



## SHORT-CIRCUIT SCHOOL CANTEENS IN SENEGAL: TOOLS FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Since 2022, the CNCR (Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux), AVSF (Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières), and Grdr Migration Citoyenneté Développement, a member of CFSI (Comité Français pour la Solidarité Internationale), have been running school canteen projects in Senegal (in the Rufisque and Vélingara areas) using short distribution channels, partly financed by the Compagnie Fruitière Foundation. Drawing on their experience in urban and rural Senegal, Hélène Basquin Fané (West Africa Programme Manager - CFSI), Seyni Kebe (Canteen Development and Monitoring Manager - GRDR - Migration Citoyenneté Développement), and Ousseynou Ka (Climate Change and Resilience Programme Manager - CNCR), share their thoughts on West African food issues, at the crossroads of economic and political perspectives. Offering both remunerative outlets for local producers and room for manoeuvre to meet nutritional challenges, short-circuit school canteens help to promote local consumption and improve support for local sectors. By capitalising on local initiatives, an advocacy strategy is being developed in Senegal in favour of short-circuit school canteens, which can be part of a drive to transform food systems.

### SCHOOL CANTEENS, FROM PROJECT TO IMPLEMENTATION, A REVIEW OF VARIOUS SENEGALESE MODELS

#### From the nutritional benefits of school canteens to commercial for local production

By promoting access to a healthy and varied diet, short-circuit school canteens in Senegal help to educate children about nutrition and improve their health. What's more, setting up canteens in schools helps to improve school results.

*"A great deal of research has shown the positive effects of canteens on children's attendance, (...) Now other aspects are being highlighted. In particular, the canteen can be an instrument for promoting local production.*

*It can be used as an economic lever, by linking it to local food systems".*

(Seyni Kebe)

Contributing to local food security, school canteens are a way of promoting local consumption and developing income-generating activities for local farmers' organisations. They represent guaranteed and remunerative markets for these organisations, and secure their access to credit. For Grdr, the short-circuit school canteen projects have a significant impact on the economy of small producer organisations, enabling some to double their production by working with two or three schools. To ensure that the canteens run smoothly and are supplied with local resources, the projects generally focus on various aspects: improving local productivity through training; adding value to products that need to be processed and preserved; promoting entrepreneurship, particularly among women. Different models of canteen management are developed, depending on financial resources and specific local conditions.

## Models adapted to local conditions in Senegal

To develop school canteens in Rufisque, a Senegalese department that stands out for the strong involvement of local authorities, Grdr has set up two central kitchens with tripartite funding. Parents provide a third of the funding, with the remaining two-thirds provided by the local authority and project support respectively. The long-term aim is for the State to cover the remaining third through a national school canteen programme. Funding is also being sought via the corporate social responsibility (CSR) mechanism. Sococim has provided €15,000 for one of its central kitchens, targeting 10 schools. Grdr believes that every local authority should have a central kitchen.

*"The idea is that every local authority in urban and suburban areas should have a mini central kitchen, not in the European style with huge investments, but with minimal investments borne by the local authority, and whose management is the responsibility of a group of stakeholders: parents, school inspectorates, the local authority, in order to have transparent and shared management, with a specific bank account that allows all financial transactions to be traced". (Seyni Kebe)*

At the same time, this model must correspond to local production, and purchase contracts are signed with local producers, in particular with women's organisations. In Senegal, the public procurement code allows local authorities to award direct contracts if the value is less than or equal to 3 million CFA francs. In the case of Rufisque, the local authority pays its contribution in the form of subsidies to the management committee, which is not governed by the public procurement code. In this way, procedures are simplified, enabling the local authority to guarantee the operation of the canteens, despite the absence of government directives to streamline public procurement and provide part of the funding.

*"In rural areas, other systems are being tested, through community fields. (...) in Casamance, the community fields manage to supply almost all the vegetables needed by the canteen from January to June". (Seyni Kebe)*

While in urban areas the central kitchen model is suited to the spatial concentration of schools, it is more difficult to implement in rural areas. An almost autonomous canteen model is more appropriate, requiring upstream investment and training for the players involved, particularly in terms of production techniques. In rural areas where local produce is not available, canteens require substantial subsidies to operate.

In Vélingara, parents have very little opportunity to contribute financially, but they take it in turns to take delivery of produce, manage stocks and prepare meals in the kitchen. They also contribute in kind to the mobilisation of foodstuffs with products such as millet, cowpeas, condiments, groundnuts and moringa. Some parents organise themselves around a collective field, while others make contributions in kind. In this agropastoral area, the management of some school canteens is based on tripartite agreements between AVSF, the schools and local milk producer groups. The aim is to empower the management committees so that they can manage contracts and resources. In addition, one of the criteria for choosing schools is the presence of producer organisations and mini-dairies.

In the Diourbel region, the CNCR is running a canteen project combining nutrition and support for women's entrepreneurship.

*"We are thinking in terms of sustainability (...) we intend to move towards an agreement with the parents of schoolchildren so that they can contribute in kind, through foodstuffs, depending on the production chain". (Ousseynou Ka)*

To ensure the long-term future of the project, CNCR is considering a contribution in kind from parents, which would also help to structure agricultural sectors.

## **NGOs and parents, the technical and financial partners of school canteens in Senegal**

Only 20% of Senegalese schools have a canteen, a rate that has been falling for the past fifteen years. The World Food Programme (WFP) is the main funder, followed by Counterpart International (CPI) and other NGOs such as Grdr (although they are mainly American). Above all, it is the children's parents who fund 50% of the canteens, through cash contributions, contributions in kind (agricultural produce), or by offering their services, with the mothers of the families generally being the cooks. However, this model does not ensure the sustainability of the canteens and raises a number of difficulties: if the parents' share is made up of a donation in kind, the model relies on their voluntary work, and may also thwart the income-generating activities of another part of the population, such as the shopkeepers who sold produce around the schools before the canteens were set up. When it involves cultivating plots of land that will supply the canteen, the voluntary work of parents does not help to boost local production.

*"These are the models we are proposing in the face of the lack of substantial funding from the State to make these canteens sustainable, but in the long term, if we set up canteens following a social protection approach, we will have to find subsidies to cover the shortfalls in income or production costs". (Seyni Kebe)*

Senegal recently proposed a social protection bill, including a substantial section on school feeding, which is promoted as a model for social protection. The initiative is encouraging, but still needs to be financed, in particular to create institutional markets.

## **FROM RAISING AWARENESS AMONG STAKEHOLDERS TO LOBBYING FOR A TERRITORIALISED NATIONAL POLICY**

### **Involving local authorities in school canteen management**

*"We need communities to take an interest in our projects (...) to understand what is expected and what is at stake, so that they*

*are prepared to contribute and invest". (Ousseynou Ka)*

Parents, school inspectors, businesses - all the stakeholders who make up the communities in which the canteens are located need to be made aware of the need to invest in access to healthy food for children, and to promote local supply chains, the development of which will have positive economic repercussions for all those involved.

The support of local authorities is also essential, as the most successful projects are based on their strong involvement, as in the case of the department of Rufisque. It is also thanks to these decentralised branches of the State that the results of relevant local initiatives can be passed on to the national level and influence the implementation of effective public policies in favour of short-circuit school canteens. In so doing, this approach helps to promote local consumption and the structuring of supply chains.

## **Senegalese advocacy inspired by West African regional initiatives**

On the strength of exchanges of good practice with organisations in Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo (brought together thanks to the work of the CFSI during country workshops as part of the Terres Nourricières programme), the Senegalese players, grouped around the Groupe Multisectoriel de l'Alimentation et la Nutrition (GMSANE), are developing an advocacy strategy in favour of a law on school food in Senegal.

This working group is urging the government to develop legislation to govern school canteens whose needs are met by local purchases. As things stand, it is difficult to trace the origin and quality of products, and local purchases do not guarantee that products are local and benefit producer organisations.

To support Senegalese advocacy, an information platform on school food has been developed (<https://sasse.education.sn/>), in collaboration between the National Division of School Canteens - a state institution currently endowed with limited resources - and NGOs, to list and map national initiatives. More than 100 indicators have been identified and tracked on the platform.

## **SCHOOL CANTEEN PROJECTS AT THE HEART OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ISSUES**

*"Among the institutional markets, we [the CFSI] realised that we were supporting more and more short-circuit school canteen projects. (...) Many foreign organisations are involved in this area of school food. So there really is a question of national sovereignty in this area, and of ensuring that solidarity initiatives are consistent between food distribution initiatives and development initiatives in the supply chains". (Hélène Basquin)*

*Through the Pafao programme (Promotion of Family Farming in West Africa) and support for a number of local initiatives, the issue of school canteens is a key one for the CFSI, which is looking into the obstacles and levers to providing school canteens with food produced locally and sustainably. Depending on the projects, their local roots and the stakeholders involved, school canteen models raise questions for international solidarity organisations in terms of empowerment, sustainability and economic prospects. These projects, developed on a local scale, deserve to be integrated into a more global reflection on the challenges of sustainable agriculture and the development of sectors. In particular, Grdr is questioning the capacity of local production to meet the needs of school canteens if a national policy is developed in Senegal. In order to respond to public tenders and become acculturated to institutional procedures, it is necessary to support producer groups, and above all to advocate a national policy that involves them in its development.*

Following the example of Burkina Faso - which has introduced directives to encourage local purchases and direct purchases from farmers' organisations, while decentralising canteen budgets to the commune level - the Senegalese advocacy strategy advocates: decentralised management of canteens in order to adapt them to local conditions and involve local authorities more; developing canteen management models based on the distribution of funding according to local conditions; involving local producer organisations in the debate on the national school canteen programme.

While the Senegalese government is struggling to fund initiatives to develop short-circuit school canteens, the advocacy initiatives are designed to highlight the positive impact of setting up school canteens in other countries, such as Benin, where 75% of children eat in a school canteen. The Beninese government communicates widely on the policy it has put in place. A section on local purchases from national producers has been incorporated into the national school canteen programme.

Senegalese stakeholders are making the most of the capitalisation process with the CFSI's country workshops, enabling them to cross-reference what they have learned about school canteens in the West African region, and to take ownership of it.

Finally, to reinforce its actions in favour of the implementation of public policies for school canteens, the CNCR is in dialogue with the candidates in the legislative elections before they are elected, and is making the parliamentarians aware of the results of the regional capitalisation.

*"In recent years, the CNCR has taken the initiative of meeting all the candidates for the supreme magistracy and understanding what their programmes are, and then analysing what is in favour of the environment and agriculture (...) this is an approach that can pay off. (...) The other aspect is that we have planned to hold meetings after the capitalisation (...) and involving parliamentarians, so that they can take these results, these achievements, to the highest authorities, could also be a good approach". (Ousseynou Ka)*

*By getting involved with associations and farmers' organisations in West Africa that are running short-circuit school canteen projects, the Compagnie Fruitière Foundation has taken up an issue at the heart of the challenge of food sovereignty. These actions on the ground contribute to access to healthy food, support family farms and promote income-generating activities. **Ultimately, the Foundation support is part of the ongoing debate, both from the point of view of research and field operations, on territorialised food systems, by experimenting with initiatives that look at the sustainability of actions and the economic and food autonomy of territories.***

