



African Population and
Health Research Center

POLICY BRIEF



ENHANCING KENYA'S SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS THROUGH THE INCLUSION OF MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES (MSES) & SMALLHOLDER FARMERS (SHFS)

Executive Summary

School feeding programs in Kenya have become an essential platform for improving child nutrition, boosting education outcomes, and strengthening food systems, reaching more than 2.6 million learners in over 8,000 schools nationwide. While existing frameworks such as the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2011), the National School Health Policy (2018), and the National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (2017; 2022–2032) emphasize local sourcing, they lack explicit mechanisms for integrating Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) and smallholder farmers (SHFs) into school food supply chains. Centralized and complex procurement systems, limited aggregation, minimal institutional support, and restricted access to finance continue to hinder the participation of these key actors, despite their critical role in Kenya's food economy.

Innovative models such as Nairobi's Dishi na County demonstrate the potential for inclusive procurement, technology, and partnerships to transform school feeding into a catalyst for learning, nutrition and health, and local economic growth. Building on these lessons, this policy brief recommends harmonizing education, agriculture, and health policies; strengthening farmer and vendor associations; expanding

aggregation and storage infrastructure; enhancing technical capacity; and piloting inclusive procurement models at county level. With deliberate action, Kenya can leverage school feeding as a cornerstone of Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda, delivering sustainable gains in nutrition, education, rural livelihoods, gender equity, and resilient food systems.



Key Messages

- Existing school feeding strategies acknowledge local sourcing but there is minimal guidance on provisions to include MSEs and smallholder farmers in school food supply chains.
- Procurement systems remain centralized and complex, limiting inclusion of small-scale local actors.
- Minimal institutional coordination, limited aggregation mechanisms and lack of technical capacity and support hinders effective participation of smallholder farmers and MSEs in the school feeding value chain.
- Policy harmonization and capacity building are essential to scale inclusive school meal procurement models.
- Draft policies such as the National School Meals Policy and Nairobi County's "Dishi na County" regulations offer timely opportunities to formalize inclusion of local producers.
- Community-based examples, like the Dishi na County program, show the power of integrating technology and partnerships for scalable, efficient school feeding.
- Inclusive school feeding can transform local food systems, promote nutrition and health, educational outcomes, and gender equity.

Context: School Feeding in Kenya

Globally, school feeding programs are recognised as contributing to health and nutrition, education, agriculture and social security outcomes (WFP, 2022). In Kenya, these programs are known to be critical for improving education outcomes and child nutrition. They not only provide health and nourishment for the children but they have been proven to advance education through improved school enrolment, retention and completion, especially in arid and semi-arid regions as well as urban poor settings. County-level innovations like **Dishi na County feeding** over **200,000 children daily** with centralized kitchens and digital monitoring (Tap2Eat™), demonstrate that well-coordinated, locally anchored programs can boost attendance, retention and even employ thousands, especially women (Rockefeller Foundation, 2023). Increasingly, school feeding programs are being redesigned to also play a significant role in enhancing food security by harnessing the potential of public procurement to support local agriculture and food system resilience, equity, sustainability and adaptability. The linkage between school feeding programs (SFPs) and local food supply chains is bidirectional. Local food supply chains can play a critical part in shaping food patterns and consumption choices of school meals by delivering healthy and sustainable foods, and school meals programs are beneficial to these local food supply chains since they can provide a ready market for their produce (FAO & WFP, 2018). As of 2024, according to the Ministry of Education **2.6 million learners in 8,185 public primary schools** benefit from government-led school meals, aligned with the National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (NSMNS)

2022 - 2032 (Parliament of Kenya, 2024). This strategy promotes a Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) model that sources food locally, aiming to support both learners and the surrounding community. The model aligns with Kenya's devolved governance and its broader objectives in food security, agriculture, and economic empowerment.



8,185

public primary schools benefit from government-led school meals

200,000

children are fed daily by the Dishi na County initiative



Despite these advances, some gaps are still present that prohibit SFPs being a transformative approach to food systems. For instance, local Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) and small holder farmers (SHFs) who play a crucial role in Kenya's food system contributing significantly to job creation, income generation and the availability of nutritious food, are often excluded from procurement processes particularly in the school feeding value chain (Kamau, J. et al, 2025). This is mainly due to capacity limitations, minimal institutional support and limited access to procurement platforms (Kamau, J. et al, 2025, Kilelu, C. et al, 2017). Without their structured inclusion, the school feeding programs miss a key opportunity to strengthen rural economies, promote food system resilience, and achieve long-term sustainability.

Integration of MSEs and Smallholder Farmers in School Feeding Policy

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) under the Catalyzing Change for Healthy and Sustainable Food (CCHeFs) Impact Project, carried out a policy desk review to understand the policy landscape on the role of MSEs and SHFs in supplying healthy and sustainable food to SFPs. The review was based on the Walter and Gibson's (1994) framework of policy analysis examining the policy context, policy content, policy actors and policy-making processes. The review resulted in a desk review report that synthesized existing policies, program documents, and other relevant literature and documented the roles of MSEs and SHFs in SFPs. The report also identified key barriers and opportunities for enhancing their inclusion in SFPs.

Findings from the review showed that:

- Several policy documents, for instance, The Basic Education Act (2013) and Vision 2030, make reference to local sourcing yet do not address how MSEs and SHFs should be involved in school food supply chains.
- Strategies such as the National School Meals and

Nutrition Strategy (2017; 2022 -2032) and the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2011), emphasize community involvement and local procurement yet there is minimal guidance on how the integration of MSEs and SHFs can be operationalized.

- The lack of the structured supply frameworks and models such as the quota system (a model that sets aside a specific portion of the total food procurement for certain groups, such as smallholder farmers or local producers ensuring that these groups have access to the school feeding market) has led to uneven implementation across counties. Such models have proven to be successful, for instance, Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (**Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar (PNAE)**) requires that at least 30% of procurement comes directly from SHFs (International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, 2013). This kind of quota-based inclusion has proven successful in ensuring stable markets for local producers and supporting inclusive economic development. Kenya's procurement laws offer provisions for disadvantaged groups, however they offer minimal guidance within the school feeding context, which weakens their application.
- There is growing recognition of the role MSEs can play in food processing, value addition, and last-mile delivery. Similarly, SHFs can supply fresh, seasonal, and nutritious foods. However, weak aggregation systems, limited access to financial services, and inadequate infrastructure also pose significant barriers to market entry.

30%

of procurement comes directly from SHFs -

Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar (PNAE))



Implementation challenges were also noted. As much as there have been efforts to decentralize procurement in the school feeding supply chain in Kenya under the HGSP Programme, it has been met with mixed success. While some counties have adopted community-based approaches, others continue to rely on national-level suppliers due to a lack of local capacity and coordination. Furthermore, schools and procurement committees require training on how to engage local suppliers effectively, while SHFs and MSEs face a number of challenges, some of which include:

- Aggregation and logistics, as many operate in isolation, preventing them from meeting bulk demand and lack sufficient storage or transportation capabilities;
- Financial exclusion, where access to credit and finances remains a challenge, making it difficult for SHFs and MSEs to grow their business or participate in tenders and,

- Low awareness on policies and lack of technical knowledge on procurement processes, nutrition standards, and food safety, limiting their opportunities to participate in the school feeding value chain.

Moreover, these challenges have been amplified by minimal intersectoral coordination, for instance between critical stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Agriculture, and Health. It is noted that their roles are not always aligned at the county level, which leads to fragmented implementation. Therefore, without comprehensive support structures, the potential of the inclusion of SHFs and MSEs into the HGSP remains untapped.

Further to the desk review, the CHeFs Impact project convened a national policy dialogue in November 2024, with key stakeholders from government, including the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Cooperatives, Health, and the County Government of Nairobi; government agencies, including the National Council for Nomadic Education (NACONECK); civil society, academia, community groups, and international organizations. Discussions were focused on the findings of the policy review and entry points for policy review to include MSEs and SHFs in SFPs some of which include:

- The draft National School Meals Policy, which is currently awaiting finalization, proposes promoting locally available, diverse foods through procurement from SHFs and MSEs. In September 2025, the APHRC CHeFs Impact project team made inputs into the draft policy in this regard.
- County-level frameworks such as the Nairobi County's School Feeding Policy (Dishi na County) guidelines and integration with the County Integrated Development plans (CIDPs) to institutionalize school feeding.
- Existing laws and strategies like the Basic Education Act 2013, Kenya Vision 2030 and the Bottom - Up Economic Transformation Agenda can also mainstream school feeding into the broader food security and economic plans.
- Stakeholders also emphasized operational actions such as introducing procurement quotas (e.g., 30%) for SHFs and MSEs; formalizing food vendors associations to facilitate registration, aggregation, and training and aligning with urban agriculture laws to encourage school and community gardens, as seen in planned kitchen gardens under [Dishi na County](https://nairobi.go.ke/dishi-na-county-school-feeding-program)¹.



1. Dishi na County <https://nairobi.go.ke/dishi-na-county-school-feeding-program>

In conclusion, Kenya's progress in strengthening SFPs presents a powerful opportunity to transform education, nutrition and health, local food systems and economic growth. While current policies emphasize local sourcing, greater inclusion of MSEs and SHFs can unlock even broader benefits. By embedding clear mechanisms for their participation through improved procurement frameworks, aggregation, and cross-sector coordination, school feeding can serve as a catalyst for multiple development goals. This integration would not only enhance nutrition and learning outcomes for learners but also expand markets for local producers, create jobs, and strengthen rural economies. With deliberate action, school feeding can evolve into a cornerstone of Kenya's Vision 2030 and Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda, driving inclusive growth and building resilient, sustainable food systems.

Recommendations

In order to enhance SFps with the inclusion of SHFs and MSEs, below are recommendations for consideration:

- 1. Mandate Local Procurement Quotas:** Introduce procurement targets (e.g., At least 30% as is the case in Brazil and as proposed by stakeholders in Kenya) for sourcing food from MSEs and SHFs. The Ministry of Education should embed these within the National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (NSMNS) 2022–2032 implementation guidelines.
- 2. Strengthen MSE and SHfs Aggregation Models:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, should invest in farmer organizations and local cooperatives that can coordinate production, post-harvest handling, and distribution. This will also encourage joint ventures between MSEs and producer groups.
- 3. Improve Infrastructure and Access to Finance:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development should lead efforts to expand aggregation centers, cold storage facilities, and farmer infrastructure, working in partnership with the Ministry of Cooperatives and MSME Development, the National Treasury, and county governments to ensure credit facilities and tailored support reach small producers.
- 4. Enhance Capacity and Technical Assistance:** The Ministry of Education should lead capacity-building efforts for county officials, school boards, and local suppliers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health on nutrition and food safety standards and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development on procurement and supplier engagement.
- 5. Coordinate Intersectoral Action:** The Ministry of Education should lead the creation of inter-sectoral task forces composed of representatives from the Ministry of Education, Health, Agriculture, Cooperatives and Trade to harmonize policy actions across those sectors. This will also enhance coordination among ministries, counties, and partners for streamlined integration of SHFs and MSEs into SFPs.
- 6. Pilot Inclusive Procurement Models:** The Ministry of Education should lead the piloting of inclusive procurement models in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, county governments, and development partners to test localized supply chains, monitor outcomes, and scale best practices.



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