



Feeding Futures:

SNV's systems approach to home-grown school meals

The challenge

The global food crisis limits families' access to enough food. In 2024, between 638 and 720 million people faced hunger—including **73 million** children.¹ Hunger undermines education, a key pathway out of poverty and malnutrition.²

Governments worldwide are adopting school feeding as both a human capital investment and a social safety net for people living in poverty or who have been marginalised. These programmes encourage families to send their children, especially daughters, to school, where nutritious meals support learning.³

Beyond cost-effective nutrition and education benefits,⁴ school meals help enable systemic change across health, social inclusion, sustainable agriculture, local economies, clean energy, and climate resilience. Estimated economic returns range from US\$3–US\$9 per dollar invested,⁵ up to US\$35 from a multisectoral perspective.⁶ Yet only 27% of schoolchildren in low-income countries are enrolled in national school feeding programmes,⁷ despite many governments having established home-grown policies.

Consistent financing and sustained government budget allocations are essential for expanding programme coverage. However, many debt-burdened countries struggle to prioritise school meal investments—despite recognising the critical role these programmes play in youth development and workforce readiness. The barriers are multifaceted and deeply interconnected.

At the school level, the capacity to manage logistics and prepare healthy, culturally appropriate menus remains limited. Rising food prices further constrain budgets. Many schools also lack adequate infrastructure and equipment—such as functional kitchens, canteens, storage facilities, and reliable water and sanitation systems—to ensure food safety and consistent provision.

On the production side, farmers face obstacles in accessing school meal markets. These include weak aggregation, complex quality standards, delayed payments, price volatility, and limited support services. As a result, imported foods often undercut locally

¹ World Food Programme (WFP), 2025, [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World \(SOFI\) Report](#)

² WFP, 2023, [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#)

³ WFP, 2023, [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#)

⁴ The School Meals Coalition is celebrating over 112 [member countries](#) and [more than 150 partners](#) taking action for positive impact worldwide.

⁵ NFP Connects, 2023, [School Milk in East Africa](#)

⁶ Verguet S, Limasalle P, Chakrabarti A, Husain A, Burbano C, Drake L, et al, 2020, [The Broader Economic Value of School Feeding Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Estimating the Multi-Sectoral Returns to Public Health, Human Capital, Social Protection, and the Local Economy](#), *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8(Dec):1-9.

⁷ WFP, 2025, [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024](#)

produced, nutritious, and culturally relevant alternatives, which undermines opportunities for local agriculture and supply chains to benefit from school meal programmes. School gardens can help schools source vegetables, generate funding, and teach children where food comes from. However, they require inputs, extension services, and staff time.

Environmental pressures add further challenges. Many schools rely on firewood and other biomass fuels for cooking, increasing emissions. Food loss remains high, and programmes must promote agrobiodiversity and healthy diets.

Quality monitoring and progress tracking also remain weak, limiting the data needed for effective policy, planning, management, financing, and accountability.

Many national governments have joined the School Meal Coalition (SMC),⁸ committing to scale programmes and develop policies and guidelines. The African Union has prioritised nutrition and home-grown school feeding across the continent. Major stakeholders—including WFP, donors, foundations, civil society, and private-sector companies—have joined the country-government-led SMC.

The SMC's initiatives help governments address these barriers. The most recent is the School Meal Accelerator, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Novo Nordisk Foundation, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, in collaboration with WFP. It helps governments mobilise high-quality technical assistance to develop context-specific, country-led solutions.

Development organisations like SNV, with strong grassroots networks and relevant expertise, can play a vital role in turning policy into practice.

National commitments

Uganda: A draft National School Feeding Policy integrates local procurement and promotes clean cooking. A policy dialogue and subsequent approval are expected in 2026. The national school feeding committee recently developed a blended-funding programme that combines parent-led and targeted government support.

Burundi: The government aims to source at least 50% of food from smallholder farmers and processors by 2027 to boost local economies and improve nutrition with quality meals. The budget has significantly increased to reach universal coverage by 2032.

Ethiopia: The national School Feeding Program aims to provide nutritious, locally-sourced meals to all pre-primary and primary students (grades 1-8) by 2030. Local procurement supports agricultural development, enhances social protection systems, and provides fresh food and more diverse diets.

Kenya: In 2024, the government committed to increasing coverage of school meal access to universal coverage by 2030. Kenya's home-grown model targets poorly-performing areas, promotes healthy diets, and boost local markets and food systems. The 2017 national school meal and nutrition strategy includes specific actions to promote smallholder production for school meal supplies and local sourcing.

Tanzania: In Oct 2024, the government formed a national school feeding Technical Working Group. It developed guidelines on school feeding and nutrition services that provide a clear framework for public, private, and civil society implementers. The financing strategy uses a community-led model for public schools, with government funding for boarding and special needs schools. It also includes a dedicated budget line with annual increases for scale-up.

Rwanda: Since 2021, has increased its school feeding budget from RWF 40 billion in 2021 to over RWF 94 billion in 2024. This funding supports the rollout of the 2019 National Comprehensive School Feeding Policy, aiming to achieve universal coverage across all public and government aided schools.

Source: Landscape mapping and situational analysis county reports, SNV, 2025.

⁸ Further information is available at SMC's website: <https://schoolmealscoalition.org/>

Recommendations

Based on global experience and lessons learned from school feeding policy and programme development, the following recommendations are particularly significant:

- 1. Government policies and commitments to develop school feeding programmes must be grounded in realistic, nationally-owned financing plans.**
These should include innovative blended financing and local resource mobilisation to enhance ownership, accountability, and funding diversity.
- 2. Upfront investment in kitchens, storage facilities, clean cooking technologies, renewable energy systems, and water and sanitation is essential.**
These investments reduce labour and costs, improve food safety, and lower the risk of infectious diseases. Private sector partners can support the energy transition and maintain water services.
- 3. Strengthen integrated, multisectoral approaches to local food sourcing by promoting regenerative agriculture, improving productivity and quality, and enhancing aggregation and delivery systems.**
Inclusive financing should underpin farmers' livelihoods, stimulate rural economies, and advance broader food systems transformation.

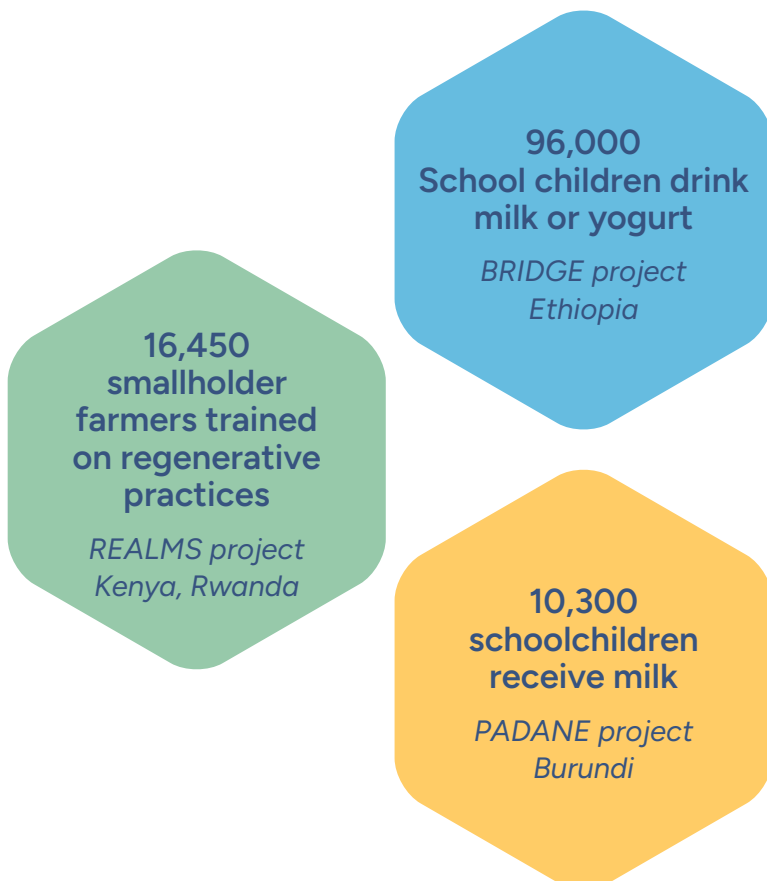
- 4. Adopting clean cooking technologies, renewable energy for institutional kitchens, and sustainable biomass management**—particularly in rural and remote areas—**promotes more environmentally-sustainable school feeding.** Clear policies and standards for school feeding and institutional clean cooking enable replication, scale, and long-term sustainability.
- 5. Stronger linkages between school feeding programmes and youth employment initiatives improve local economies.** Engage businesses in local food preservation, fortification, processing, aggregation, delivery, catering, and clean cooking and energy services.
- 6. Strengthening school meal programming** through participatory local planning and community-led monitoring and accountability is essential. These measures can significantly increase efficiency and effectiveness.

SNV's place in the puzzle

To meet national school feeding commitments, governments, donors, and technical stakeholders need trusted partners who can:

1. Deliver quality technical assistance and reliably implement innovative programmes.
2. Build and sustain lasting relationships with government institutions, communities, and market actors.
3. Support key actors across the school feeding ecosystem to ensure effective policy implementation, coordination, and sustainability.
4. Reinforce local food systems and market-based approaches.

SNV endeavours to fulfil a role in this capacity. We are a long-standing partner with decades of experience advancing sustainable, locally led food systems. We help facilitate the connection of school feeding with agriculture, nutrition, renewable energy, equitable water management, and systems strengthening to further broader livelihood, environmental, and climate goals.



Together with local partners, SNV can act as a neutral convenor, coordinate multistakeholder platforms, and provide comprehensive implementation assistance.

This includes:

- Enabling school management and school feeding committees.
- Developing local procurement arrangements and logistical systems that serve remote smallholder farmers and schools.
- Establishing agronomic support for farmers supplying schools to transition to regenerative practices.
- Promoting clean cooking technologies and hygienic food preparation with efficient renewable energy use.
- Strengthening equitable water resource management for drinking water and sanitation.
- Facilitating inclusive multistakeholder platforms to coordinate integrated school feeding solutions better and improve programme results.

This combination of technical expertise, coordination, facilitation, and delivery capacity supports partners in translating national commitments into effective action.

SNV's contribution to school feeding programmes is rooted in **close collaboration with governments** and a commitment to **locally led solutions**. We work within national frameworks to strengthen government-led initiatives and ensure alignment with policy priorities and long-term sustainability.

Multilateral organisations such as WFP and IFAD appreciate our technical expertise, multistakeholder facilitation, and private sector engagement to deliver feasibility studies, pilots, and capacity development that institutionalise and scale home-grown school meals.

Building on this national-level experience, SNV enhances programme impact through regional knowledge sharing, evidence generation, and networking, with a focus on East Africa. This brings school feeding priorities across nutrition, agriculture, climate, and livelihoods—expressed by local voices—to global platforms. These include the International Congress of Nutrition, the African Food Systems Forum, and the UN Climate Change Conference.

Our approach goes beyond government engagement. We involve communities and families in programme design and implementation, and partner with the private sector to develop sustainable, market-oriented solutions. SNV integrates expertise in agriculture, nutrition, energy, and water to build comprehensive school meal strategies aligned with health, social protection, and education systems.

Our experience Uganda

From October 2015 to December 2023, SNV implemented The Inclusive Dairy Enterprise (TIDE)⁹ project in southwestern Uganda. The project supported 20,000 farmers in increasing productivity and reducing poverty. It also boosted dietary diversity among schoolchildren through a school milk initiative that reached more than one million children. Building on TIDE, SNV partnered with the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES), the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), and the Dairy Development Authority to scale the School Milk Programme and strengthen national policy frameworks. Our work helped establish and institutionalise the National Task Force on School Milk, which now leads the formulation of Uganda's National School Meal Policy. The government continues to engage SNV in an advisory role to draft the policy, develop implementation guidelines, and prepare stakeholders for rollout.

⁹ TIDE, 2023–2025, funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands (EKN).

922,700
children access
daily milk

*TIDE project
Uganda*

**130 energy saving
stoves installed
in institutions**

*IMEU project
Uganda*

‘SNV put up the necessary system to achieve our target: creating capacity with the private sector and educating our farmers. SNV has set the stage for us to march towards our target.’

Bwino Fred Kyakulaga
State Minister for Agriculture
Uganda

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the BRIDGE¹⁰ project contributed to the professionalisation of the dairy sector by improving production, processing, and market access for smallholder farmers, while promoting policy dialogue and inclusive business models. The project generated strong economic benefits, particularly for women, who secured jobs as school caterers, milk handlers, and community suppliers. It also created long-term market opportunities for dairy farmers and processors. SNV first worked with individual schools and later partnered with city administrations and regional development associations to establish school milk programmes. For example, the Tigray Development Association and the Kombolcha City Administration institutionalised school meals programmes within local governance and financing systems. Tigray scaled the model to more than 34,000 children across eight cities, while Kombolcha embedded a mayor-led model into municipal budgets, reaching 20,000 children. Beyond local implementation, SNV contributed to accelerated national uptake through inter-regional exchange visits and policy dialogues hosted by platforms such as the Ethiopian Society of Animal Production (ESAP) and the African Livestock Exhibition and Congress (ALEC). These exchanges enabled cities, regional governments, and development associations to observe results, compare implementation models, and build peer confidence—sparking school milk programme adoption across multiple regions. The school meal programme now serves 252,000 learners nationwide. Communities mobilise 92.3% of financing through taxes, business contributions, and local government funding—demonstrating strong ownership, sustainability, and systemic integration.

Burundi

In Burundi, WFP partnered with SNV to pilot a home-grown school feeding model that replaces imported UHT milk with safe, locally sourced milk from smallholder farmers. The pilot showed that local procurement generates income for farmers, cooperatives, and other community partners, while strengthening national food systems. A key success factor was the programme's focus on food safety and quality control mechanisms, which ensured that locally produced milk consistently met required standards. The experience also underscored the value of transparent procurement systems, building confidence among buyers and suppliers and enabling expansion into additional value chains. Building on the dairy pilot, partners are exploring locally supplied sunflower, amaranth, and eggs to diversify school

meals and stimulate rural economies. The intervention demonstrates that reliable local demand from school feeding programmes can create sustainable market opportunities across multiple value chains.

Rwanda

SNV is a member of Rwanda's School Feeding Technical Working Group and co-chairs the national Clean Cooking Task Force. The government appointed SNV to lead the institutional clean cooking strategy and develop a roadmap to guide policy and implementation from 2026. This includes assessing current initiatives, identifying suitable clean cooking solutions for schools, and designing a sustainable financing strategy for nationwide adoption. We also support farmers' cooperatives to supply schools through smart contracting arrangements, either directly or through aggregators. This includes training cooperatives in regenerative agriculture, brokering linkages between schools and cooperatives, and facilitating market opportunities that ensure sustainable, profitable supply relationships. Through the Farmer to Market Alliance project (FtMA),¹¹ SNV has enabled 75 cooperatives to connect to school meal markets, supplying vegetables like amaranth, tomatoes, and cabbage, as well as eggs.

Kenya

Non-profit Food 4 Education's (F4E) school feeding programme benefits from SNV's work with farmer cooperatives to secure sustainably produced, high-quality vegetables for school kitchens. These linkages have delivered strong results and prompted interest in deeper collaboration on local procurement. Projects like Veggies for Planet & People (V4P&P)¹² have worked with more than 3,000 farmers to adopt regenerative agriculture and supply school meal markets. Over 56 aggregators now sell to schools through our linkages with Tawi Fresh, a formal off-taker and supplier for F4E. SNV and F4E are also exploring further collaboration to improve the sustainability of school feeding operations. These efforts focus on improving access to drinking water and handwashing facilities in schools and ensuring a reliable supply of safe water to F4E kitchens.

¹⁰ Building Rural Income through Inclusive Dairy Business Growth in Ethiopia (BRIDGE), 2018–2028, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ethiopia.

¹¹ FtMA is a WFP-led initiative implemented through a public-private consortium, with SNV an implementing partner in Rwanda: <https://innovation.wfp.org/project/farm-market-alliance>

¹² V4P&P is a 4-year project funded by the IKEA Foundation and implemented by SNV and the World Vegetable Center: <https://www.snv.org/project/veggies-4-planet-and-people>

Power for Food

SNV's school feeding experience is complemented by our Power for Food Partnership with the IKEA Foundation.¹³ This partnership catalyses collaboration and builds capacity to transform agri-food systems in East Africa. Starting in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, it enables smallholder farmers to access renewable energy and adopt regenerative agriculture practices.

By improving local food production and supply chains, the partnership supports nutritious, locally-sourced foods—including perishables such as milk, fruits, and vegetables—to reach school feeding programmes. Productive Use of Renewable Energy (PURE) solutions, such as solar cold rooms, milk chillers, and small-scale pasteurisation, address common supply constraints. Green leafy vegetables illustrate how Power for Food's approach to regenerative agriculture and productive energy use benefits school meals programmes. Although these crops are nutritious and widely grown, perishability, seasonality, and logistical barriers limit their use in school feeding.

The Power for Food Partnerships builds on SNV's experience as a neutral convenor of multistakeholder platforms. Through the consortium model, partners align priorities, develop shared agendas, and collaborate across sectors. This neutral convening role also supports effective school feeding partnerships and coordinated, cross-sector efforts, creating national movements for school meals.

Our results

Over the past decade, SNV has helped shape school feeding practices across East Africa, often working behind the scenes in a technical and facilitation capacity. We have collaborated with key partners, combining specialised expertise with locally-driven stakeholder engagement to improve school meal delivery. By reinforcing agricultural value chains (specifically dairy), market development, and private sector engagement, we reached 1.5 million children in Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, and Ethiopia.

This approach has helped improve child nutrition, attendance, and learning outcomes. It has also contributed to strengthening rural economies by creating stable market linkages for smallholder farmers and by promoting greater social and economic inclusion.



**300
regenerative
smallholder farmers
linked to schools as
institutional markets**

*V4PP project
Kenya*

**2,000
smallholder farmers
produce school milk**

*PADANE project
Burundi*

¹³ Further information about P4FP: <https://www.snv.org/project/power-for-food-partnership>



Our vision

SNV aims to make school environments conducive to learning with diverse, nutritious meals. We promote clean cooking solutions designed to reduce smoke-related health risks and deforestation, while improving access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Our focus on nutritious diets improves children's eating habits and strengthens markets for locally produced food.

To accelerate this impact, we are building partnerships with actors who share our vision. Together, we strive to expand school feeding across East Africa and reach **10 million children** with healthy meals by 2030—improving educational opportunities and reducing short-term hunger. We will work to achieve this through strategic partnerships with governments, civil society, private sector actors, and development partners, anchored in three key pillars:

1. **Advancing regenerative and home-grown school feeding:** Delivering diverse, nutritious diets through regenerative production while strengthening national systems and local ownership.
2. **Linking schools to markets and smallholder livelihoods:** Creating economic opportunities and resilient supply chains through local procurement.
3. **Implementing sustainable solutions:** Introducing clean cooking technologies and renewable energy for production and storage, while ensuring access to safe water for healthier schools and communities.

By connecting these pillars, SNV can support school feeding that goes beyond meals to drive better education systems, healthier environments, and stronger local economies. Through government-led frameworks, community action, and regional collaboration, we will jointly scale proven solutions, foster innovation, and mobilise diverse financing—so every learner can benefit from nutritious meals and a brighter future.

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SNV is a mission-driven global development partner working in more than 20 countries across Africa and Asia. Building on 60 years of experience and together with our team of over 1,600 people, we strengthen capacities and catalyse partnerships that transform the agri-food, energy, and water systems, which enable sustainable and more equitable lives for all.

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