

Discursive divergences: School food in Guinea facing on-the-ground challenges

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Abstract

This research aimed to conduct a diagnostic analysis of the implementation of the school canteen policy in Guinea through a methodological approach that combined two scientific approaches: quantitative and qualitative. Data was collected from 325 stakeholders in Guinea.

The results revealed various dysfunctions, both at the institutional level and in the operational management of the canteens.

The nature of these dysfunctions means that if these problems are not resolved, they risk having lasting negative impacts on the school feeding policy and on certain key indicators in the preschool and primary education sectors in the country.

Consequently, the research suggested innovative solutions to the bottlenecks that hinder the efficient and effective management of this policy, which is of great importance to Guinea.

Keywords: Disparities; School Feeding; Challenges; Fieldwork

1. Introduction

For many years, school feeding has been considered by many countries as the most reliable lever for improving school enrolment indicators and, more recently, the quality of education. In Guinea, school canteens represent a crucial factor for educational success and student well-being.

Although several initiatives have been implemented to promote children's nutritional health and improve their engagement in school, a significant gap between the government's ambitions and the realities on the ground is evident. This contrast reflects tensions between formal institutional discourse, which advocates universal access to nutritious meals, and the realities on the ground, often marked by economic, cultural, and logistical constraints.

In his book "Education at the Heart of Food Issues," E. R. P. Walther (2012) emphasizes that school feeding must be understood as a determining factor in educational success, but that its effectiveness is often compromised by discrepancies between theory and practice. Furthermore, S. M. Diallo (2019) highlights the specific challenges encountered in the Guinean context, such as the limited availability of food resources and the need to include families and communities in program design. Finally, J. L. F. Berthelot's critical approach (2021) reminds us that these discursive divergences are not simply a matter of resources, but also relate to the representations and expectations of the various stakeholders involved, from policymakers to the students themselves.

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Thus, this research aims to explore these divergences by analysing how official discourses and the lived experiences of education stakeholders interact. Through this analysis, we will seek to understand (i) the alignment of the school feeding program with national policies, (ii) evaluate the supply chains for school canteens, and (iii) assess the relevance of the institutional framework for managing school canteens from the central to the school level.

2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptual approach

The overall issue of school canteens is the focus of this research. Indeed, the origins of school canteens date back to the 19th century in industrialized countries, with the aim of encouraging parents to send their children to school (Lontie, 2013). Nourrisson (2004) identifies the town of Lannion (Côtes-du-Nord, France) as the first to house the very first school canteen in 1844, an initiative of Emile Depasse, the town's mayor, with the goal of educating children from poor families.

According to Lontie (2013), school canteens led many parents to withdraw their children from the fields to enroll them in school, due, he explains, "to the certainty that children would have access to a meal during the day." He explains that school canteens have served a dual purpose: improving the quality of nutrition and enhancing the level of education and training. It is easy to understand why these two dimensions have influenced the food policies of other countries around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Following this dual function of school canteens, program specialists J. Hallak and M. Poisson (2009) at the International Institute for Educational Planning concluded that "school meals are essential for strengthening learning abilities, combating absenteeism, and reducing school dropout rates."

In Francophone Africa, the 1960s saw the establishment of the first school canteens. In Senegal, foreign organizations, with the support of public authorities, implemented the first school canteens, while in Togo and Burkina Faso, they were initiated by the American NGO Catholic Relief Services, even though the Confédération Paysanne du Faso (Farmers' Confederation of Burkina Faso) states that "endogenous dynamics existed before this date: village chiefs collected food to feed children at school" (Basquin-Fané, 2021).

In Guinea, the school feeding program was initiated in 2002 by the World Food Programme. The Guinean government, as well as other technical and financial partners such as the Japanese Cooperation, the World Bank, and other international donors, joined the initiative.

According to data from the National Directorate of School Canteens, in 2023, the program impacted 40 preschool establishments and 1616 primary schools in rural areas, in 29 prefectures of the national territory spread across the seven (7) administrative regions and the city of Conakry.

2.2. Methodological Approach

2.2.1. Nature of the Study

This study is both qualitative and quantitative. It is exploratory, descriptive, and analytical of a current issue in Guinea.

2.3. Sampling and Research Targets

The research covered structures at several levels: the central level, the regional level (prefecture), and the local level. For each level, it was necessary to define the survey sites, identify the target population, and determine the sampling methods.

The selection of survey sites and target groups was based on a reasoned approach using a combination of the following essential criteria:

- urban/rural setting;
- social status: privileged/disadvantaged groups;
- geographical accessibility of the site and the individuals.

At the central level, the research covered the Ministry of Education. Stakeholders were identified using purposive sampling. At the local level, within each prefecture, a number of educational centers were identified using random sampling.

Taking into account the realities in the prefectures, we selected 5 prefectures in 8 of the 4 natural regions to conduct the survey. A total of 40 schools were surveyed.

The survey was conducted with local stakeholders such as school principals, presidents and treasurers/secretaries of parent-teacher associations and canteen management committees, producers, and students.

The following table summarizes the number of stakeholders at the local level.

Table 1 Number of Stakeholders at the Local Level

Actors	Staff
Students	80
Canteen workers	40
Primary school principals	40
Members of parent-teacher associations/management committees	80
Producers	80
Focal points of the canteens	05
Total	325

2.4. Data Analysis

2.4.1. Quantitative Data

Data analysis focused on the expected results of this research. The software used was STATA 17 and Excel.

2.4.2. Qualitative Data

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were also entered and then analyzed using thematic content analysis.

3. Results

The results are structured around the research objectives, namely a diagnostic analysis of the implementation of the school feeding policy in Guinea.

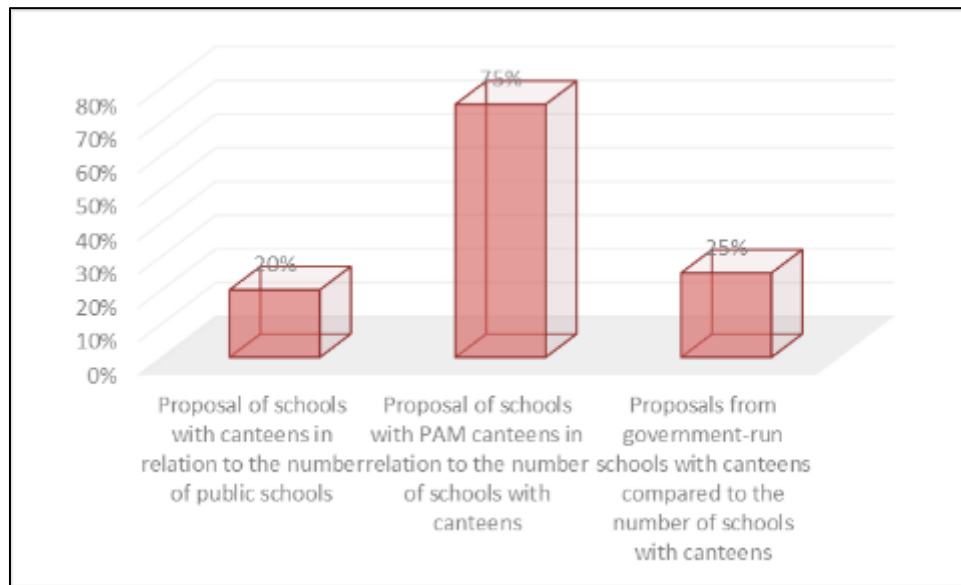
3.1. Integration of the school feeding program into national strategy documents: an insufficiently documented initiative

The school feeding policy in Guinea is implemented without a proper strategy document. Indeed, the absence of a dedicated school feeding strategy document has been noted, one that outlines long-term and short-term objectives, identifies potential opportunities and threats, and outlines implementation strategies.

School feeding was addressed superficially in the country's Economic and Social Development Plan. However, it was clearly addressed in: (i) the National Social Protection Policy (PNPS 2016), which aimed to cover all primary schools nationwide in the long term and potentially extend to lower secondary school; and (ii) the National Nutrition Policy and Action Plan (2016), which demonstrates how implementing a school feeding program contributes to improving the quality of education and academic performance, as well as the impact of school canteens on girls' education. (iii) The Education Sector Program (2015-2017) and the Ten-Year Education Program in Guinea (ProDEG), which prioritizes school feeding programs to achieve gender equality by providing dry food rations to girls.

According to data from the National Directorate of School Canteens, in 2021, 400 schools were covered by canteens funded from the national budget, compared to 1,216 schools funded by the World Food Programme (WFP), for a total of 1,616 schools across the country, representing an overall coverage rate of 20%.

The graph below shows the national canteen coverage rate.



Source: Authors, based on data from the DNCaS

Figure 1 National Coverage of School Canteens

3.2. Relevance of institutional framework for managing school canteens from central to school level

3.2.1. The World Food Programme (WFP) model: a reference to consider at a national level

The WFP has two modes of intervention. The first is the traditional method, which consists of a group purchase of food through an open tender process and the distribution of food to beneficiaries. The second mode of operation is the purchase of food from local producers closest to the intervention areas (schools), who then deliver the food to management committees, which are paid by electronic transfer via their mobile phones.

The first circuit involves the World Food Programme (WFP) (i) assessing food needs based on statistical data provided by the Ministry of Education and compared with field data produced by WFP focal points and regional offices, (ii) launching a tendering process at the WFP level to select the supplier responsible for providing food to the targeted schools, and (iii) delivering this food directly to the schools under the supervision of focal points, WFP offices, and members of the COGECS (Committee for the Management of School Food). In this circuit, the supplier is paid directly by the World Food Programme. This model relies on a single entity purchasing large quantities of dry goods for a large number of schools, which can be stored and transported over long distances. With few contracts involved, it is unlikely that smallholder farmers can easily participate in or compete with imports from high-producing countries. However, some dry goods can be purchased locally. This centralized model can offer better opportunities for group purchasing and economies of scale, increase the purchasing power of procurement authorities, and reduce the costs of developing human and institutional capacities.

The second circuit represents the method of supplying schools with food. It prioritizes the local economy. It allows for:

- An assessment of food needs based on statistical data provided by the Ministry of Education and compared with field data produced by focal points and regional offices;
- Selection/evaluation of cooperating partners (supporting ngos);
- Selection of the mobile phone company (service provider);
- Targeting/identification, evaluation, and registration of beneficiary groups, traders, winemaking unions, and management committees, as well as awareness-raising among stakeholders (ngos, traders, beneficiary management committees, groups, women winemaking unions, and technical services).
- Drafting of contracts with cooperating partners;

- Distribution of SIM cards and activation of mobile money accounts;
- Transfer of electronic money to beneficiaries;
- Purchase of food products by management committees from traders, groups, and winemaking unions selected by the project;
- Cash distribution to traders, groups, and winemaking unions (cash out);
- Payment of invoices to the mobile money service provider (MTN);
- Payment of invoices to the technical support ngos.

Wherever possible, this model seeks to establish more direct relationships between producers and beneficiaries, and to reduce the number of intermediaries and steps in the supply process. In this model, the purchase of raw materials for school canteens is delegated to the schools. With decentralization, the idea is to move towards a more efficient and effective local system for acquiring and supplying schools with food. Another objective is to offer local producers and processors an opportunity to sell their produce by creating predictable and structured demand. Transport volumes are low due to the small scale of transactions at the school level. Vendors manage stock levels, while small producers generally sell immediately after harvesting.

In terms of comparison, the traditional supply chain, which involves tendering to select a supplier, allows large providers to compete and obtain relatively better prices for ordering and delivering food. It also allows for the consumption of certain food items made available to the World Food Programme (WFP) by some of its partners, such as Japan. However, this supply chain does not allow small local producers to bid on tenders and therefore does not foster local economic activity. The cash money system facilitates connections between the COGECS (School Management Committee), the beneficiary school, small local producers, and local merchants for the purpose of supplying schools with food. It allows for very active involvement of school management committees and promotes a local economy around school canteens. Even though the cost of food purchased through this system can sometimes paradoxically be higher compared to the traditional supply chain, it remains a more streamlined system that strengthens community ties around the school.

2.2.2. The Supply System of the National Directorate of School Canteens: A Key Factor in the Policy's Ineffectiveness

The supply chain used by the National Directorate of School Canteens (DNCaS) extends from needs assessment to the delivery of food to schools.

Indeed, the process begins with an assessment of the directorate's needs in terms of food for schools and resources for monitoring and operating the DNCaS. According to data collected from stakeholders, this needs assessment is conducted strictly by the national director based on available statistical yearbooks. She then submits the assessment to the Bureau of Strategy and Development (BSD), which in turn incorporates it into the ministry's draft budget. This draft budget is then subject to budgetary arbitration at the level of the ministries of budget, economy, and finance.

After the budget is submitted to the Ministry, the National Directorate of School Feeding (DNCaS) uses a direct agreement method to sign contracts with certain producer groups based on the food prices it collects on the market. These contracts include an initial advance payment, and the groups deliver the food to the District Education Offices (DPEs) under the supervision of focal points.

Following this step, a delegation from the DNCaS distributes the food to each school. The principals of the schools concerned then go to the DPE to collect the food for their respective schools.

3.2.2. Comparison of the two food distribution channels to schools: the need to capitalize on the WFP's experience

The World Food Programme and the National Directorate of School Feeding Offices (DNCaS) do not have the same strategies for supplying schools with food. While one of the WFP's procurement strategies (mobile money purchasing) differs significantly from the National Directorate of School Feeding (DNCaS) procurement method, its second strategy appears to be quite similar to the DNCaS's approach. Indeed, while DNCaS purchases food through a process akin to a direct agreement, WFP purchases are made via open tender. The purchased food is then delivered to the DPE by DNCaS, whereas WFP deliveries are made directly to the schools.

In both cases, the World Food Programme's two procurement strategies offer greater transparency and provide reassurance regarding the effective delivery of food to schools.

4. Discussion

4.1. Coordination of interventions in school canteens: one of the weak links in the management mechanism

With regard to the responsibilities of the National Directorate of School Canteens (DNCaS), one of its duties is "to establish and maintain partnerships with stakeholders involved in school canteens." In this capacity, the DNCaS's role includes, among others, ensuring better synergy among stakeholders' interventions in the field of school food services.

Unfortunately, a lack of synergy was noted between the DNCaS (National Directorate of School Feeding) and the World Food Programme (WFP), a key partner in the field of school feeding in Guinea. This lack of synergy is characterized by (i) the absence of a joint programmatic framework for WFP activities; (ii) the lack of periodic meetings for monitoring and evaluating WFP activities; and (iii) the lack of certain data relating to the management of WFP school canteens at the school level and their impact. Indeed, according to Garba and Amoussou (2024), the involvement of local communities must be strengthened in the management of school canteens.

4.2. Annual decisions regarding school canteen policy: the absence of arbitration sessions limits opportunities for innovation

Here, we use the term "budgetary arbitration" to refer to the choices made by management to prioritize certain public expenditures over others when presenting its draft budget to the Development Strategy Office (BSD). Interviews conducted with stakeholders reveal that the strategic choices regarding activities to be included in the DNCaS budget are made by only a few of its members. This suggests a lack of a culture of budgetary arbitration, which is supposed to allow for leveraging the differences between two possible choices. In short, the planning of DNCaS activities is not inclusive.

4.3. Central food supply mechanism: significant risks of poor governance

The food supply mechanism for schools with canteens implemented at the DNCaS level does not guarantee efficient management of financial resources. It appears to be a risky choice. Indeed, the mechanism for selecting producer groups to supply food to schools does not adhere to any procurement procedures for the benefit of the State and appears to lack transparency. According to interviews conducted, the process boils down to compiling a list of potential groups based on the documents they provide establishing these organizations, and then selecting them without any standard competitive bidding process. Furthermore, an analysis of the available documents reveals that most of the groups, which are supposed to be NGOs, operate like private companies that buy food from small producers and deliver it to schools after selection by the National Directorate of Food Supply (DNCaS).

In the absence of competition among the potential groups, the DNCaS simply gathers information on market prices to set the food prices. This method of setting food prices for producer groups appears to be entirely unprofessional and could lead to overbilling.

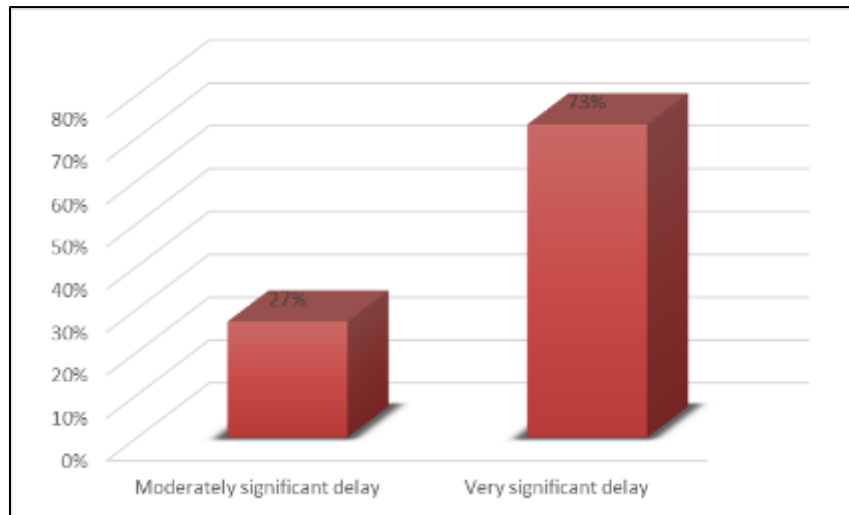
The contracts with producer groups do not require them to guarantee the upfront payment received for services. This situation could be the reason why the objectives set for these groups are not being met.

4.4. The new framework agreement currently being prepared: a risky option

A framework agreement is a tool for planning public procurement. It is a contract by which the public buyer commits to awarding contracts to the holder(s) of the agreement, for a given period and for specific services. In the context of school meals, to circumvent the difficulties related to signing agreements with producer groups and to ensure timely and continuous school meal service, the National Directorate of School Canteens is considering a framework agreement with producer groups without competitive bidding. This proposed new approach risks binding the State to multi-year contracts, likely with limited results.

4.5. Delays in food delivery: a factor in disruptions in school feeding

One of the shortcomings that emerged repeatedly during interviews with respondents was the delay in providing food to schools. The graph below illustrates the trends observed for this variable.



Source: Authors, based on survey data, April 2023

Figure 2 Assessment of the Delay in Food Delivery According to Surveyed School Principals

Analysis of the figure shows that the issue of delays in food delivery to schools is a concern for all stakeholders. During our field visit (April 19-20, 2023), interviews with school stakeholders revealed that children in government-run schools had only received enough food for 26 days since the start of the school year. This poor performance could be attributed to (i) the limited capacity of stakeholders in the supply chain to utilize allocated funds, (ii) delays in food deliveries to schools, (iii) difficulties in justifying the allocation of funds, (iv) delays in processing budget lines for the National Directorate of Food Supply (DNCaS), etc.

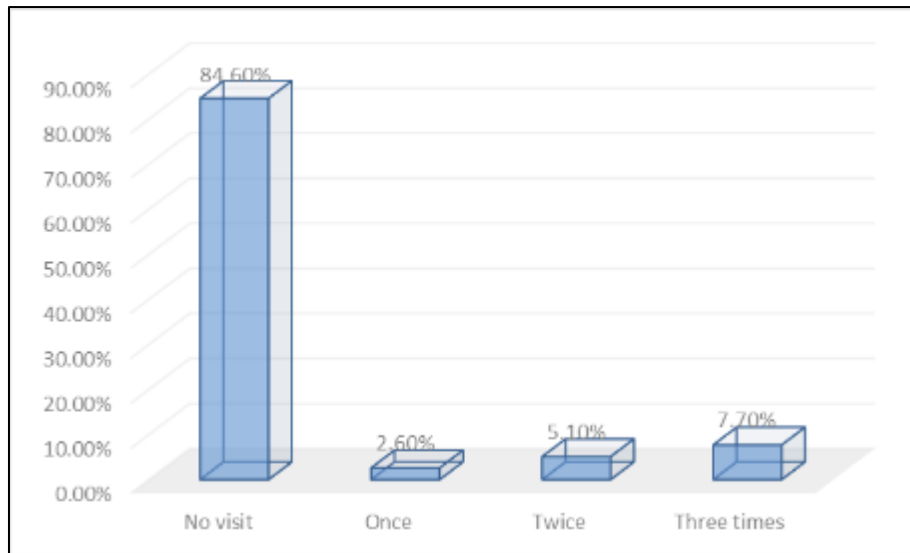
4.6. Monitoring and Evaluation of School Canteens: An Ineffective System

A monitoring and evaluation system is an essential component of sound management and accountability for any business or project. It is crucial for assessing progress toward objectives and results and for providing reliable and accurate information to various stakeholders. Its aims are to:

- obtain specific information to assess the weaknesses, strengths, and opportunities of project implementation;
- evaluate the established objectives of the supply chain;
- assess the interest and level of participation of stakeholders.

In the case of the DNCaS (National Directorate of School Canteens), the research found that the directorate has a monitoring and evaluation division, but it is not functioning due to a lack of qualified personnel and adequate resources. Indeed, the research was unable to access documentation related to activity reports from previous years, monitoring and evaluation tools, and other relevant materials. Even worse, the focal points meant to support the monitoring and evaluation system are not always qualified for the task. They lack the necessary resources and rarely visit schools, relying instead on visits by the District Education Directors (DPEs) during inspections. Their monthly reports are often based on information gathered by telephone from the principals of schools receiving school canteens.

The graph below shows the rate of regular visits conducted by focal points and/or DNCaS staff to schools receiving canteens.



Source: Authors, based on survey data, April 2023

Figure 3 Rate of Close Monitoring Visits to Schools with Canteens

The figure above shows that most schools have never received close monitoring visits to their canteens. Analysis of the collected data revealed that the 15.4% of schools that received canteen monitoring visits are WFP-funded schools with canteens. This situation could be explained by the fact that WFP may be adopting a strategy that prioritizes school visits, however infrequent they may seem.

4.7. Food Management: A Severe Gap Between Ambitions and Reality

The field data collected indicates that the principals of schools receiving canteens have a thorough understanding of food management mechanisms in schools. Unfortunately, in the absence of a functional food management control system, standards are being disregarded. Indeed, the management of school canteens is often strictly the responsibility of the school principal, who controls the delivery and distribution of food supplies as they see fit, sometimes with the tacit approval of ad hoc management committees.

4.8. Mixed community mobilization around school canteens

According to the field data collected, grassroots community engagement with school canteens remains very low. However, the success of the Program depends on its ownership by grassroots communities and local elected officials. "My mother doesn't give me my daily canteen contribution every day," said one schoolgirl. This weak community mobilization around school canteens could be a consequence not only of poor food management but also, and especially, of the lack of transparency surrounding the management of parental contributions per student for canteen operations. In most of the schools surveyed, many do not have a ledger to track parental contributions in cash and/or in kind for canteen operations. This situation is not conducive to encouraging parents to get involved with school canteens.

It is therefore important to reinvent a mobilization mechanism around this tool that is the school canteen.

4.9. School canteen management committees: a key strength of the policy

The research was unable to obtain documents concerning the standards relating to the creation and responsibilities of School Canteen Management Committees (COGES) and Parents' and Friends of the School Associations (APEAE). However, interviews with stakeholders at the local and central levels revealed that COGES exist in all schools and that this is a prerequisite for a school to benefit from canteens. According to stakeholders, COGES members play a crucial role from the establishment of the canteens to their actual management.

4.10. Insufficient food storage facilities: a major factor in food waste

The following graph shows the proportion of schools with a store.

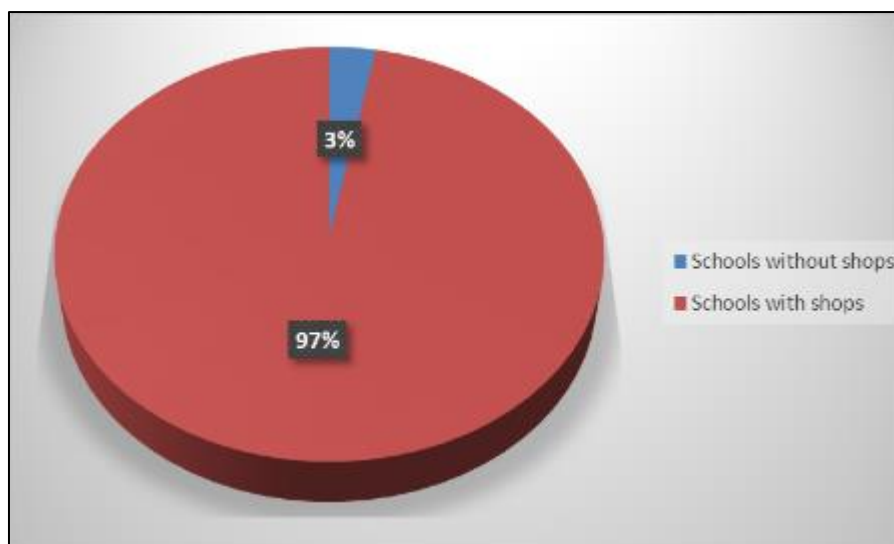


Figure 4 Proportion of schools with a store

The graph shows that only 3% of the surveyed schools have storage facilities. In most schools, the principals' offices also serve as storage areas, facilitating the theft of food supplies. As for the 3% of schools that do have storage facilities, a more in-depth analysis of the data revealed that these are constructed from makeshift materials.

4.11. Insufficient dining Facilities: difficult meal conditions

The following graph shows the locations used as dining areas for students.

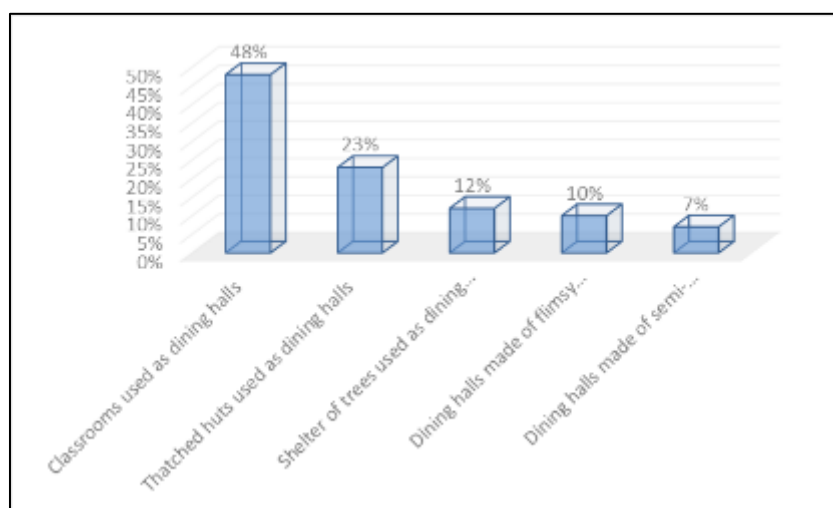


Figure 5 Student dining locations

This graph shows that none of the surveyed schools have a permanent cafeteria. This observation implies the need for specific arrangements to facilitate children's meals.

4.12. Insufficient kitchens: risks of accidents for children

The following graph shows the types of kitchens found in schools with cafeterias.

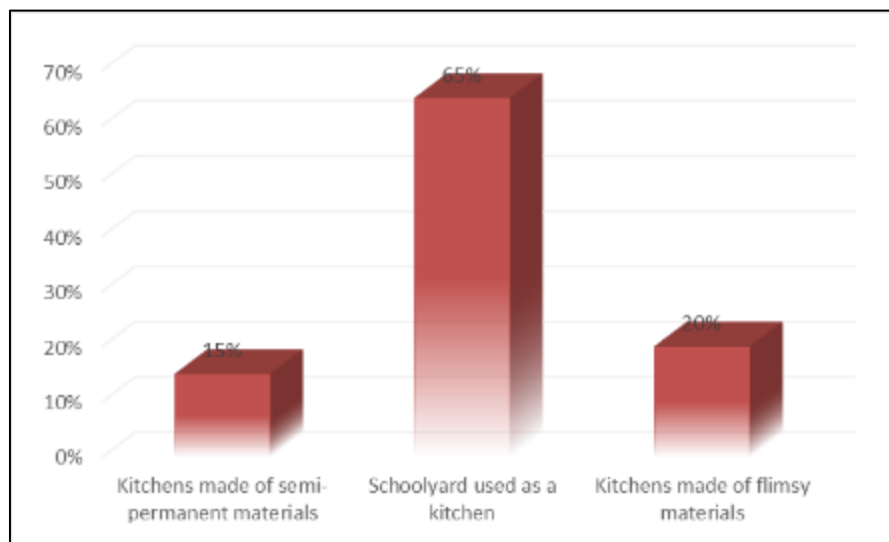


Figure 6 Types of kitchens in schools with canteens

Analysis of the graph above indicates that no school has a permanent kitchen. In 65% of schools, the schoolyard serves as the kitchen, exposing children to the risk of accidents during recess.

4.13. Handwashing facilities: good practices established in habits

The graph below shows the presence or absence of handwashing facilities in schools with cafeterias.

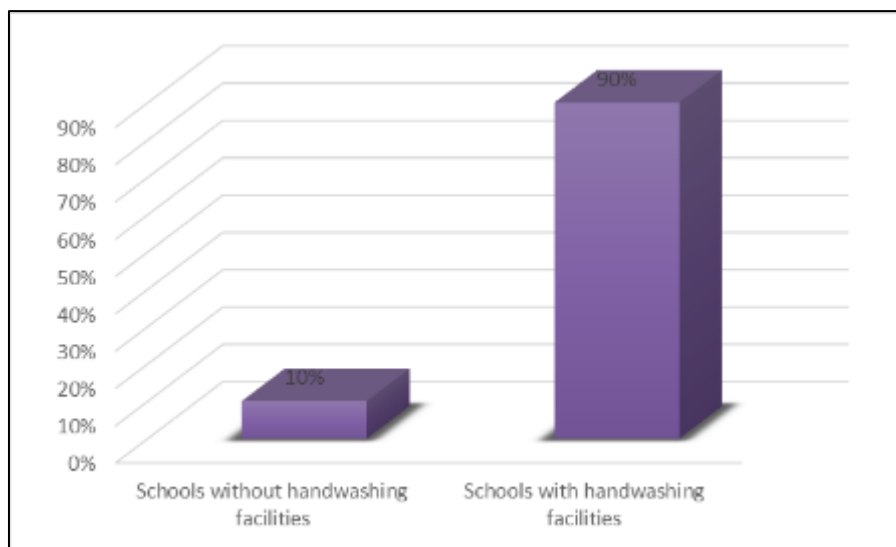


Figure 7 Availability of handwashing facilities in schools

Field data reveals that 90% of schools have handwashing facilities, with each school having an average of three. This demonstrates the importance placed on hygiene in most schools with canteens, although further efforts are still needed.

4.14. Water sources used in schools with canteens

Analysis of the graph below shows that most of the surveyed schools have access to drinking water, which is reassuring regarding the hygiene measures practiced in these schools. Indeed, when schools have access to clean water, toilets, and soap, children benefit from a better environment for studying, learning, and reaching their full potential. Furthermore,

children who acquire habits related to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene at school reinforce lasting positive behaviors within their families and communities.

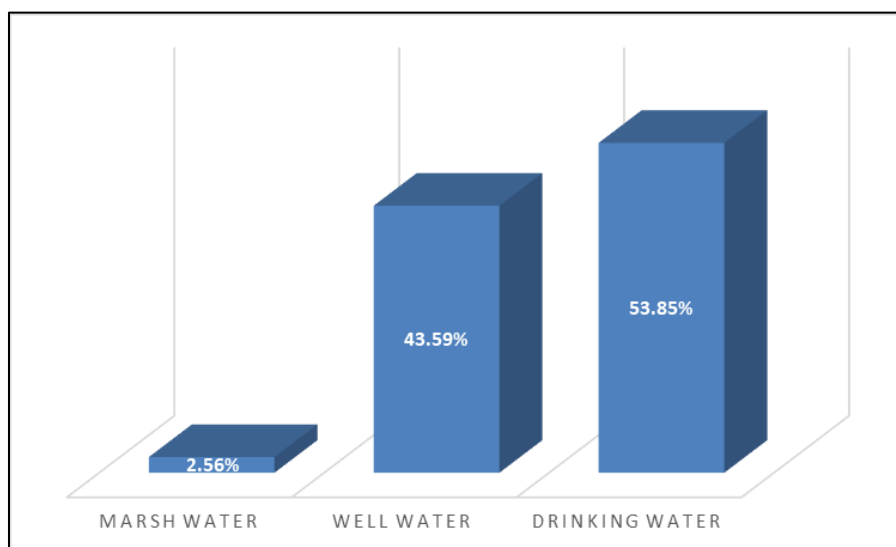


Figure 8 Water sources in schools

4.15. Availability of toilets in schools with canteens: challenges remaining

The following graph shows whether or not toilets are available in schools.

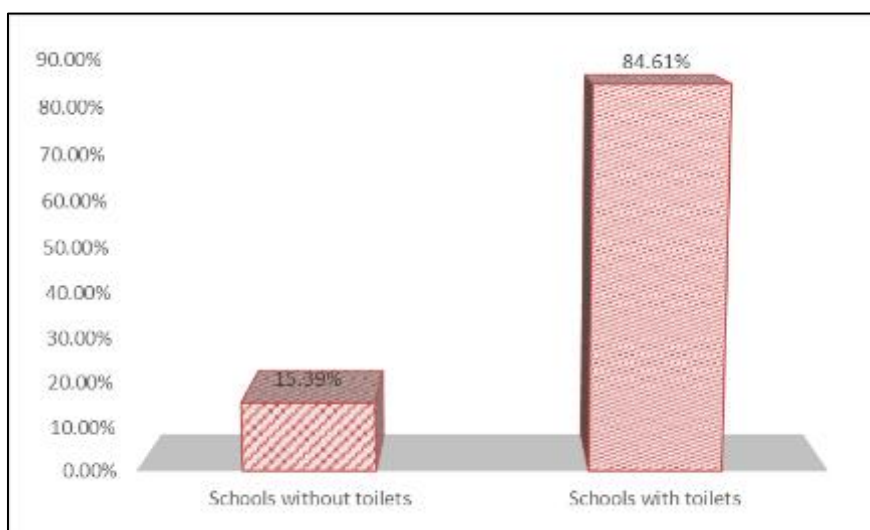


Figure 9 Availability of toilets in schools with canteens

Analysis reveals that 85% of the surveyed schools with canteens have toilets, while 15% do not. While the toilet coverage rate in the sampled schools is high, challenges remain in equipping all schools, especially those with canteens, with toilets.

4.16. The "canteen workers": a volunteer workforce requiring health monitoring

According to field data, this link in the chain consists, in part, of women who previously sold food near schools, unemployed women living in the vicinity of schools, women recommended by members of school canteen management committees, etc. Theoretically, they are not paid and work either in groups or sometimes individually. In all the schools visited, no canteen worker underwent medical examinations. Their status is therefore not verified. Furthermore, it was noted that they do not receive training on basic hygiene practices. Their capacity-building needs remain considerable.

4.17. Menu composition and selection

Left to the Discretion of School Principals According to data collected during field interviews, it appears that it is often the principals, sometimes in consultation with the canteen staff, who decide on the menu. Students often have no choice, and there is no weekly menu planning in the schools visited. The factors taken into consideration in determining the menu are the following:

- Local availability of food;
- Overall caloric content;
- Achieving a balanced and varied diet;
- Local eating habits.

4.18. Student feedback on the quality and quantity of meals served

During the meetings, the children expressed complete satisfaction with the various menus that make up their meals. Neither the cafeteria staff nor the school principals had ever recorded any complaints about the food served. However, this is far from meaning that the service is flawless.

Despite the overall satisfaction expressed, the menus are not viewed the same way within a single school or from one school to another. There are, however, widely shared preferences.

Neither the teachers, nor the children, and certainly not the parents, mentioned the presence of fruit in the menus, which seems to be the biggest shortcoming. This is all the more concerning given the limited opportunity to compensate for this at home. Vegetables also do not appear to be consumed in sufficient quantities, as they are only served as ingredients in sauces. We observed firsthand how the limited amount of vegetables in sauces could negatively impact the quality of the meal. In Guinea, the prices of fruits and vegetables in the markets seem to relegate these items to the category of luxury goods. If schools are ever to contribute to meeting their students' needs, this is precisely the area they should focus on. Furthermore, in the future, menu planning should take into account students' expressed preferences, without necessarily making these opinions the primary consideration.

4.19. Perceived effects of school canteens

These are the benefits perceived by students and parents, without being quantifiable. They were recorded during interviews.

Table 2 Benefits of school meals according to students and parents, respectively

Beneficiaries	Benefits
Students (direct beneficiaries)	It avoids the fatigue caused by going home for lunch; It allows you to be more attentive in class; It guarantees that you will eat at least once during the day; It contributes to better health.
Parents (indirect beneficiaries)	It eliminates the worry of preparing lunch, allowing for more peaceful pursuits in the countryside; It helps save money on family food supplies; It prevents children from experiencing the fatigue caused by the distance between home and school; It promotes better health in children and reduces the incidence of illness.

Source: Authors, based on survey data and literature review, April 2023

Regarding increasing children's attention during learning situations, everyone knows the adage "a hungry belly has no ears."

4.20. Sustainability of the school feeding program: a concern for stakeholders

Opening a canteen in a school generates recurring expenses. The cost of food accounts for 90% of these expenses, with the remainder covering the cost of replacing equipment (cutlery, pots, etc.). When considered in relation to the number

of canteens opened, these expenses can represent a high cost that is difficult for communities to bear, thus necessitating a strategy for ensuring the sustainability of the school feeding program.

The sustainability strategy begins with a shared understanding of the current state of school feeding in the country, from achievements to current challenges and weaknesses, followed by the identification of actions to address these challenges and weaknesses. This will be achieved through a coordinated commitment from all stakeholders. The Government and its main international and local partners will use this document as a reference for all their technical assistance, capacity-building, advocacy, and initiative mobilization activities related to school feeding for a specific period. Furthermore, a law on school canteen financing will not only ensure the sustainability of the achievements of the government and its partners but also extend the school feeding program to all preschool and primary schools in Guinea in the medium term. The ultimate goal is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, "Zero Hunger."

4.21. Alignment of the school feeding program with national policies

While the school feeding measure appears to be aligned with several national and sectoral policy and strategy documents, such as the country's Economic and Social Development Plan, the issue of school feeding has been addressed only as a secondary consideration. Regarding the National Social Protection Policy (PNPS 2016), school feeding was clearly addressed, even though the timeframe of this policy document expired eight years ago. The same is true of the ProDEG, which also expired in 2017. Consequently, the country lacks a comprehensive school feeding policy document, and the national strategy and policy documents that address the issue of school feeding only partially are no longer in effect. The importance of this crucial public action planning document seems to be overlooked by stakeholders in the education sector, especially for such a large-scale initiative. Pierre Muller (2012) argues that the existence of a public policy is based (i) on a set of concrete measures; (ii) on decisions of a more or less authoritative nature; (iii) through a "general framework for action" that, in principle, distinguishes a public policy from simple isolated measures; (iv) through "publics" individuals, groups, or organizations some of which are passive while others organize to influence the development or implementation of public programs; and finally, through goals or objectives to be achieved. In the field of education, Vanessa Casadella (2018, p. 6) reminds us that, when implemented, educational policies introduce numerous strategic orientations such as expanding and ensuring the continuity of educational opportunities and improving the efficiency of the education system.

4.22. Relevance of institutional framework for governing school canteens from the central to school level

Hallak and Poisson (2009, p. 5) argue that objective assessments of successes and failures conducted in preparation for the Dakar Forum on Education for All concluded that numerous problems persist. Among these programs, the authors point to "a lack of transparency, inadequate accountability, and even corruption," and conclude that "governance is one of the most important factors to consider if we want to achieve the defined objectives."

In the context of Guinea, the institutional framework established, particularly at the level of the National Directorate of School Canteens (DNCaS), does not appear to be adequate to address the challenges of school feeding. Field data also indicate that there are overall risks of poor governance in the food procurement system, in the monitoring and evaluation mechanism for school canteens which is almost inoperative, but also leaks in food distribution which the field phase was able to reveal.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to assess the current state of school feeding in Guinea, revealing both strengths to be maintained, such as the State's commitment to this policy, and the presence of canteens, storage facilities, toilets, water points, and handwashing stations in some schools.

However, it was found that the institutional framework of the National Directorate of School Canteens (DNCaS) is dysfunctional and unable to produce conclusive results. From a technical standpoint, the school food supply system, managed by the DNCaS, is characterized by poor management, with risks of non-delivery, overbilling, and favoritism. Furthermore, the monitoring and evaluation mechanism within this directorate is virtually nonexistent. The canteen focal points, mostly teachers assigned to sedentary positions, often lack the necessary expertise. Furthermore, they lack any means of conducting on-the-ground monitoring. The information they use to write their reports is generally transmitted by school principals via telephone conversations.

In schools, food management is frequently a monopolistic affair, reserved solely for the principal. Moreover, the inadequacy or even complete absence of kitchens, dining halls, and other infrastructure contributes to the problem. In

addition, community participation remains uneven due, among other things, to the mismanagement of parental contributions intended for the operation of school canteens.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to declare.

Data availability

Data are available upon reasonable request.

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Author contributions

All authors contributed to the design and implementation of the study. They also contributed to all sections and the drafting of the first version of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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