

## Providing healthy, high-quality, locally-produced and sustainable school meals



Teams of parents take turns preparing meals at a public primary school in the Ambositra district © H. David-Benz, CIRAD

School meals are a useful mechanism to assist in the territorialisation and greening of food systems. On the one hand, they influence the eating habits and nutritional education of many young people and, on the other hand, strengthen the supply of healthy, sustainable, and high-quality local products. At the territorial level, they help drive strategies and cooperation between public and private players in education, health, agriculture, and development.

**C**IRAD and its partners are conducting research in contrasting island contexts, in the Antilles and the Indian Ocean, where malnutrition is seen in its different forms.

School meals are widespread only in the French Overseas Territories (DROMs). In other Indian Ocean islands, catering is limited to highly vulnerable populations or pilot projects in areas where food supply is particularly challenging. But in all these places, the challenge is to improve the diversity of children's diets, use a greater quantity of quality locally-sourced products, particularly fresh produce.

### Projects involved

- **RESTOMART** - Barriers and levers to locally-sourced food in mass catering in Martinique (2021-2022). This project aims to identify players in mass catering and to analyze their activities and interactions on the island of Martinique. It also aims to understand the constraints facing stakeholders, particularly in their purchasing decisions, forced upon them by the nature and origin of foods, as well as to identify, discuss, and propose mechanisms for improving the supply of locally-sourced food.
- **TERRITOIRES DURABLES 2** (Martinique Ambition, 2025-2027). This local project supports stakeholders in their efforts to increase supplies to school catering of fruits and vegetables from low-pesticide production areas, or from certified organic farming or other standards promoting sustainable practices, compatible with the EGAlim law.
- **ITALIQ** - Technological and organizational innovations for quality food (2023-2026). This project is designed to improve food security in the Indian Ocean by improving the availability of varied, healthy foods in local and regional markets. It provides a fresh perspective and new initiatives for Indian Ocean countries for sourcing locally-produced foods for school meals.
- **SADUR** - Sustainable food systems in an island environment (2023-2026). This project aims to strengthen the sustainability and sovereignty of the food system on Reunion Island, via agroecological transition, to provide healthy, sustainable, locally-sourced and accessible food for all. In particular, the project analyzes how best to organise procurement structures between suppliers, school catering managers and support players to simplify the purchasing of quality local products, as well as promoting the benefits public policy can play.



## Lessons learned from the projects

- In Martinique, as in Réunion, local produce is limited, seasonal, and subject to significant climatic hazards. Competition from imported products, complex public procurement procedures, and unattractive payment terms for producers all serve to hamper local sourcing. However, professional and inter-professional organizations as well as the use of facilitators between local suppliers and caterers are helping to increase use of local products. Combined with awareness-raising, these initiatives are also helping to change students' attitudes toward fresh local produce and vegetarian dishes.
- In Madagascar, the World Food Programme is backing a new school meal supply model. This model is based on a combination of imported staple foods (rice, oil, pulses), cash transfers to purchase fresh local produce, and parental contributions through meal preparation and agricultural production on community plots. It has resulted in diversification of diets and has generated positive community dynamics connecting the areas of education, nutrition, and agriculture.



Mealtime at a public elementary school in the Ambositra district (Madagascar). The refectory has been damaged by bad weather, and the children are eating in their classroom  
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## Recommendations to policy makers

- Increase local legume production. Diversifying school meals requires a highly diverse local agriculture, particularly fresh produce. This includes the fruits and vegetables, but also legumes, essential for a balanced and inexpensive protein intake and for soil fertility. In French Overseas Territories (DROMs), legumes are widely used in traditional recipes, but are rarely locally produced.
- Simplify administrative procedures for public procurement in the DROMs to make them accessible to as many producers as possible.
- Promote organizations that facilitate coordination between local supply and demand for school meals (professional organizations, purchasing groups, etc.).
- Develop school meal programs with local producers and schemes promoting diversified agriculture and agroecological practices.

Find out more



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