

SCHOOL MEALS

Burundi
Case Study

BEYOND THE PLATE

How locally sourced school meals are creating economic opportunities in Burundi

NUTRITION • EDUCATION • FOOD SECURITY • COMMUNITY & CLIMATE RESILIENCE • LIVILIHOOBS • ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Context

School meal programmes are generally judged by what happens inside the classroom that includes whether children are sufficiently nourished to attend school, concentrate and continue their education.

But the journey of a school meal begins long before it reaches a child's plate. It begins in fields cultivated by smallholder farmers, in cooperatives bringing producers together and in local markets where crops are bought and sold.

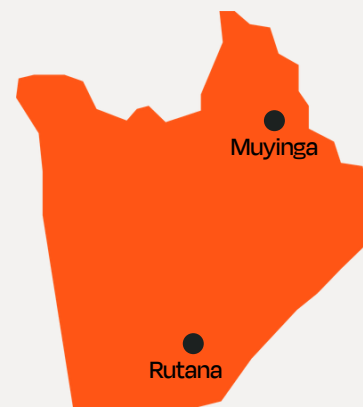
In Burundi, the Home-Grown School Feeding programme is bringing these different parts of the food system into a single model. School children receive diversified, nutritious meals, while local producers gain opportunities to earn an income and participate in a dependable supply chain.

This connection is particularly important in communities where reliable markets are limited and in refugee settings where declining humanitarian assistance has left households looking for alternative sources of income and greater economic self-reliance.

The Challenge Was Not Just Feeding Children

Historically, school-feeding programmes in Burundi relied heavily on food sourced externally and procured through centralised systems. These arrangements provided meals for children, but offered fewer opportunities for local farmers and communities to benefit economically from the investment.

At the same time, many smallholder farmers struggled to find reliable markets for their produce. Without predictable buyers, farming families faced continuing uncertainty over whether their crops would generate sufficient income.





2,000
cooperative
farmers impacted

Refugee households confronted an additional pressure as humanitarian assistance declined. The question was therefore broader than how to provide children with food at school. It was how to build a school-feeding system capable of supporting children while also generating value within the communities around them.

By enabling local procurement, the approach sought to ensure continued access to school meals while increasing programme responsiveness to local conditions.

Turning School Feeding into a Local Investment

The Home-Grown School Feeding programme connects participating schools directly with local farmer cooperatives. Instead of relying exclusively on food brought in from elsewhere, schools purchase commodities produced by nearby farmers.

This creates a more predictable market for agricultural produce and strengthens community-based supply chains.

World Vision complements local procurement with training and investments intended to strengthen agricultural production, diversify livelihoods, improve climate resilience and provide productive assets. More than **2,000 cooperative farmers** have received support to participate in the supply chain serving the programme's schools.

This is a significant change in emphasis. Communities are not positioned only as beneficiaries of a feeding programme. They become part of its design and delivery, producing and supplying the food that children eat. For participating farmers, the programme offers an opportunity to generate income while contributing to children's nutrition and education.





350 tonnes of food commodities provided to 44 schools by Tubehoneza Cooperative



USD 1,671 generated monthly by a cooperative of Congolese refugee women

A dependable market for local farmers

The experience of the Tubehoneza Cooperative in Muyinga illustrates the economic potential of this model.

The cooperative has **924 members** and supplies approximately **350 tonnes of food commodities to 44 schools**. The demand created through school feeding provides cooperative members with access to a stable market, helping support their incomes and agricultural livelihoods.

The benefits can extend beyond individual farmers and their immediate households. Donatien Ngendabanka, a member of the Susuruka Cooperative, describes how collective production has helped cooperative members support the wider community. *"As members began working together in agriculture and small businesses, they were also able to support people beyond their own households. When cooperative members cultivate and harvest together, they are able to contribute to and support the wider community."*
- Donatien Ngendabanka, member of the Susuruka Cooperative.

His account points to an important feature of the programme: economic activity is organised collectively. Farmers work together, gain access to a shared market and build relationships that can strengthen social as well as economic networks.

Refugees as producers and economic partners

At the Musenyi Refugee Site, the programme is also creating opportunities for refugees to participate in the local economy.

Nearly **10 livelihood cooperatives** operate alongside the school-feeding programme, supplying schools with locally produced food. Among them is the Susuruka Cooperative, a **23-member group** led by a Congolese refugee woman. It supplies maize and beans to schools taking part in the programme and receives training, monitoring and technical support from World Vision.

As humanitarian support has declined, the cooperative has become an important source of income for its members. Together, members generate up to **5 million Burundian francs, approximately USD 1,671, a month**.



For participating refugee families, the significance goes beyond income. They are contributing to the local food economy and helping supply meals to schools attended by their own children. The model therefore presents refugees not solely as recipients of assistance, but as producers, suppliers and contributors within local food systems.

Results and emerging outcomes

- **Children have access to a reliable source of food** - School meals provide children with a dependable source of food and support their attendance, concentration and continued participation in education.
- **Farmers can reach a more predictable market** - By purchasing food from local cooperatives, the programme creates regular demand for locally produced commodities. Farmers and cooperative members gain opportunities to sell their produce and generate income.
- **Local supply chains are being strengthened** - The model increases demand for local produce and supports community-based systems for producing and supplying food.

Complementary livelihood activities, technical training and cooperative development also provide participants with skills and assets that may strengthen their economic resilience beyond the immediate school-feeding programme.

- **Refugee communities are participating in local economies** - The involvement of refugee-led cooperatives shows how displaced communities can contribute to food production and school supply chains. At Musenyi, cooperative members are earning income while helping provide food for participating schools.
- **One investment is generating benefits across sectors** - The programme creates a reinforcing relationship between children's wellbeing and household livelihoods. Communities help feed their children while benefiting economically from the system supplying those meals.

The Bigger Lesson: Where Children's Wellbeing Meets Economic Resilience

- **Local procurement can turn school meals into an economic investment** - When schools purchase food from nearby farmers, spending on school meals can also support local production, rural livelihoods and community markets.



Burundi's experience shows that school feeding can function as both a social service and a practical driver of local economic activity.

- **Procurement works best when producers are supported** - A market alone may not be enough. Training, agricultural inputs, livelihood diversification, climate-resilience measures and productive assets help farmers and cooperatives participate more effectively in school-feeding supply chains.
- **Cooperatives can extend benefits across communities** - Cooperatives allow farmers to cultivate, harvest and supply food collectively. The experience described by cooperative members suggests that this collaboration can support economic activity beyond individual households and reinforce wider community networks.
- **Refugees can be active participants in local food systems** - Refugee and other vulnerable communities should not be viewed only through the lens of need. When provided with access to training, technical support and markets, they can become producers and suppliers contributing directly to local economies.

- **Children's wellbeing and local livelihoods can be advanced together** - The programme demonstrates that nutrition, education and economic resilience do not have to be pursued separately. A locally rooted school-meal system can support children while creating opportunities for the households and communities around them.

The Impact Extends Far Beyond the School Gate

In a conventional school-feeding model, the meal is often treated as the final outcome. In Burundi, it is also the beginning of a wider story.

It is a story about a farmer who has a buyer for a harvest. A cooperative that can organise around predictable demand. A refugee-led group earning income and contributing to the local economy. And a child receiving a meal produced, supplied and supported by the surrounding community.

The Home-Grown School Feeding programme brings those stories together. By sourcing food locally and investing in cooperative development, it links children's nutrition and education with stronger livelihoods and more resilient local food systems. Its central lesson is straightforward: when communities are trusted and equipped to participate, a school meal can carry benefits far beyond the school gate.





Looking Ahead

Burundi's experience shows how school feeding can become a platform for inclusive economic opportunity. Through local procurement, participating schools are connected with farmers, cooperatives and refugee communities. Children receive nutritious meals, while local producers gain access to markets, training and livelihood opportunities.

The approach reflects a commitment to improving children's wellbeing while strengthening the families and communities around them. It recognises that sustainable change is most likely when communities are not merely reached by a programme, but have a meaningful role in delivering it. A meal served at school may last for a day. A stronger local food system can help children, families and communities build towards a more resilient future.

RELATED RESOURCES



School Meals
Capacity Statement



Protecting Children &
Strengthening Resilience
Through Food Assistance



Food Assistance
Programming Global
Capacity Statement



Policy Brief |
Famine Prevention &
Food Security

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Javan Niyakire
Communications Manager,
World Vision Burundi
Email: javan_niyakire@wvi.org

Dr. Tendai Chigavazira
Programme Officer, School Meals,
Disaster Management,
World Vision International
Email: tendai_chigavazira@wvi.org

