

## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé



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**ABSTRACT:** Many learners drop out of school because parents find it difficult to provide them with lunch or because of the long distances between their homes and the schools they attend. The objective of this study is to analyze the determinants of the proper functioning of school canteens in the municipality of Athiémé. The collection of data was based on an important work of exploration made of literature review and interviews. The central model used is similar to multi-criteria analysis, but carried out by consulting the actors for the weightings: this is a property of the Delphi method. The data was collected from 341 actors including 121 households, 84 teachers, 74 members of the CGCSI, 47 schoolchildren and 15 administrative staff from school districts and educational regions. The results reveal the existence of a trilogy on which the proper functioning of canteens depends, namely: learners, cooks and dry rations of food. The involvement and strong participation of parents and members of the management committee are essential for the success of school canteens, all of which allow a substantial improvement in the meals offered to learners. The effectiveness of learners' daily subscriptions and accessibility to water are essential for the success of school canteens.

**KEYWORDS:** Determinants, functioning, Canteens, Schoolchildren, Athiémé.

### INTRODUCTION

Benin, like other countries, has had the opportunity to be supported for many years in the field of education, nutrition and sustainable development. Despite the efforts made, obstacles remain in terms of access to primary education for all. In rural areas, enrollment and attendance rates have remained low due to several factors, the most important of which is food insecurity, especially among children in basic primary schools.

Although Benin's score on the Global Hunger Index improved from 31.7 in 2008 to 24.4 in 2017, food insecurity remains severe in the country (Grebmer, 2017). An in-depth food security and vulnerability analysis carried out in 2017 showed that 9.6 percent of the population (or 1 million people) were food insecure (WFP 2019). Food insecurity worsens during the lean season, affects rural areas more (13 percent) than urban areas (9 percent) and highlights regional disparities: the department of Atacora in the northwest ( 24 percent of households) is the most affected, followed by Couffo (16 percent), Collines (15 percent) in the center of the country and Zou (12 percent) in the south. The regions most affected by food insecurity are characterized by both higher poverty and lower human development (WFP, 2019). In 2017, households spent on average 46 percent of their overall budget on food (59 percent in Atacora), which is a sign of their vulnerability to food insecurity (AGVSAN, 2017). Low agricultural productivity, seasonal fluctuations and price volatility, as well as natural hazards related to climate change, only aggravate this phenomenon. Detrimental coping strategies, such as selling livestock and other assets at unfavorable terms, reducing food consumption, and increasing consumption of poor quality food are common during crises, as is the increased migration to cities, especially among young people (WFP, 2019). This situation has an impact on agricultural production and also compromises food security. Rural women are more affected by shocks because they own fewer productive assets and have limited adaptive capacities (UNDP, 2015). According to the WHO, childhood and adolescence are characterized by particularly high nutritional needs to cover the needs related to growth, maintenance of the body and development of the intellect (WHO, 2003). To effectively meet these needs, it is essential to adopt good dietary practices. Dietary habits acquired early in life tend to persist into adulthood and condition the present and future state of well-being and health of the individual (WHO, 2003). An adapted diet during childhood and

## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé

adolescence thus makes it possible to reduce the risks of infectious or nutritional pathologies in children and contributes to the prevention of the onset of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular disease in adulthood (WHO 2003, Mikkila et al., 2004). It contributes to the quality of school performance, by improving learning and concentration abilities and by limiting absenteeism for medical reasons (Bellisle 2004, Belot et al., 2011).

Even if food and nutrition education is mainly a matter for the family environment, school remains a privileged place to promote better eating habits in children and adolescents (WHO, 2003). In addition, many children are captive to the food offered by the school at lunchtime. The quality of the food supply at school is therefore essential to guarantee many children a diet adapted to their needs and to promote the acquisition of good eating habits in order to facilitate access to education in all schools. The Government of Benin has, for about five years, developed strategies to increase the enrollment rate, retention and success in primary schools through the provision of hot meals to children every school day. It should therefore be emphasized that the Government's efforts in terms of providing school meals to pupils in public primary schools fall within this framework in order not only to make it possible to consolidate efforts to improve access but also and above all the retention of pupils until the end of their primary cycle. It is therefore a question of creating favorable conditions to attract and keep children in school by creating a learning environment conducive to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Thus, in the current school context, what are the foundations of the operation of school canteens in Athiémé (Benin)? What is the modus operandi of school canteens? Does the functioning of the canteen depend on the existence of key elements?

This article analyzes the basic elements on which depends the proper functioning of school canteens in the municipality of Athiémé (Benin). It is structured in four parts, namely the study framework, the methodology adopted, the results obtained and the theoretical and practical implications through the discussion.

### 1. MATERIAL AND METHOD

#### 1.1. Study zone

Located in the Mono department (south-west of Benin), the town of Athiémé is about 8 km from the city of Lokossa (via the Lokossa, Athiémé, Cotonou axis) and 104 km from the city of Cotonou. Due to its proximity to the Togolese Republic, schoolchildren in search of sustainable livelihoods drop out of school in favor of income-generating activities. Given its position, it is subject to migration of young people and children, especially of school age, to other municipalities with a particular character (Lokossa) and country (Togo) in search of social well-being. It has 05 districts which are subdivided into 47 villages and city districts. According to the results of the General Population and Housing Census (RGPH4-2013), the population of the municipality of Athiémé is estimated at 56,483 inhabitants, including 27,562 males (48.79%) and 28,991 females ( 51.21%). There are 14,535 people between 5 and 14 years old (average age for primary education) or 25.73% of the population. The town is essentially rural and animated by the activities of the primary sector (agriculture, livestock and fishing) and tertiary. It is crossed by the Mono river which experiences a flood in the rainy season. The districts are mostly invaded by water during the flood period.

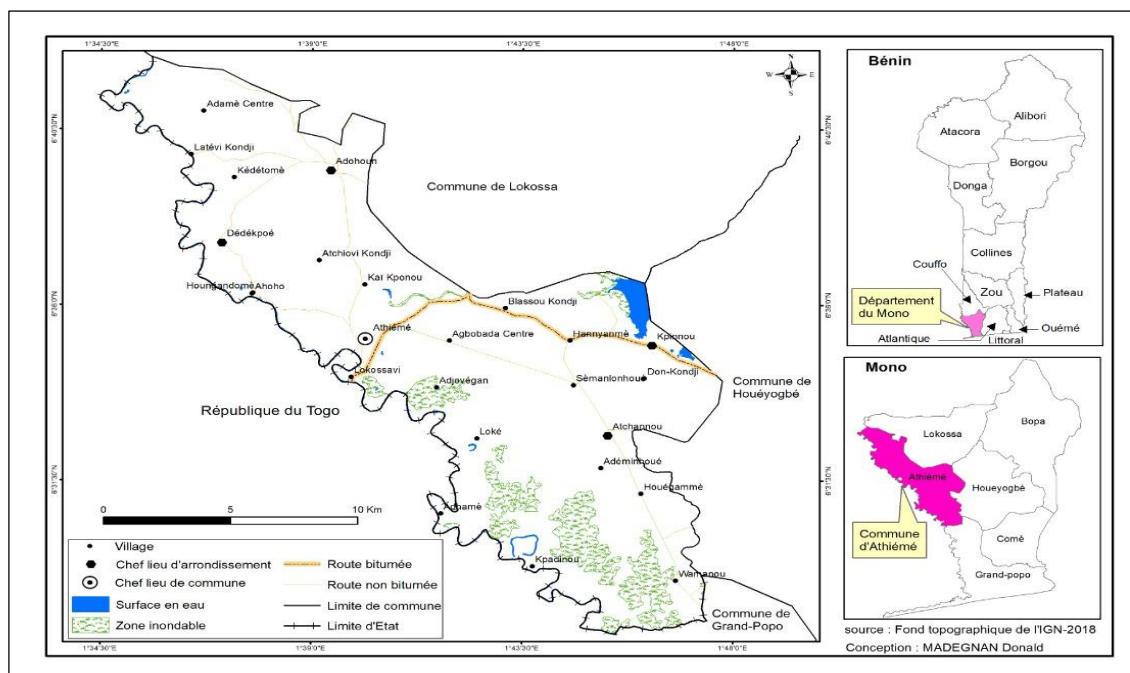


Figure 1: Geographical location of the municipality of Athiémé

# Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé

## 1.2. Methodological approach

The sample used is determined by reasoned choice and based on the representative character of the various actors concerned by the issues of school feeding and schooling in the Commune of Athiémé.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents**

Groups/targets	Number surveyed	Proportion in %
Households surveyed	121	35%
Canteen school teachers	74	22%
Teachers of schools without canteens	10	3%
CGCSI members	74	22%
Canteen schoolchildren	37	11%
Non-canteen schoolchildren	10	3%
Administrative staff	15	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Authors, based on data collected

## 1.3. Data collection tools

The main tools used for collecting information are essentially the observation guide, the interview guide and a questionnaire. The observation guide was used for field observation. It has helped to understand the socio-economic realities of the parents of pupils, particularly those in the localities benefiting from the school canteen initiative, the related modus operandi, the adequate infrastructures capable of supporting the school canteen initiative, the environment work, the family living environment, the important socio-cultural and anthropological particularities. The interview guide is the main tool for collecting data in the field. The questionnaire for administrative staff facilitated the collection of qualitative and quantitative data on the impacts of the school canteen in the education system of the study area. Thanks to the questionnaire, we obtained data with a higher level of precision.

## 1.4. Data collection technique

Data is collected through desk research and fieldwork. Thus, this documentary review provided statistical data, information relating to the education system, food security in the municipality of Athiémé on the one hand and the management of the school canteen on the other. The documentary research was supplemented by the information collected during the fieldwork. As part of this research, the surveys were carried out using respectively direct interviews, direct observation in the field, focus groups and questionnaires in order to cast a wide net and obtain a very high level of consistency of data.

## 1.5. Data analysis method

In order to obtain diverse data and representing all points of view, all actors involved in school canteens in the study area were included in the sample. It should be noted that this flexible method of data collection makes it possible to "adapt the interview plan during its course" while allowing direct access to the experiences of individuals (Gauthier, 2009, pp89-106). The sampling of respondents was carried out randomly taking into account all the districts having benefited from school canteens.

Two fundamental methods were used: a method close to multi-criteria analysis

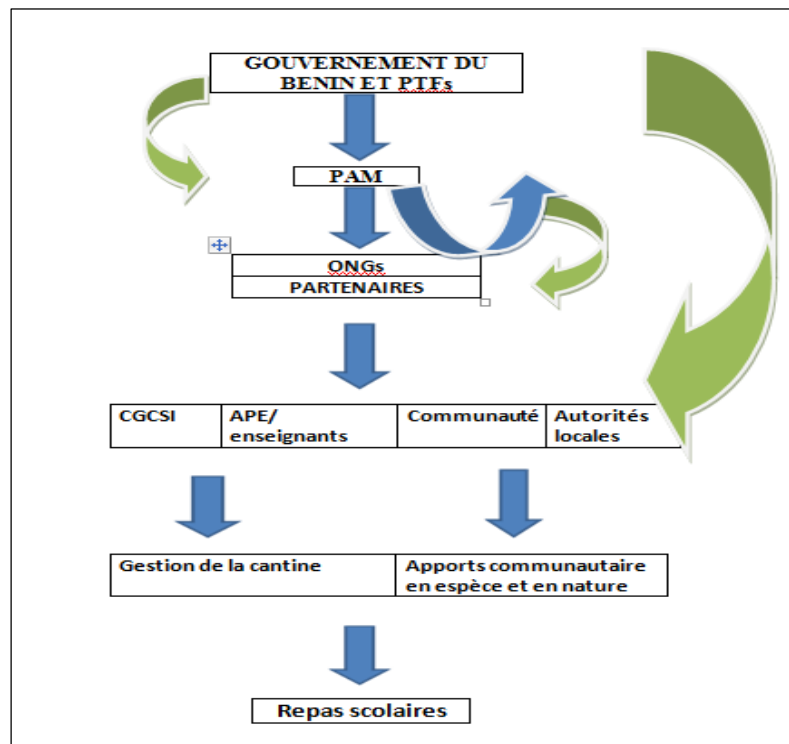
(analysis of actions and interactions between actors) and an application of the Delphi method. The central model used is similar to the multi-criteria analysis, but carried out by consulting all the actors (beneficiaries of school canteens, municipal and local authorities, heads of parents' offices, members of the canteen management committee) for the weightings : it is a property of the Delphi method. It was a question, after an analysis of the field information as well as the literature, of setting up criteria by family of constraints/domains (socio-cultural, economic, pedagogical). Three families of criteria are thus constituted. These are families of socio-cultural, economic and cyclical constraints. The weighting is done by constraint families on a scale of 1 to 10 per family. It was first a question of verifying that the judgments are expressed in a homogeneous way (ex: the canteen requires a contribution per child and allows the parents to go about their business).

## 2. RESULTS

Beyond proposing an answer to the question "how to (better) feed the pupils", the results obtained reveal that school canteens are at the heart of a development process which affects as much the right to food, agricultural development (supply, composition and frequency of meals) access to education, water and sanitation, hygiene and health but also the environment (waste management, cooking fuels). The additional activities to raise awareness and empower children are an opportunity to transmit know-how and life skills that can be used later according to the data collected.

## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiéomé

For a good management of the school canteen, the data collected reveal that in the Commune of Athiéomé, the World Food Program to which the Government of Benin entrusted the implementation of the initiative, associates the organizations of the civil society which implement activities to facilitate regular operation of the school canteen in all beneficiary schools. The flowchart shown in Figure 2 gives more details on the operating mode of canteens for rational and inclusive management around school canteens.



**Figure 2 : School canteen management model**  
**Source:** Authors, October 2021

Figure 2 explains how school canteens work. The Government of Benin finance from its own budget and with the help of Technical and Financial Partners the program called "PNASI". The WFP weaves partnership agreements with civil society organizations (NGOs) to support the management of canteens and social intermediation. Community radios are used for close communication about the activities of the school canteen program. NGOs support the establishment in schools of Integrated School Canteen Management Committees (CGCSI). Each committee, generally made up of 5 members, under the control and supervision of field agents from the partner NGOs, works in close collaboration with the Parents' Association, the communities and the local authorities so that the latter participate in the management by providing community aid (first necessity products for cooking on the one hand and financial aid for the purchase of said products on the other). According to the data collected, the commune of Athiéomé has a total of 59 public primary schools. For the 2022-2023 school year, the number of schools benefiting from school canteens is 57, i.e. nearly 97% in terms of coverage. Only two schools are not yet taken into account, i.e. around 3%.

The data collected reveals that school canteens improve school performance through the daily supply of healthy, nutritious and balanced meals. The canteens make it possible (i) to ensure the regular supply of school meals to pupils in public primary schools and to increase school performance ; (ii) to use the school as an entry point to bring together support for education, agriculture and health. According to the data collected, the school canteen, in its operational phase, uses a series of activities governed by two (02) main levers which serve as a code of conduct facilitating de facto the proper functioning of school canteens in the commune of Athiéomé. This is basically the "Monitoring the management of the school canteen" component and that of "community mobilization".

### 2.1. Monitoring the management of school canteens

The implementation of school canteens encompasses a series of steps from the development of the food allocation plan for schools to the service of quality meals to the beneficiaries of the 57 public primary schools in the municipality of Athiéomé. . The successful monitoring of the management of school canteens calls for a series of activities which, as a whole, are carried out efficiently and guarantee the success of this component. It is :

## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé

### 2.1.1. Development of the food allocation plan

This task is of paramount importance in that it conditions the provision of food in schools and their coverage until the end of each term. It must therefore be carried out according to the quarterly needs of each school on the basis of (i) the number of children who actually eat (taking into account the socio-economic considerations of each school), (ii) the period of coverage of food to be put in place and (iii) the existing stock (remainders of food) or not. It is a capital and rigorous exercise whose execution is ensured by the WFP via its partner NGOs. It emerges from the data collected that poor planning of food needs could cause early shortages (which could hinder the daily operation of the canteen), significant remainders likely to cause damage to food if they are not consumed in the deadlines. The food basket allows schools to offer a balanced diet to children so that they can optimally develop their cognitive potential. According to the data collected, the daily food basket provides each child with 745/Kcal/day/child, including 12% of Kcal of protein origin. It is made up of the 4 food groups mentioned above. Thus, the WFP ensures the quantity and quality of food that each child needs to grow normally. The food basket put in place is basically made up of cereals (maize and rice), legumes (beans or yellow peas) rich in vegetable protein, vegetable oil enriched with vitamins A and D and salt rich in iodine in the proportions described below:

**Table 2: Food basket set up by WFP per child per school day**

<i>Commodities</i>	<i>Cereals (Maize and Rice)</i>	<i>Legume (Yellow pea/cowpea)</i>	<i>Vegetable oil (vitamins A and D)</i>	<i>Iodized salt</i>
<b>Quantity</b>	150 g	30 g	10g	3 g

Source: Field survey, October 2021

### 2.1.2. Reception measures

The reception of food remains the responsibility of the school director and the beneficiary community, more particularly the management committee set up. It is done on the basis of a formal document serving as proof called a "consignment note". This document, which attests to this receipt by the beneficiary school, will only be signed by the director after verification of the quality and quantity of the foodstuffs mentioned therein. Thus, upon receipt, it is imperative to check that the packages received are not torn, wet or do not present a risk of damage or very close expiry. If necessary, it is important to specify in the observations part of the LV, the quantities actually received as well as the state of the quality of the foodstuffs received before signing it. It is essential to sew up or repackage torn and damaged packages and to carry out, if necessary, maintenance operations on damaged foodstuffs or at risk of damage before they are consumed. During unloading, certain strict rules must be respected for better conservation of the quality of the food received. This includes moving the products with care (not dragging them, dropping them or moving them with hooks or sharp objects), avoiding unloading the products in the rain (risk of embossing the corn for example) or at night (which could prevent quality control of the food received).

### 2.1.3. Stowage of food

The data collected shows certain logistical requirements in terms of food storage and maintenance. These are essentially the following no less important aspects:

- The pallets must be used as a support for the storage and stacking of food;
- A spacing of 0.7 to 01 meters must be respected between the food and the wall;
- A spacing of 1 to 02 meters must be maintained for the main aisle;
- The stowage of food is done commodity by commodity and it must preferably respect the method of alternating layers where all the layers of the pallet have the same number of bags;
- Each batch of foodstuff must be clearly identified by signs which clearly mention the foodstuff concerned and the quantity available.

### 2.1.4. Store maintenance

The store must be cleaned daily or failing that at least 03 times a week. A complete cleaning (wall, floor and roof) of the store is necessary at the end of each quarter when the food is almost exhausted. In addition, it is also necessary to ensure that the store which serves as storage for food is ventilated (windows and doors regularly open), that non-food items or packaging (bags, empty cans) are stored in such a way that they cannot serve as refuges for rodents and that the roof and the wall of the building do not show any cracks.

### 2.1.5. Compliance with direct debits (daily and weekly)

The CGCSI put in place, more precisely the storekeeper must be trained and scrupulously follow the prescriptions in relation to the samples and daily rations defined by child.

## **Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiéme**

### **➤ The good performance of management tools**

Training, refresher sessions and strict and continuous monitoring of the filling of management tools (menu book, stock book, general cash book, fund collection book by class, visit/mission book, etc.) must be done with the CGCSI, more particularly the master/mistress secretary who is responsible for maintaining the management tools. He must ensure compliance with the rules for filling in the various tools, the punctuality and quality of the documented data and also ensure the conformity of the information between the theoretical stock and that available in the store.

### **➤ Compliance with hygiene rules**

Cooks must be made aware of and followed up on compliance with hygiene rules, in particular on the 05 M (Method, Environment, Equipment, Labor and Raw materials) and the essential notions of hygiene. The installation of modern Hand Washing Devices (DLM) and tippy-taps, the awareness of learners on regular hand washing with soap and water, and moreover on personal and clothing hygiene, must be priorities. with regard to hygiene issues.

### **➤ Student catering**

Awareness and follow-up are essential for cooks and teachers on the punctuality of the service (at 12 noon), the variation of the menus, the conformity of the meals served to each learner on the basis of the defined rations and the meal service in the classrooms in order to guarantee healthy catering conditions for the beneficiaries.

### **➤ Nutrition education**

Regular sensitization on the essential notions in nutrition education, based on approved endogenous knowledge and local production are essential for cooks and AMEs for a substantial improvement in the nutritional quality of meals offered to learners.

### **➤ Culinary demonstrations**

Culinary demonstration sessions are of paramount importance in the acquisition of nutritional know-how insofar as they constitute practical cases making it possible to apply and master the nutritional notions received and essential to the offer of nutritious meals and quality. They are therefore not to be neglected.

## **2.2. Community Mobilization (Social Intermediation)**

Community mobilization encompasses all awareness-raising and advocacy and/or lobbying actions carried out to encourage and obtain the involvement of communities and authorities at various levels, for a considerable improvement in community contributions which are of various kinds (species or donation in kind). This component also allows for close collaboration between the various actors involved in the success of the school canteen: this is what justifies the integrated aspect of the program. This involvement of all stakeholders also requires the availability and day-to-day functionality of a dynamic management committee, each member of which properly plays the role assigned to it by the texts.

### **2.2.1. The Management Committee**

It is set up at the end of an elective general assembly where the community designates from among its members the persons able to assume the responsibilities related to the three positions out of the five available to the community in the committee. This committee, set up at the beginning of each school year and which has a renewable one-year term, is conventionally made up of a CGCSI President, a master secretary, a storekeeper, a treasurer and a student representative. It must consist of at least 02 women and can be expanded, always after a general assembly with the agreement and participation of the community. The role of each committee member must be clearly defined during the GA and each elected member must commit to being available and to properly assuming his responsibilities for the proper functioning of the school canteen.

### **2.2.2. Community contributions**

They are essential and remain an essential indicator of the involvement of communities and authorities at various levels (mayors, district chiefs, village chiefs, religious authorities) in the smooth running of school canteens. They are of various kinds and can be triggered at the end of a general assembly, door-to-door awareness-raising, advocacy, etc. Community contributions include:

- (i) Intakes in kind such as protein of animal origin (fry, meat, egg cheese, etc.), condiments, firewood, water, construction materials, gardening tools;
- (ii) Cash contributions such as daily subscriptions from parents, cash donations from the community (opinion leaders, local elected officials, people of good will);
- (iii) Labour contributions include volunteering cooks, cleaning the store, maintaining and securing food, involving communities in setting up gardens and/or school fields, livestock units and building infrastructure dedicated to the canteen (kitchens, improved stoves, shelf, gate, etc.).



## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé



**Photo 1: Community sensitization by representatives of CARITAS (WFP's NGO partner) in canteen schools for inclusive management.**

Photography, Authors, October 2021



**Photo 2: Establishment of school gardens by representatives of CARITAS (WFP's NGO partner) in the canteen schools of Athiémé.**

Photography, Authors, October 2021

Photos 1 and 2 illustrate the results of the activities of the NGO partner of the WFP in the implementation of the school canteen program in the commune of Athiémé in order to offer a quality meal to the children. These actions include raising the awareness of parents of students for sustainable support and the establishment of infrastructure dedicated to the canteen such as school gardens.

### 2.2.3. Integrated approach to school canteens

School canteens require close monitoring by the educational authorities (DDEMP, CSAS, CRP, CP) for regular and adequate operation. Good collaboration between NGO agents, education authorities and teachers is very important for the success of school canteens. It happens that teachers lack the will and motivation to accompany the canteen, some teachers may be absent from school, thus causing the non-functioning of the canteen. The involvement of school administration authorities facilitates the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The proper functioning of school canteens in Athiémé requires discussion and advocacy sessions with the municipal authority to encourage the establishment of essential infrastructure such as kitchens with permanent equipment, food storage warehouses (non-existent in some schools), water points, the construction of canteens as far as possible, the construction of appropriate classroom modules in schools that need them, the construction (or repair) of roads serving beneficiary schools and also the establishment of a budget line to support the operation of the canteen.

Awareness and advocacy towards the Departmental Health Directorates (DDS) and Health Centers must also be carried out to ensure the management of the medical examination of cooks in school canteens, and guarantee hygiene in all schools. As a priority, the schools benefiting from the canteen, through sensitization and follow-up carried out by the hygiene agents for the cooks, pupils and teachers. Health centers should also be called upon for the deworming of learners if necessary and also for the management of the nutritional status of malnourished people (moderate and acute cases).

Like the DDS, the Departmental Directorate for the Family through the Social Promotion Centers (CPS) supports destitute or needy schoolchildren or their parents (micro-grant). The Territorial Agricultural Development Agencies (ATDA) support in school canteens in the implementation of sustainability activities (fields, garden, fish farming, breeding, etc.). The water department is also a resource to be exploited to take full advantage of the integrated approach taken by school canteens. For the realization of long-range sensitization in order to have a greater impact on the target communities, interactive programs, round tables, reports and press releases on the provision of food or other activities, radio stations are privileged partners.

It should be noted on the basis of the data collected that the proper functioning of school canteens is dependent on a trilogy, namely: learners, cooks and dry rations of food. The involvement and strong participation of parents and members of the management committee are essential for the success of school canteens in Athiémé, all things allowing a substantial improvement in the meals offered to learners. The effectiveness of learners' daily subscriptions, the installation of school fields and gardens and accessibility to water are essential for the success of school canteens.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The results reported in this study reveal that school canteens are a gateway to local development with an emphasis on improving the living conditions of beneficiaries. Our work shows that the school, a pl

## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé

together all the forces with a view to instilling the necessary dynamics for harmonious and inclusive development. The learner spends most of his day at school, and is supposed to find there all the conditions required for his development. These results confirm the words of Ban Ki Moon (2015), for whom education is a fundamental right and the basis of progress in all countries. The development of the different components, standards and principles of school canteens allows us to see that a good organization reigns throughout the process of operation of school canteens. Nevertheless, the results achieved still leave challenges to be met (availability of water in all schools, involvement of communities, consistency of daily subscriptions, etc.). It is important to emphasize certain levers for the proper functioning of school canteens in the municipality of Athiémé.

With regard to the preparation and distribution of meals, a series of actions are carried out and relate respectively to (i) the proposal of balanced meals through the choice of suitable products taking into account food habits but also local agricultural resources, specific sanitary conditions in the area, nutritional balance (energy, proteins, micronutrients), current and future availability of foodstuffs, preparation time, water and fuel consumption and the impact on the environment ; (ii) the use of suitable equipment (utensils and furniture are necessary for cooking and serving meals) and the availability of drinking water and fuel, the nature of which may or may not limit the impact of the canteen on its environment (improved stove, biochar, gas, photovoltaic, etc.); (iii) inventory management based on the planning of weekly purchases (fresh products), monthly or quarterly (dry products). The use of properly stored dried or processed fruits and vegetables helps to guarantee nutritional intake out of season. Despite the existence of land and fruit species, the consumption of fruit during school meals is not systematic in all schools. It therefore requires a great deal of diagnostic work, in order to find an operational, urgent, rapid, reliable and lasting solution.

It would therefore be advisable to encourage the setting up of canteens on the basis of endogenous specificities as much as possible in Athiémé. This will mean that the communities will have to demonstrate self-sacrifice and unconditional determination to gradually dispense with the dry rations of food put in place. The objective will be to make the canteens autonomous through a better supply of local foodstuffs, a guarantee of inclusive, sustainable development.

For Ananga (2014), in Africa, many students drop out of school before completing the primary cycle and the educational problems and the way to address them vary according to the objectives of each country. The African Union (AU) through CESA Strategic Objective 2 aims to “build, rehabilitate, preserve educational infrastructure and develop policies that ensure a lifelong, healthy and supportive learning environment across all sub-sectors and for all, with a view to widening access to quality education”. To achieve this goal and with a firm resolve to strengthen school feeding as a critical action, AU Heads of State and Government established March 1 as Africa School Feeding Day, by Assembly Decision/AU/Dec.589(XXVI). These continental arrangements reflect the level of commitment of African states and their operationalization should be a source of joy for African communities. By implementing a social protection policy aimed at providing social safety nets and, with this in mind, the Government of Benin is making the school meals program the main instrument of social transfer in the education sector and an important factor of improving and maintaining access to education (WFP, PSP 2019-2023).

The multisectoral (integrated) approach taken by school canteens allows different ministerial departments to come together to work in perfect harmony to provide quality education to children based on (i) a policy dedicated to school canteens; (ii) the definition of the objectives and the design of a school feeding initiative which will have to be examined to ensure that they can respond to the real concerns of the beneficiaries; (iii) useful pilot programs to assess the feasibility of local food supply aimed at improving producers' access to markets and (iv) cost analyzes to identify localities requiring basic infrastructure (classrooms) essential for a school canteen program.

In some countries, school meals are combined with take home rations for the most vulnerable schoolchildren such as girls and orphans. The combination of the two methods has a greater impact on student enrollment and retention rates, cognitive abilities and nutrition. Take-home rations work like conditional cash transfers, since their value offsets the costs of sending children to school. These rations are also an effective mechanism for protecting the rights of children, particularly for young girls in localities where they are still denied access to education. Take-home rations increase their school attendance and attendance. A school meal promotes learning, and allows children to focus on their studies rather than on where their next meal will come from. But wanting to rely entirely on the school canteen as the only way to educate children is considered insufficient. One thing is to have the canteen, but another is to manage it well because of its demands. It is certain that good management is a factor of growth and development and therefore good results. Thus, good management of the school in general, and of food in particular, can influence the effect that the school canteen can have on keeping children in school. If the canteen service is of poor quality, it alone cannot play its role and the objective of getting children to attend school and staying there will not be achieved.

Teachers and cooks are key to the proper functioning of canteens. Due to the impoverishment of certain communities in Athiémé, these actors are called upon without necessarily wanting to, to use their own financial resources to buy condiments, in order to better serve the children who do not give their desired participation. Water is an essential input for cooking meals. Without water,



## Determinants of the Proper Functioning of School Canteens: Case of the Municipality of Athiémé

the garden, hygiene, drinking for children are impossible. The availability of water and the strengthening of communities in the construction of fields and gardens are no less important aspects for the proper functioning of canteens.

### CONCLUSION

School feeding policies are an essential component of an effective education system as children's health and nutrition influence their school attendance, learning ability and overall development.

The proper functioning of school canteens in the 57 beneficiary schools of the municipality of Athiémé is conditioned by the existence of key elements (dry rations of food, the availability of cooks, daily subscriptions, the availability of water) . A dynamic organization is implemented from the design of food allocation plans to the service of meals for children (from farm to fork).

Also, is it enough to have the presence of these key elements to speak of the proper functioning of school canteens? Is the proper functioning of school canteens in the municipality of Athiémé synonymous with nutritious meal offers?

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