

# Investing in school meals ‘win-win’ for West African nations – UN

The United Nations food relief agency has urged Governments in West Africa to spend more money on school meal programmes as these investments not only contribute to children’s better future but also create local jobs around agriculture.

“It is a [win-win opportunity](#) which governments must seize,” said Abdou Dieng, UN World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “Children enjoy healthy meals that make it more likely that they will stay in school and learn for a better future, while jobs are created and businesses develop.”

The call was made on African Day of School Feeding, annually observed on 1 March.

Increasingly, the food for the meals is sourced from smallholder farmers within the community. The idea is that home-grown school meals provide local farmers and businesses with a predictable outlet for their products, leading to more stable incomes, more investment, higher productivity and the creation of jobs for youth and women in the communities concerned.

In Burkina Faso, the introduction of yoghurt in school meals has had multiple benefits – a women’s group that collects milk locally has recently set up a processing plant for yoghurt that is now delivered to schools by young people on motorcycles.

Some governments in the region are showing a growing interest in investing more in national school meals programmes. The Government of Benin has allotted \$47 million to feed 400,000 children over the course of five years in partnership with WFP, using a home-grown school meals model.

WFP’s regional school meals programme, which aims to assist about 2.7 million children this year, faces a \$60 million funding gap. Without proper financing, the programme will fall short, leave many vulnerable students hungry and at risk of dropping out of school.