions are mandated by the central government, in practice, their application varies from community to community.

SNV Mali's Public Restitutions on School Feeding

SNV Mali is leveraging the tradition of public restitutions to increase community awareness and support for school feeding. Public restitutions for school feeding give authorities and each school's CGS the opportunity to present annual reports on school canteen management and gather community observations, critiques, and commitments. The restitution serves as a forum for the elected CGS members to explain their roles and responsibilities to the community. Likewise, participants learn about the established or potential roles for other actors involved in school feeding, including parents of students and farmer organisations. The approach provides a forum for discussing how school feeding can support local economic development by linking canteens to cereal producers and smallholder farmers. By triggering a discussion of school canteen issues, the restitutions are intended to foster greater community support for, and oversight of, the school canteen.

SNV Mali organises two sessions to prepare presenters prior to a public restitution on school feeding. During the "actors' training,"⁸ representatives from the municipal government, CGS, and educational services are joined by local women leaders to study a facilitator's manual. The manual outlines the restitution's

Structure of School Feeding in Mali

In Mali, PG-HGSF works in conjunction with the national school feeding programme, or *alimentation scolaire* (ALISCO), as it is known locally. The National Center for School Feeding has managed school feeding since 2011 and aims to "ensure that food at school is managed in a sustainable way so that hunger will not be an obstacle for child development or prevent children from accessing or staying in school." At the school level, the *Comites de Gestion Scolaire* (CGS), or School Management Committee, is in charge of implementing school feeding as well as other school activities. CGS members are elected from the community, and often include representatives from the town's administration, parents association, and women's organisations, as well as school directors and teachers, chiefs and religious authorities. The CGS is in charge of establishing annual plans, procuring foodstuffs, organising support from technical partners, mobilising local contributions, and reporting to local and state authorities as well as partners. The commune administration is responsible for approving CGS plans and distributing school feeding funding to the CGS. In many communities, these authorities also procure food on behalf of all CGSs in the commune, despite an interministerial decree assigning this task to the CGSs. The CGS is also supported by the Pedagogical Ability Structure (CAP), one of the Ministry of Education's decentralised structures. The CAP provides support and advice to the CGS, monitors and assesses school feeding programmes, and reports on the status of school feeding to the central government.

4 Including state services related to education and health.

5 GOVERNANCE AT THE GRASSROOTS: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES IN THE SAHEL REGIONS OF NIGER, BURKINA FASO, AND MALI, Catholic Relief Services, August 2014.

6 Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization—Republic of Mali, Practical Guide to Public Presentations and Territory Management, June 2013.

7 Ibid.

8 In Sikasso, SNV Mali delivered this training in conjunction with DIGNAFRIC, an NGO whose research on public restitutions in Mali served as the basis for developing public restitutions for school feeding.



approach as well as the nine tools available to collect data about the everyday operations of a school canteen. Participants learn that the canteen's action plan for the current school year,⁹ a tabular summary of canteen goals, will form the basis of their presentation on the day of the restitution. If a CGS does not already have an action plan for their canteen, as was the case in Dogoni, SNV leads an in-depth discussion on the action plan development tool, helping CGS members define clear objectives that take into account their vision since the beginning of the school year. Following the actors' training, CGS members prepare for the public restitution by finalising their action plan and collecting data to complete the other tools. (See table A for a summary of all tools included in the facilitator's manual.)



Sikasso Pedagogical Ability Structure (CAP)

Table A:

Tool	Objective
Annual action plan framework	A table to help the CGS set goals for the year related to: canteen infrastructure, CGS management, equipment, food (including purchases from farmer organisations), public restitutions, number of beneficiaries, and number and types of meals.
Annual budget framework	A tool for estimating school feeding costs based on enrollment, plotting those costs against available funding sources, and budgeting for procuring food from local smallholder farmers and traders.
Supply intake registry	A template for recording information about delivered supplies, including quantity, value and source.
Supply output registry	A template for recording information about expended supplies, including quantity, value and beneficiaries. Includes fields for two signatures to authorise the expenditures.
Inventory management framework	A tool for managing the canteen inventory. Tracks product input, output, sources, costs and any losses. Includes room for two signatures for each inventory entry.
CGS meeting notes framework	A template to record CGS meetings. Includes fields to track member participation, discussion topics, decisions, conclusions and next steps.
Annual action plan assessment	A table that compares the action plan goals with progress to date. Provides fields for observations on every issue.
Annual budget assessment	A series of tables to compare the planned budget and expenditures to the actual funding available and realised expenditures.
Impact assessment	A tool to record the impact of school feeding on student performance. Records enrollment and dropout rates, attendance, graduation rates, gender balance, student health and nutrition, and smallholder farmer and community engagement.

The next step is to help the CGS members and the school director prepare their presentations for the restitution. Reviewing the nine data collection tools, SNV supports CGS members and the school director to identify any statistics and documentation on resource mobilisation, how funding was allocated, difficulties met and solutions provided, and the effects of school feeding on attendance. Participants focus on the three tools that are typically prioritised at each restitution: the action plan assessment for the current school year, the budget assessment, and the impact assessment. This hands-on session was organised in Dogoni the evening before the public restitution took place.

⁹ According to the National Center for School Canteens—the government agency in charge of setting government policies on school feeding—each CGS is required to have a three-year canteen action plan to elaborate a long-term strategy for school feeding, as well as an action plan for each school year, that identifies activities to be completed during that year.



After the preparations are complete, each public restitution for school feeding takes place during a full day, often on the school grounds. CGS members present up to all nine tools, prioritising the three tools mentioned above. After the CGS presents their data, the floor is open to discussion and questions from the audience. Following the discussion, the community's feedback and recommendations become the basis for the CGS action plan for the following school year.

The Dogoni Public Restitution on School Feeding

The Dogoni public restitution on school feeding took place on 22 November 2013 and was the first restitution to take place in the commune. The event included participants from the whole community: traditional and religious authorities, leaders of women's associations, politicians, representatives from the town administration, decentralised government authorities, and managers from the Dogoni canteen, as well as those from nearby canteens. It was a festive occasion, with loudspeakers available for CGS representatives to present data about the canteen.

CGS members presented seven out of nine tools: the 2012 action plan and budget, as well as their assessments, supply intake/output registries, and inventory management. During the presentation of the budget assessment, attendees saw that 180 school feeding days were planned for the 2012 school year, while only 32 days, or approximately two months, were funded. This had a direct correlation to the amount of local cereals that the CGS was able to procure locally (two tons), versus their plans (18 tons), given the suspension of funding.

The atmosphere during the discussion session that followed was congenial and participants discussed the canteen's issues freely. Participants asked how the CGS purchases food for school feeding, (where do you get your products? Can you buy your ingredients locally?) and indicated their interest in supplying foodstuffs for the programme. The CGS's presentation of data enabled participants to appreciate the committee's commitment to the education of their children and to the operations of the canteen. Attendees discussed the value of school feeding; namely, the correlation between the availability of school feeding and student enrollment and academic performance. A major weakness of the programme—the suspension of government funding for school feeding at Dogoni Second Cycle—was discussed extensively. The suspension was not well understood prior to the restitution, particularly among parents. In fact, community participants cited the suspension of school feeding as their motivation for participating in the restitution process. The community remarked upon the underrepresentation of women in the CGS, particularly in positions of leadership with respect to school feeding and canteen management.

Based on the discussion, CGS members took note of participant recommendations to be integrated into the



Elected officials, CGS representatives and Dogoni community members



Preparing for a public restitution



canteen's action plan for the following school year. For example, the participants recommended that the CGS hold monthly meetings; these had not been planned for the 2012 school year. The community also recommended improvements to the canteen's infrastructure. During the restitution, attendees learned that, prior to 2012, Dogoni Second Cycle did not have a canteen, prompting teachers and students to collaborate on the construction of a shed that doubled as a kitchen and dining hall for the 2012 school year. For the 2013 school year, the community recommended soliciting the support of a sand and gravel supply firm to construct a fully operational canteen for the school.

Results

A major outcome of the public restitution in Dogoni was establishing a common understanding of the reasons why government funding for school feeding was suspended. As a result, the community resolved to work with the CGS to continue providing school meals to the pupils of Dogoni Second Cycle. Since the restitution took place, commune authorities allocated 100,000 CFA (the equivalent of \$170) of the community's resources (collected through local taxes and fees) for the programme. The CGS allocated another 100,000 CFA to school feeding from the modest dues they collect from parents. Community members pledged individual in-kind contributions of cereals and condiments; however, much of these contributions did not arrive as promised. Altogether, funding mobilised by the community kept the canteen open for an additional 15–20 days. Recognising the community's interest in selling foodstuffs to the canteen, the CGS used a portion of this additional funding to purchase rice from local women producers.

Another major outcome of the restitution was strengthening the management of the CGS and empowering the members to fulfil their roles with transparency and integrity. The two sessions for presenters prior to the public restitution built the capacity of CGS members in canteen management. The sessions equipped members with tools to set goals and budgets, evaluate their activities, and monitor impact and results. Prior to the restitution, there was no action plan for the Dogoni CGS. Today, the action plan, strengthened by the input and support of the community, is integral to the CGS's operations, providing strategic guidance to its activities.

The suspension of government funding for school feeding in Dogoni continues to stymie the community's efforts to provide meals for its students. While the community, CGS, and commune authorities are now aware of the suspension of funding, no clear path forward to reinstate this funding was identified or put forth for broader advocacy measures following the restitution. Should the commune become eligible for school feeding funding in the near future, it is clear that the CGS members possess the skills and tools to budget and implement the funding effectively.



A community gathers for a public restitution in Somo, March 2015

Participant Conclusions from the Public Restitution

According to a Malian proverb, “From debates springs the light.” The public restitution in Dogoni village illustrates that a juxtaposition of viewpoints can develop knowledge and bring solutions to light. After participating in the public restitution, participants agreed that:



Transparency is important in the management of the school canteen: By collecting data in preparation for their presentation at the restitution, CGS members and the school director were empowered to share accurate information with the community. Furthermore, the tools they used to collect the data now provide a structure for keeping clear, accurate records moving forward. This structure will enable the CGS and school director to manage school feeding funding and expenditures efficiently and generate transparent reports as needed.



The community understands its role in supporting the school canteen: The restitution helped the community recognise the value it places on education, generally, and in school feeding, in particular. As a result, the community was automatically invested in understanding the challenges facing the school feeding programme and mitigating any problems. Participants agreed that the responsibility for managing the school canteen does not reside with the CGS and commune authorities alone, but is a responsibility of the community as a whole. Without the community’s involvement, it is difficult to work towards lasting solutions to the challenges facing the school feeding programme.



Social responsibility is necessary at every level: The public restitution’s open and consultative process enabled the community to participate in decision-making processes related to the school canteen. As a result, the community expressed a willingness to be involved with school feeding implementation and follow-up. The resulting solidarity between school feeding organisers and the community underscores the conclusion that everybody must contribute to build a fully functional school canteen and maintain an effective feeding programme.



Civic involvement strengthens good governance: The community agreed that the public restitution approach is a means of ensuring good governance. The actors’ training equipped community members with the skills to apply public restitutions to address specific community issues; in this case, school feeding. However, it was evident that the approach could be used to inform the community of the decisions made, communicate the results of village management reports, and promote responsible governance. Experience in Dogoni illustrated that the public restitutions can increase trust within a community and build civic ownership over decisions and resulting activities.



Efficient public restitutions require enabling environments: Effective public restitutions require a political and regulatory enabling environment, supported by strong decentralised public services. The restitution in Dogoni received strong support at the commune level, ensuring that local authorities were not only present, but active participants throughout the restitution process.

Conclusion

The Dogoni public restitution on school feeding created a space that encouraged public involvement in school feeding. Prompted by a weakness in the programme (the suspension of government funding), the restitution improved community knowledge of the issues and, in doing so, strengthened the trust of the community in the programme and its implementers. In turn, the public restitution empowered the CGS to form a dialogue with the community, and share their difficulties in managing the canteen, as well as their vision of success for the programme’s future.

Challenges remain for the community, CGS, and for local government authorities. Despite their desire to keep the canteen open, there is a limit to the community’s ability to raise funds, or provide in-kind donations of food and condiments. At the CGS level, members now possess the skills and tools to run an effective and transparent school feeding programme, but lack a stable budget to plan and implement one. At the commune and *cercle* level, authorities lack the capacity to advocate for funding to the government and/or donors. As a result, it is unlikely that the community can rely on their advocacy alone to reinstate the government’s funding for school feeding in the community.

