



Evidence for Sustainable Human Development Systems in Africa
Evidence pour les Systèmes de Développement Humain Durable en Afrique

Evaluation of *Bèsèn Diannou* Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement
(LRP) Project

Endline Evaluation and Comparison Study Report
Executive Summary

Prepared for: **Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Benin**
Cotonou, Benin

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Evaluation Team

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All evaluation team member declare they have “no conflict of interest”.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) or the United States Government.

Introduction

The Bèsèn Diannou Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP) project, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Benin, supports the establishment and functioning of school canteens in government schools of N'dali, Perere, Parakou and Tchaourou districts in the Borgou Region. The purpose of the project is to develop a replicable and scalable model for decentralized school feeding through effective local procurement and distribution of commodities with the aim of providing students with nutritious and locally procured meals (rice, shea, cowpea and maize) from Producer Associations. CRS and its sub-recipient Union Régionale des Producteurs Borgou-Alibori (URP) worked with school management committees (referred to in French as *Comité de Gestion des Ecoles* (COGES)), commune authorities, central government agencies and private partners to achieve project goals. The specific goals of the Bèsèn Diannou LRP project were to:

- Increase the capacity of schools, school management committees, and the Government of Benin to effectively and efficiently procure local commodities to supply school feeding programs, promoting the sustainability of school feeding;
- Strengthen farmer groups' ability to provide high-quality, nutritious commodities and connect them to school feeding programs; and

Improve nutrition of students by increasing access to and use of various, high-quality, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods in school meals.

3. Methodology

The endline evaluation uses a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative data, qualitative investigations in the form of individual interviews and group discussions, and direct observations.

Impact Evaluation: Quantitative Component

- **Schools:** The same schools sampled during the baseline study were kept; that is 35 intervention schools and 35 control schools.
- **COGES:** The COGES questionnaire was administered to all 70 sample schools even though we did not expect to have formal COGES in schools without a canteen.
- **Students:** The selection of students followed the same procedure as during baseline. In each of the 70 sampled schools, 50 students were randomly selected among all grade 2-6 students.
- **Producer Associations:** The sample consisted of 24 Producer Associations in the intervention group, and 10 Producer Associations in the control group.

Impact Evaluation: Qualitative Component: The qualitative component consisted of individual interviews and group discussions.

Direct Observation and Infrastructure Inventory Component: Direct observation of COGES cooks and storekeepers were conducted to evaluate the level of application of good food

management practices. School infrastructure inventory was also conducted by direct observation.

Comparison Study: Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from the LRP, MGD and WFP staff.

4. Results: Impact Evaluation

Producer Associations: About 75% of Producer Associations in the intervention group **demonstrated an increased organizational capacity**, against 50% in the control arm. Regarding the **use of improved production techniques**, 17 individual producers (78.7%) received training on production practices for example, and out of those, 15 (84.5%) put the training into practice. The percentage of Producer Associations who **used URP's Market information system (MIS)** remained unchanged over time in the control group (at 30%), but increased from 11.8% to 31.8% in the intervention group. However, the resulting impact estimate of 20 percentage points is not statistically significant at the level of 10%.

COGES: Close to 50% of COGES achieved a score of 80 or higher in **canteen and stock management**; 36% achieved a score of 80 or higher in **organizational capacity**; and close to half of COGES achieved a score of 80 or higher in **adoption of good practices in terms of hygiene in food preparation**.

Students: The percentage of students who **consumed the same foods at school and at home** increased from baseline to endline in both the intervention schools (+11.6 percentage points) and in the control schools (+5.3 percentage points). The impact estimate of 6.4 percentage points is statistically significant at the level of 5%. The percentage of students receiving a **minimum acceptable diet (MAD)** decreased from baseline to endline in both arms, and the impact estimate, though negative is not statistically significant at the level of 10%. The percentage of students who **attended school at least 80% of time** is roughly the same across the two study groups, at around 98.5%.

5. Results: Comparison Study

Cost differences: In terms of **commodity cost per MT**, the LRP system has higher average commodity cost per MT on three out of the four target commodities, compared to the MGD system. The average **commodity cost per meal and per student** is lower in the LRP model, at \$0.14 (or 84 CFA Francs), against \$0.19 (or 109 CFA Francs) in the MGD system. For specific comparable meals, commodity cost of Dambou/Zampiti and pasta (maize/soy pasta) is about 50% lower in the LRP system, while the commodity cost of wake and rice is lower (by 7% and 15%, respectively) in the MGD system.

Time differences: The total time (from contracting to delivery to beneficiary schools) is substantially shorter in the LRP model, compared with the WFP and MGD systems. Purchase contracting time is the shortest in the WFP system and the longest in the MGD system. Time for

delivery to schools is almost the same in both the LRP and MGD programs, and substantially longer in the WFP, presumably because of its larger coverage of schools.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this impact evaluation, as described in this report, demonstrate that the LRP model that relies on local commodities and procurement processes for school canteen meals is a viable method for feeding students quality meals while contributing to the local economy. Through the LRP project, capacities of Producer Associations and COGES were significantly strengthened, contributing to timely delivery of high-quality commodities that were adequately delivered to students during the school day. While there was no measured increase in minimum acceptable diet or attendance among students receiving these meals, qualitative data indicates that the provision of school meals to students improved their day-to-day lives. The evaluation put forwards the following recommendations:

1. Evaluate PA training needs with members of these associations and involve all members during training.
2. Consider contractual models that incorporate access to financial resources for producers before the sales process.
3. Design Contracts with PAs in a format of 1 to 2 pages maximum and in simple and understandable terms that allow producers to better control contract processes.
4. Respect the deadlines set in the contracts, particularly with regard to the purchase and payment of invoices.
5. Consider duly signed partnership protocols between the main institutional actors of the project.
6. Transfer supervisory functions to government entities to increase likelihood of sustainability.
7. Involve community leaders in the management of school canteens (COGES).
8. Encourage governmental authorities to review current plans, programs or school feeding strategies at national level and to allocate financial resources to the town halls for the management of school canteens.
9. Promote an integrated approach including the WASH component.
10. Reduce financial contributions and promote in-kind contributions from parents.
11. Identify means of motivation for cooks and storekeepers to maintain compliance and quality.
12. Consider a greater diversity of dishes, combining local meals with some imported products for school canteens.
13. Obtain student feedback and opinion regarding meal plans at the local level to ensure greater satisfaction in regard to meal quality.
14. Solicit a sufficient number of cooks to avoid school girls' involvement in cooking activities.