



# Reflecting on implementation dynamics in the Ghana School Feeding Programme: Towards Building Resilience in Service Delivery

# Reflecting on implementation dynamics in the Ghana School Feeding Programme: Towards Building Resilience in Service Delivery

DRAFT REPORT

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Institute for Educational Planning and Administration

&

Center for Global Development

## **Foreword**

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This research report has been prepared to serve as the closure document for the study on Building Resilience in the Ghana School Feeding Programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) under their Covid Collective portfolio of projects. The Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) & Center for Global Development (CGD) partnered to work on research around COVID-19-induced school and Early Childhood Education (ECE) centre closures in Ghana., This study of the Ghana school feeding programme gathered inputs from a variety of stakeholders in the programme. As such, issues related to operational resilience, coping strategies, and impacts on beneficiaries and implementation agents of systemic shocks and rising prices, are explored. The study highlights three key areas under the topic of school meals: relevance, operational features, and monitoring and accountability.

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# 0. Executive summary

School feeding programmes have grown in popularity in many low- and middle-income countries, including Ghana, over the past decade. However, recent developments in global and domestic economic environments have exposed key vulnerabilities for sustaining such programmes. This research explores programme features that might impact the performance and sustainability of the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP). By gathering data from implementation and beneficiary stakeholders, the research project seeks to establish the degree of variation at the level of the smallest possible unit of analysis (e.g. school or district) in the following variables: programme outputs, procurement and supply chains, financial management, monitoring, social and political accountability. While the findings in this descriptive report can be informative to domestic policymakers and development partners, the underlying data can be used to answer further analytical questions on programme characteristics in which future interventions could be applied to improve programme outcomes and sustainability.

The study is unique in the variety of key stakeholders from whom it directly collected data. The survey covered 376 urban and rural schools participating in the GSFP in 15 districts. Data was collected from school heads, caterers, parents of children enrolled in sample schools, pupils and district SHEP coordinators. Overall, the surveys were able to achieve an average response rate of 86 percent across all five categories of respondents. Some of the key questions on programme performance and accountability were posed to multiple types of respondents (for instance school heads and parents) to allow for triangulation and more balanced aggregation of subjective assessments.

The school level analysis reveals that the GSFP is largely targeted at areas experiencing high levels of poverty, as set out in the policy framework. This is reflected in the assessment of pupils, the largest proportion of whom believe they would go hungry if meals were not provided. A simple indicator showing that the programme is well targeted is the high level of take-up, measured by the share of pupils who regularly consume the meals. The value of the on-site school meals as a critical social safety net tool is also evident in the very high share of parents that would prefer their children to continue to receive meals, rather than receiving alternative social protection arrangements. However, this excellent targeting is undermined by the lack of reliability of provision. We can see this from the share of pupils who reported food running out, or the number of parents who continue to provide money for food. The triangulated evidence reveals that insufficient portion size is the main manifestation of the challenges the GSFP is experiencing, as a result of high inflation and lack of fiscal space.

Due to the outsourced or caterer-based model of school meals provision that the GSFP has adopted, programme performance can also greatly depend on the nature and functioning of the independent service providers. A large majority of the caterers involved in the GSFP also operate another small business, which could be a signal of entrepreneurial inclination, or at least the availability of a buffer to manage cash flow problems. However, the large and overt role political patronage plays in the recruitment of caterers is puzzling. Due to the rudimentary supply chains dominated by local vendors who often provide suppliers credits in exchange for above-market price, most caterers are exposed to market shocks in the major food items that constitute a bulk of their procurement such as rice and beans. This is

exacerbated by the highly irregular pattern of government reimbursements to caterers. Generally, the evident lack of ancillary business development and financing packages designed to support the small enterprise caterers seems to have contributed to inefficiencies in the GSFP.

Finally, the survey shows that the role of monitoring school meal provision is shared between school staff and district officials. Despite the existence of a basic monitoring framework, there appears to be significant inconsistencies in how the process of monitoring is understood and applied by the relevant stakeholders across participating schools and districts. Parents are largely absent from the monitoring process of the GSFP. More importantly, there is little in the form of formal mechanisms to hold caterers accountable to the service provided. The failure of the government to hold up its end of the bargain by financing the programme adequately and on a timely basis might have denied it the leverage required to enforce accountability.

Overall, the study shows that the GSFP continues to play a crucial role as a tool for preventing hunger in schools despite significant macro-fiscal headwinds. Apart from increasing funding for the programme to the extent the fiscal space allows, ironing out inefficiencies and potential inequities could make the programme more resilient. It is also crucial to improve the operating ecosystem with private sector development initiatives targeted at relevant service providers across the school feeding value chain.

# 1.0 Background to the Study

The section has been structured to provide the motivation for conducting the present study. Specifically, the drive and state of social services provided through the school meal provision and matters related to it has immense policy and research importance. The importance is enhanced by the present trends in economics as well as research indicators suggesting an increased attention to the sector. The school feeding otherwise referred to as school meal provision has not been explored carefully taking into consideration the elements emphasised in our study. Thus, we begin with policy relevance for the study and provide the reader with a justification for the study we carried out. We next consider the technical argument for the study and provide objectives to guide the study overall.

## 1.1 Policy relevance

In recent years, many countries have been experiencing fiscal shocks and economic downturns resulting from the combination of the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical shocks. According to the World Bank (2022), between February and June 2022 nearly 94% low-income countries and 89% lower-middle income countries experienced inflation in food prices, some in double digits. A rise in food prices imposes constraints on household budgets and induces households to adopt costlier coping strategies at a household level, often causing them to reduce expenditure on education and health in favour of food items (Omotayo, Omotoso, Daud, Omotayo, & Adeniyi, 2022; Danso-Abbeam, Asale, & Ogundeji, 2023). The opportunity costs for sending children to school rises for poorer families, and instances of children dropping out of school to engage in paid labour increase. Girls in particular tend to face more extreme outcomes across all domains, and end up spending more time on domestic or income generating responsibilities.

Particularly within the context of economic downturns such as the ones being experienced by countries like Ghana, school feeding programmes are an important social safety net to help households cope with adversity. School feeding programmes are already operational at some scale in a vast majority of low- and middle-income countries, and can be deployed relatively quickly at a large scale to mitigate the effects of economic and environmental shocks on vulnerable households. The global evidence base on school feeding shows that low and lower-middle income countries employ school meals to achieve a series of objectives in education, nutrition, social protection and agricultural development (Wang, Shinde, Young, & Fawzi, 2021). The impact of school feeding programmes on educational outcomes is also clear - they can help children stay in school, and contribute to their learning, through better nutrition and its impact on cognitive abilities.

As children return to schools after prolonged periods of COVID-19 related closure in an inflationary economic environment, they are facing both a learning crisis as well

as increased household poverty. In our previous study in Ghana, we found both temporal and geographic variations in the provision of school meals in the sample of schools we surveyed. Overall, we found that the number of schools providing school meals in Ghana has reduced since schools have reopened after COVID-19 closures. Schools in urban areas, public schools, and schools in Coastal zone are more likely to be offering free meals. Especially in the Coastal zone, school closures meant children ate fewer meals, and currently 1 in 4 children still eats fewer meals than before the March 2020 school closures (Grant, Achyut, Akello, Alam, Ayegboyin, Baluku, ... & Zayapragassarazan, 2023).

Ghana's SFP has been operational since 2005 and currently serves over 2.6 million children across 9,000 pre-tertiary institutions, providing an essential social safety net for the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable population. The thrust of the GSFP is to contribute to poverty reduction and food security while increasing school enrolment, attendance, and retention. There is rigorous empirical evidence showing that the programme has been effective in improving school participation and test scores particularly among children from poor households and girls (Aurino et al, 2019). However, for such a large programme that has been implemented at scale, there is a dearth of analysis on implementation fidelity beyond anecdotal evidence reported in the news media.

Given this background alongside the increasingly precarious economic climate in Ghana, it is critical to understand the design and operational features of the national school feeding programme that might have implications for its efficiency, resilience and sustainability. In particular, we are interested in exploring district or school level variations in factors related to quality, consistency and sustainability of the programme. Going beyond the basic questions of efficacy and opening the black box of programme implementation is crucial to generating evidence-based strategies to make the programme more sustainable.

The study sheds light on a whole gamut of issues related to the implementation of the GSFP which could serve as policy inputs to government and civil society actors. The primary audience of the report are the line ministries responsible for the social policy outcomes targeted by the programme: social protection, education, health and agriculture. The primary stakeholders for school feeding in Ghana at the government level include:

- the School Feeding Secretariat (SFS), the primary implementation agency for the Ghana SFP
- the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCP), within which the SFS is hosted, for the primary function of school feeding as a social safety net
- Ministry of Education (MoE), for the established links between school feeding and educational outcomes



- Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, for the impacts of local procurement of food stuffs (i.e. home-grown school feeding) on the local economy. This Ministry was also responsible for programme oversight from 2005-2015.
- Others include the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) and Ministry of Health (MoH remain allied ministry who share in the research and development of schools meals sector

In addition, the study findings are also expected to inform the policies and decisions of a broad range of policymakers from finance to local government. As a detailed case study of the caterer-based model of school feeding, the report can be a useful reference for international actors in school feeding space offering relevant lessons that could serve as inputs in similar programmes elsewhere.

## 1.2 Goals, objectives, and primary research questions

The primary goal of the current research is examining factors affecting the performance of Ghana's highly decentralised school feeding programme under increasing cost pressures and constrained fiscal space. The thrust of this objective is to understand the resilience environment of school feeding as provided and related by the key stakeholders engaged countrywide. In that regard the operational objective is to seek to understand the role of the GSFP in mitigating the impact of the ongoing economic crisis on parents and schoolchildren. It is important to put the investigation in the context of the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on households and the economy with the thrust of shaping the resilience narrative.

Combining primary and secondary data analysis, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the quality of school meals provision in the GSFP as viewed by different sets of actors involved in the programme?
2. What are the main sources of variation in the design and operation of the GSFP that could influence its performance and sustainability?
3. What are the prevailing monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the school and district levels?

## 2.0 Methodology

The section 2 is structured to deal with the methods and procedures advanced in carrying out the study and reporting the same. Thus, we begin with study design and provide the relevant justification for the choices we made in that regard. The tools used for data collection and how they were deployed were advanced. We additionally provided the context of the study and related parameters including sample size and sampling procedures utilised.

### 2.1 Study design

The underlying research design for the study is descriptive. The main method of data collection is quantitative survey. But the survey is designed in such a way that the resulting observational data could be used to answer analytical questions as well as lay the ground for future experimental studies. This choice of design is strategic as the study seeks to explore the state of play of the school feeding programme in the country with the view to examining its potential for sustainability.

Considering that the analytical objective of the research is examining the link between programme features and the performance of school feeding at the local level, it is critical to have sufficient variation in potentially relevant programme features across the study sample. As such, the design and operationalization of the study was informed by the need to establish the degree of variation at the level of the smallest possible unit of analysis (e.g. school or district) in the following variables: school feeding modality, supply chain, financial management, monitoring, social and political accountability. Overall, five tools were deployed, namely, a questionnaire and four interview guides as presented in Figure 2.1 pictorially.

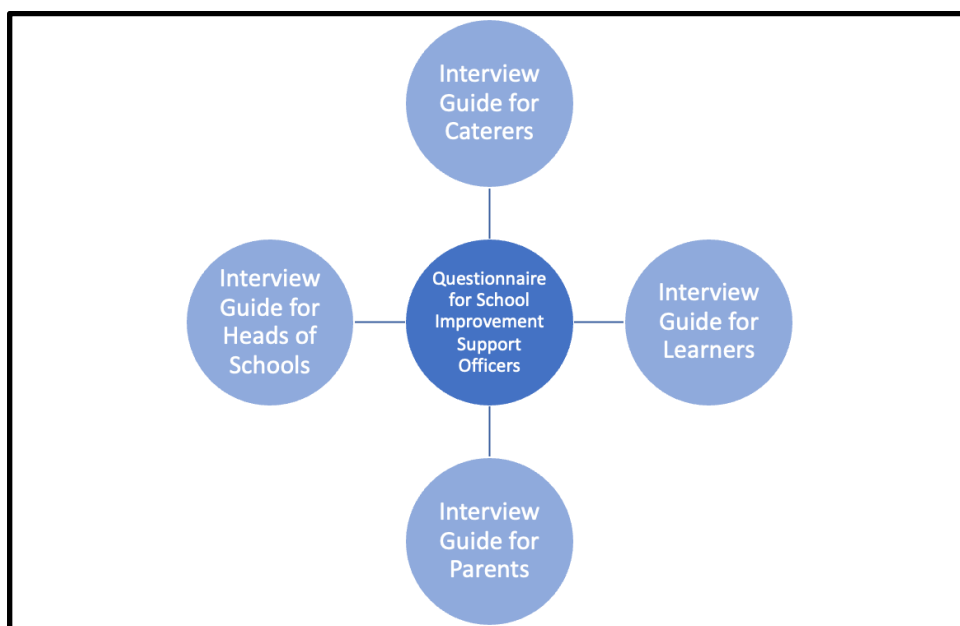


Figure 2.1: Instruments Deployed for for the field work

Whereas the School Improvement Support Officers (i.e. SHEP coordinators) responded to a questionnaire, Caterers, Parents, heads of schools and learners took individual interviews delivered over a period of two weeks.

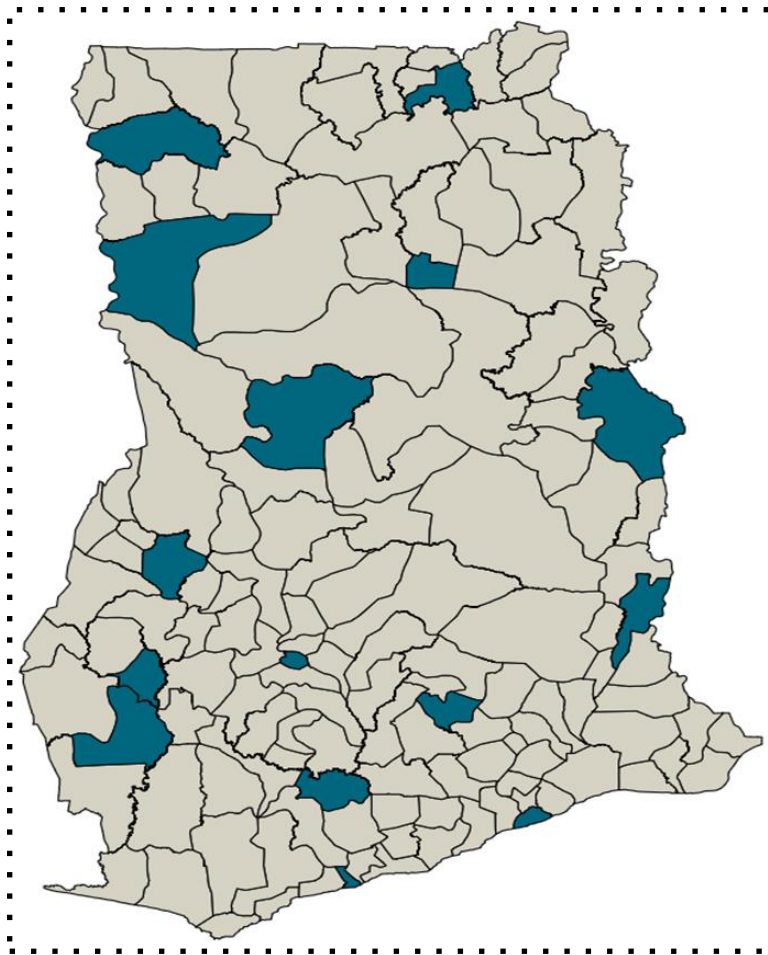
## 2.2 Study Context, Sampling Size and Sampling Procedures

The sampling approach for this research was a multi-stage approach consisting of both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. First, the country was zoned into three: the Savannah, Forest, and Coastal zones. Five Metropolitan, Municipal, and Districts (MMDs) were randomly selected from each of the zones. Out of each MMD, 25 to 30 schools were systematically selected based on meeting the criterion of having an active and operational school feeding programme. Therefore, each of the zones comprised around 120 schools (i.e. 5 districts by 25 schools) to 150 schools (i.e. 5 districts x 30 schools) participating in the research.

The list of public schools that offered school feeding under the GSFP was extracted from the 2021 Ghana EMIS data, made available to the research team by the Ministry of Education. Population proportionate sampling was conducted to determine the number of schools required to be surveyed from each sampled district. Where necessary due to insufficient total numbers of eligible schools in the sampled district, neighbouring districts were included as well. Where possible, survey schools were then randomly selected from the total list of eligible schools based on the number required for population proportionate sampling.

In each school, the survey consisted of structured interviews with the school head, caterer responsible for school feeding, parents and students. School heads were informed in advance that the enumerator will be visiting the school for surveys on any given day. The school heads were requested to invite the caterer to the school for the survey. The school heads were requested to invite 4 parents of students from primary grades (grades 2, 4, 6) to the school for in-person survey of parents. Thus we expected to survey 1600 parents in total, corresponding with 400 schools. Both the caterers and parents who came to the school for the survey were offered travel and transportation claims equivalent to \$3 per person / 35 Ghanaian cedi, to encourage their participation.

We also collected feedback on school meals from 15 students, randomly selected by the enumerator at the time of the school visit, using n-th digit sampling procedure based on school lists of students from Grade 4 and below, Grade 5, and Grade 6, in order to get a representative distribution across primary grades with 5 students selected from each group. Consent for students' surveys was acquired from their parents over the phone. The sampled districts in Ghana that were involved are presented in Figure 2.2.



*Figure 2.2: Sampled districts in Ghana*

Through surveys with school headteachers we gathered information on the provision of school meals at their school from the lens of accountability, consistency and sustainability of the programme. From students we asked for short feedback on the meals offered to them at school. From randomly selected parents who had children in grades 2, 4 or 6 at the school, we gathered their perspectives on provision and take-up of school meals at their children’s school. In addition, while at the school we also conducted surveys with the caterers to inquire about quality of school meal delivery as well as operational details including financing and procurement. We were also able to gather data from conducting key informant interviews with School Health and Education Programme (SHEP) coordinators from across Ghana to understand the coverage, monitoring and accountability mechanisms of the school feeding programme at a district level.

We have collected data on the subjective assessments of various dimensions of the programme from multiple sets of stakeholders listed above. Since some of these responses could suffer from subjective biases or lack of accurate information, the fact that multiple types of respondents with a variety of interests and vantage points have provided their assessment of school feeding in a single school will allow triangulation and construction of composite measurement of performance. Particularly the representation of parents and students as end users, caterers as

suppliers and school heads as immediate regulators is expected to result in a more reliable measurement of performance. A mapping of the questionnaires to the various themes explored in this report is available in Appendix 1.

**Sample description**

In total, the surveys were able to achieve an average response rate of 86 percent across all five categories of respondents as shown in Table 2.1.

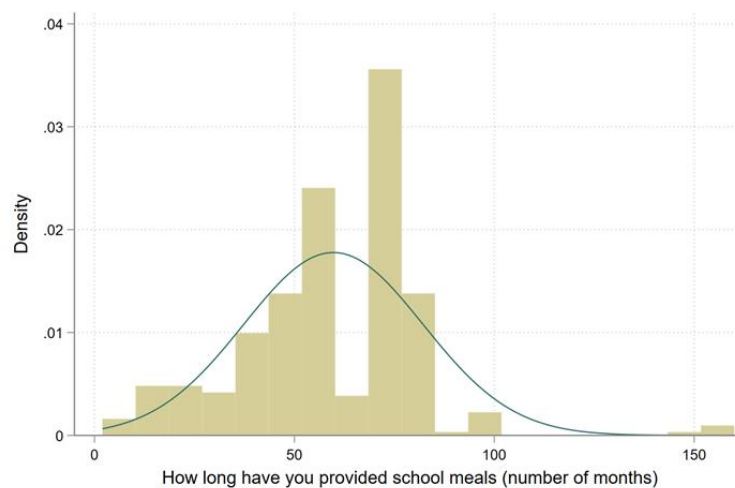
*Table 2.1: Sample size per respondent type*

<b>Respondent type</b>	<b>Target sample size</b>	<b>Actual sample size</b>	<b>Response rate</b>
Caterers	400	376	0.86
School headteachers	400	338	0.84
Parents	1600	1425	0.89
Students	6000	5094	0.85
SHEP coordinators	261	231	0.88

Key characteristics of respondents for each of the stakeholders is presented below.

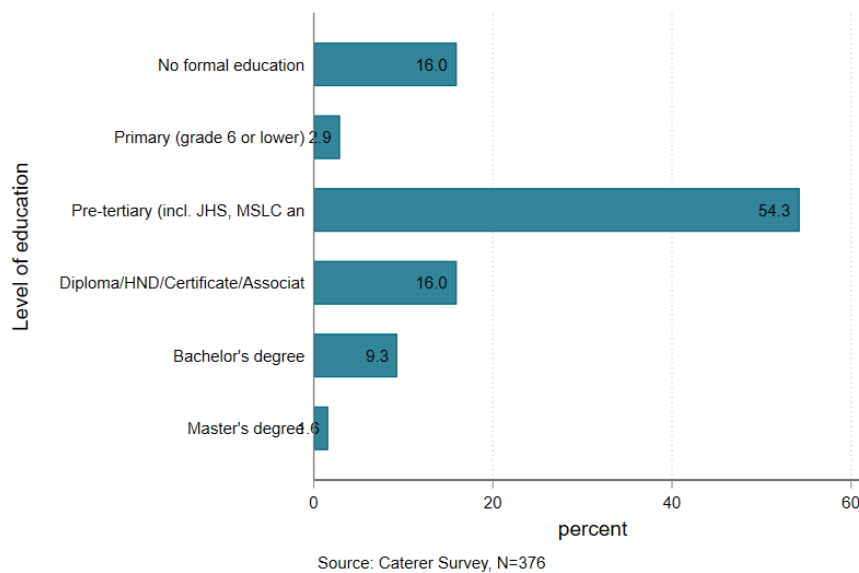
A. Caterers:

- 85 percent of the respondents in this category are the primary contracted caterers. Around 13 percent are cooks that have been hired by caterers for preparing meals at schools.
- Most caterers (almost 97 percent) have been providing meals for their schools for at least one year. On average, caterers provide meals for just under 350 students, with a vast range (35-1180) as presented in Figure 2.3.



*Figure 2.3: Duration that caterers have been providing school meals*

- For more than half the caterers in our survey (54,7%), this is their first experience providing school meals under the Ghana SFP
- Almost 70% of caterers in our sample operate a parallel business (most likely a shop) alongside the school meals operation
- Family and friends were the most common source of startup capital investment for caterers starting off their school meals operation (over 50%).
- Caterers are most likely to be selected by submitting an application or tender; an almost equal number report being appointed through political connection
- The average age of caterers in the survey is 50, ranging from 24 to 82 years old.
- More than 15% of caterers in the survey have no formal education and more than half have pre-tertiary education as shown in Figure 2.4.



*Figure 2.4 Education level of caterers*

#### B. Headteachers / schools

- Nearly 35 percent of schools in the sample have had the SFP provision for less than 5 years (i.e. 2018 or later). In the years 2017, 2018 and 2019, over 40 percent of the sample was included in the programme - see Figure 2.5

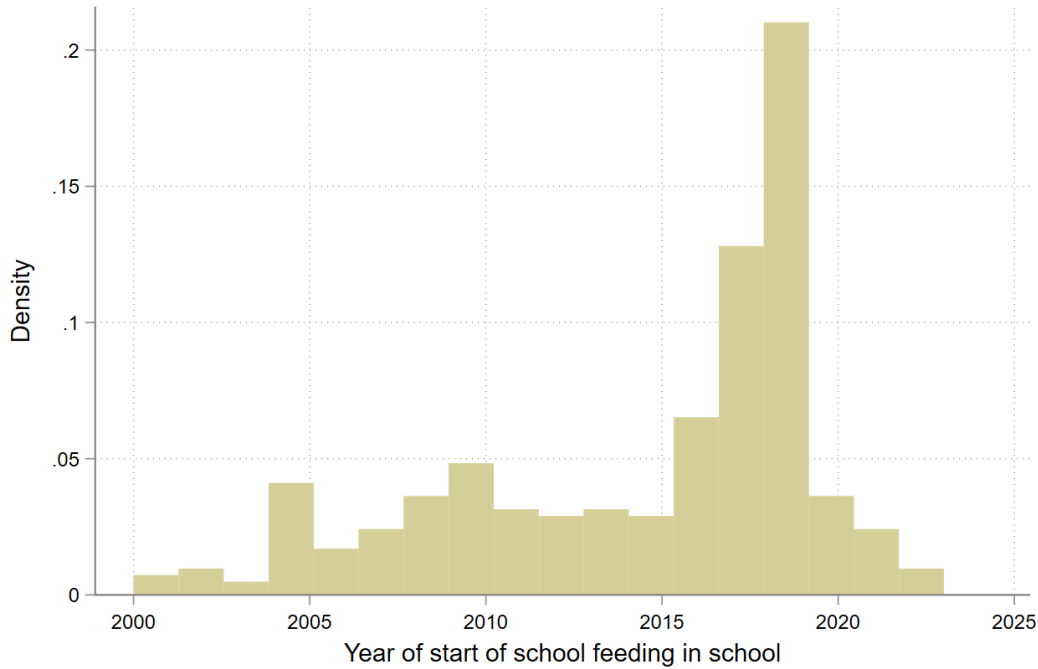


Figure 2.5: Year of start of GSFP in school, as per headteachers

- 3 out of 4 head teachers believe that SFP will continue to be offered in their school next year

C. Household heads

- Most respondents (more than 70%) in the household heads survey are female.
- More than 30% have no formal education and more than 40% have pre-tertiary certificate as presented in Figure 2.6.

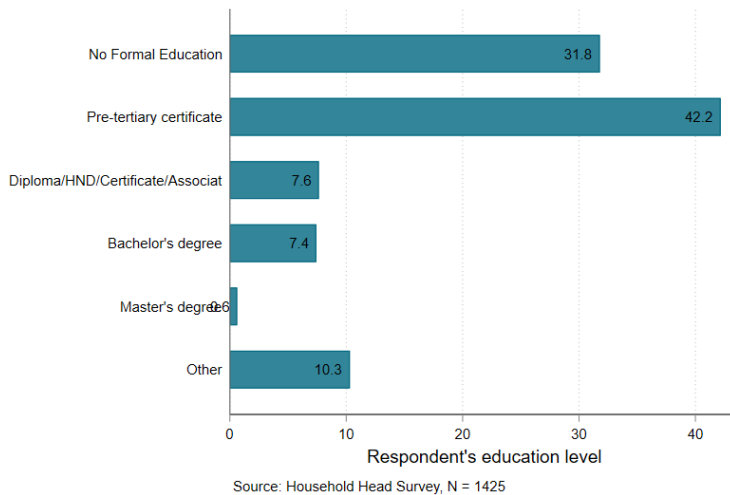


Figure 2.6: Education level of household respondent

- The primary reported occupation of mothers of primary school aged children in the household is services/sales (38 percent), whereas for fathers it is skilled agriculture/fishery (22 percent)

- On average, the households in our sample comprise over 6 family members, with around 3 children (younger than age 18) . 68 percent of households had no household member over the age of 65.

#### D. Children

- The number of male/female in the children survey is quite balanced: 53% are female, 47% are male
- The mean age of students surveyed, i.e. those that were randomly selected from the school lists for grades 2, 4 and 6, is 10 years of age. The range of students surveyed is 6 to 15 years.
- 87 percent of students surveyed travel to school by foot, 8 percent travel by taxi or car, and 2 percent by bus as reflected in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Spread of respondents by districts

No	District	Number of caterers	Number of schools	Number of children	Number of household heads
1	ASSIN NORTH	9	8	120	40
2	ASUNAFO SOUTH	14	13	179	54
3	ATIWA EAST	8	8	120	32
4	AYAWASO CENTRAL MUNICIPAL	15	15	209	56
5	AYAWASO EAST MUNICIPAL	11	11	130	38
6	AYAWASO NORTH MUNICIPAL	6	4	12	4
7	CAPE COAST METROPOLITAN	23	23	328	86
8	HOHOE MUNICIPAL	18	22	325	83
9	KINTAMPO NORTH MUNICIPAL	14	11	180	56
10	KUMASI METROPOLITAN	98	86	1,283	365
11	NADOWLI-KALEO	15	13	205	54
12	NKWANTA SOUTH MUNICIPAL	16	16	245	68
13	OFORIKROM MUNICIPAL	21	19	315	83
14	OLD TAFO MUNICIPAL	20	17	285	76
15	SAWLA-TUNA-KALBA	17	13	210	58



16	SEFWI WIAWSO MUNICIPAL	16	14	255	74
17	SUNYANI MUNICIPAL	18	15	228	72
18	TALENSI	13	11	165	44
19	TAMALE METROPOLITAN	24	19	300	82

## 3 Key findings

Drawing on the primary objectives and their resultant research questions that guided their exploitations, the present study examines learning from four standpoints. First the design, relevance and performance outputs of Ghana School Feeding Programme are put in perspective. Second, the operational features of Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) are examined. Third, the monitoring and accountability consideration of the school feeding implementation in Ghana are reported. In the fourth place, cross cutting features of the school feeding operations are examined.

We are only producing simple descriptive summaries of the data in this report, without any high-level or disaggregated analysis included.

### 3.1 Relevance, design and performance of GSFP

#### 3.1.1 Background and relevance of GSFP

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) was established with the aim of improving school attendance, reducing malnutrition, and enhancing the overall well-being of Ghanaian schoolchildren. The programme is based on the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) model, which focuses on sourcing food items from local farmers and offers fresher and more diverse produce, leading to improved nutritional quality for school children. By incorporating locally sourced food items, the HGSFP aims to enhance the sustainability and impact of the feeding programme. Particularly for school meals provision in primary schools, the GSFP model uses independent service providers, i.e. caterers, that are responsible for procurement of raw food items, preparation of meals and distribution of meals to children.

The GSFP is a multi-sectoral programme initiated in 2005 under the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) Pillar III and as a response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce poverty and increase social security for the rural poor in Ghana. The GSFP provides an opportunity to pursue Ghana's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2 & 4 which seek to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition while promoting sustainable agriculture, and lastly, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education opportunities.

The core objective of GSFP is to provide children in public primary schools in the poorest areas of the country with one hot, nutritiously adequate meal per day, using locally grown foodstuffs. The GSFP is expected to play a crucial role in addressing several key issues in Ghana's education system and societal development:

1. **Improved School Attendance:** The provision of daily nutritious meals in schools has been linked to increased attendance rates. Children from low-income families often face food insecurity, leading to absenteeism and reduced educational outcomes. The GSFP helps to alleviate this problem by ensuring that children have access to regular meals, which in turn improves their attendance and engagement in the classroom.
2. **Enhanced Nutritional Status:** Malnutrition poses a significant challenge to child development and learning. By providing balanced and nutritious meals, the GSFP contributes to improving the nutritional status of schoolchildren. Adequate nutrition supports physical and cognitive growth, leading to better academic performance and long-term health benefits.
3. **Local Agricultural Development:** The GSFP incorporates locally sourced food items, thereby supporting local farmers and stimulating agricultural development. By promoting the consumption of locally grown produce, the programme encourages self-sufficiency and reduces dependence on imported food items..
4. **Addressing poverty and food insecurity:** Ghana faces significant poverty rates, especially in rural areas where access to nutritious food is limited. School feeding programme is to act as a social safety net, ensuring that children receive at least one nutritious meal per day. The GSFP also ensures educational equity in the country. Since children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to face barriers to accessing quality education, the implementation of GSFP is to promote educational equity by reducing the burden of hunger and malnutrition and ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to learn and thrive.

The GSFP uses poverty geographical targeting and the quota system based on the level of deprivation and vulnerability of the school, budget constraints and other educational outcomes. Fundamentally, two sets of criteria are used to select schools for the GSFP, namely, the primary and the secondary criteria. The primary criteria include scores on low school enrolment rate; attendance and retention rate especially for girls; willingness of the community to put up basic infrastructure (e.g. kitchen, storeroom), provide potable water and to contribute in cash or kind. The programme also considers the high level of hunger, food insecurity and vulnerability status; and existence of a school management committee and/or PTA. The secondary criteria entail high school drop-out rate, low literacy levels, high communal spirit/ or community management capability, present or planned provision/expansion of health and nutrition interventions.

In our survey, we asked school heads why their school had been selected for the school feeding programme. High rates of poverty in surrounding areas, followed by low enrollment rates, is the most commonly cited reason for a school's selection in the Ghana SFP. However, there could also be cases in which a school is included because

it falls within a certain designated area as 40 percent of school heads cited geographical area as a reason for selection as presented in Figure 3.1.

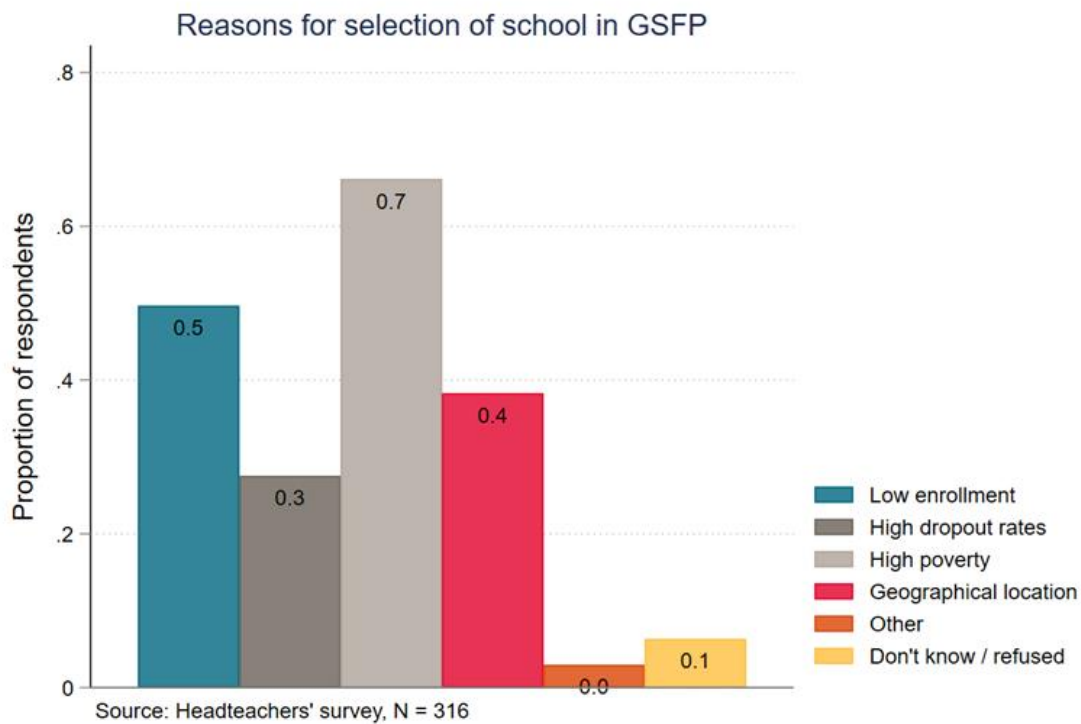


Figure 3.1: Reasons for selection of school in GSFP

From a household economy point of view, school feeding is often presented as one of many potential instruments of social protection. Therefore, the relevance of school meals as an effective policy tool partly depends on how it stacks up against alternative social assistance schemes from the point of view of beneficiary households. Within the realm of food for education programmes, the most obvious alternative to on-site school meals is take-home rations provided on condition of school enrollment and attendance. The other alternative social protection tool school meals are often compared with is cash transfer. In order to assess the relevance of the GSFP to households, parents were asked in the survey to indicate whether they would prefer cash transfer to the value of the school meals or take-home rations instead of on-site school meals served to their children. Figure 3.2 shows that there is a clear preference for on-site school meals compared to either of the alternatives. Close to 8 out of 10 parents stated that they would prefer their children to receive school meals than take-home rations or cash as per Figure 3.2.

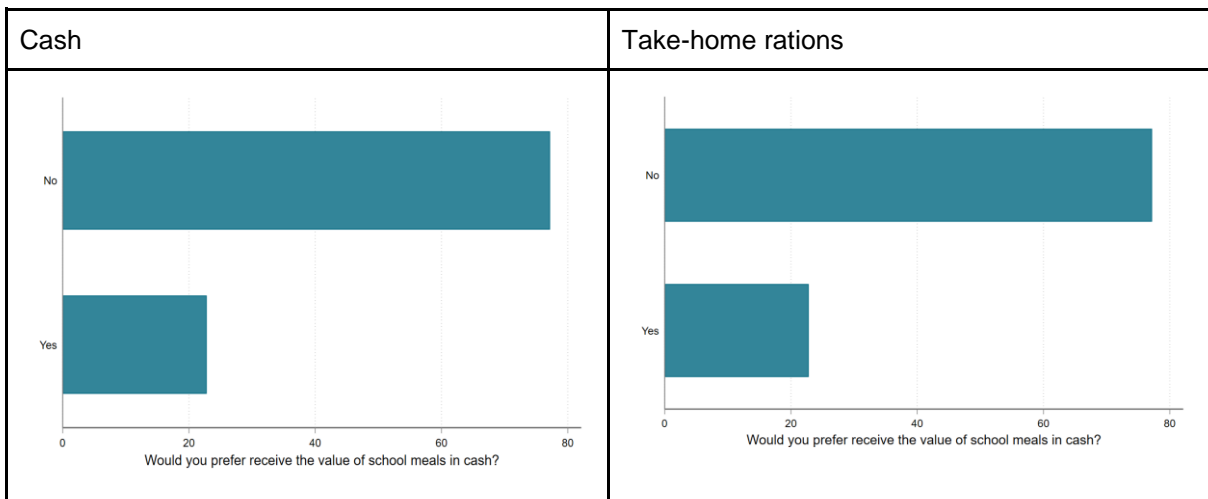


Figure 3.2: Parents' preference for school meals compared to alternative social assistance schemes

Another way to judge the relevance of the GSFP is to directly ask the primary user - the students - how they would be affected if school meals were no longer provided. According to Figure 3.2, nearly 60% of sample students confirmed that they would be affected if school meals were not provided. A significant majority of the students that said they would be affected feared they would go hungry without school meals whereas a still sizable proportion said they would have less food to eat at school. When these proportions are compared with the relatively smaller share of students who claimed that their studies would be affected, it becomes clear that the GSFP is more valuable as a social safety net scheme preventing short-term hunger than an education intervention (See Figure 3.3).

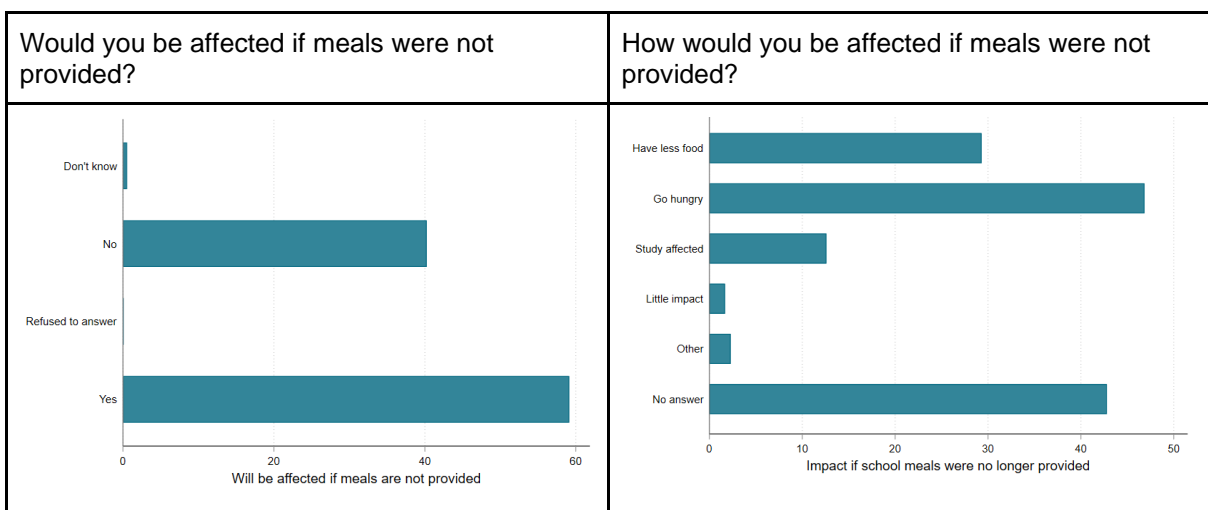


Figure 3.3: Relevance of school meals from the point of view of students

### 3.1.2 Outputs of GSFP in the views of key stakeholders

This section of the report presents a comprehensive overview of the survey results relating to the assessment of selected dimensions of the school feeding provision by parents, learners and head teachers.

#### 3.1.2.1 School Heads

School heads were asked to provide their assessment of the quality, quantity and hygiene of school meals provision in their school. Over 70% head teachers consider the food provided in their school to be at least of average quality. However, schoolheads’ opinion on quality is polarised as the proportions that deem the food to be “equivalent to the best meal at home” on the one hand and “barely edible” on the other are comparable. There is much less ambiguity when it comes to opinions about quality. A majority of school heads believe the quantity of food provided to students is not sufficient (See Figure 3.4 for further information).

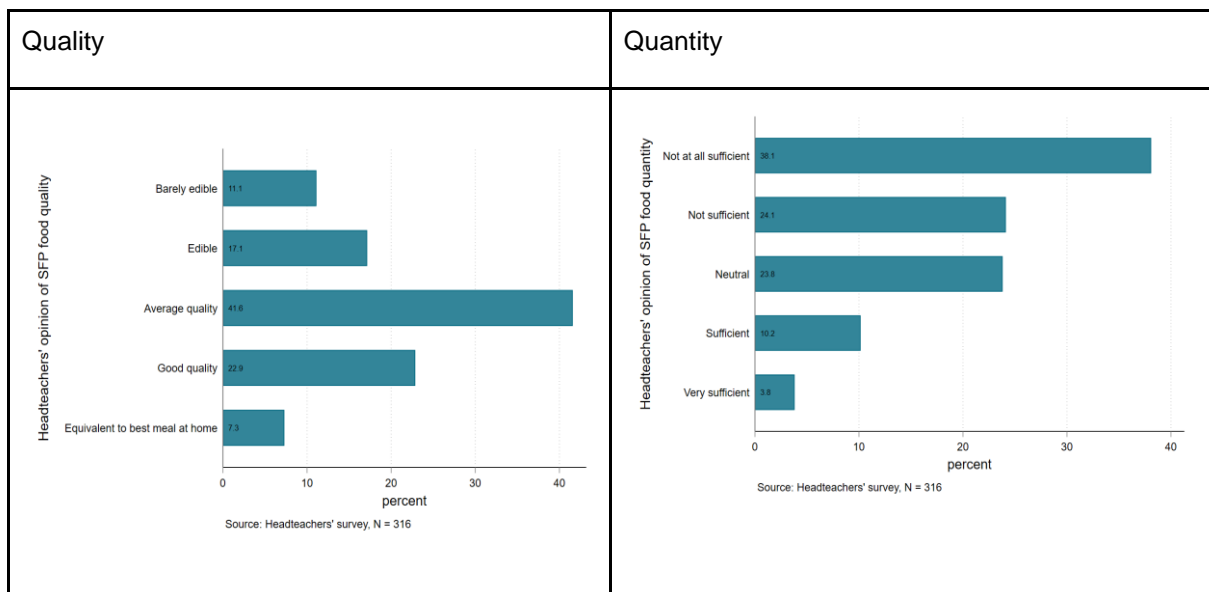
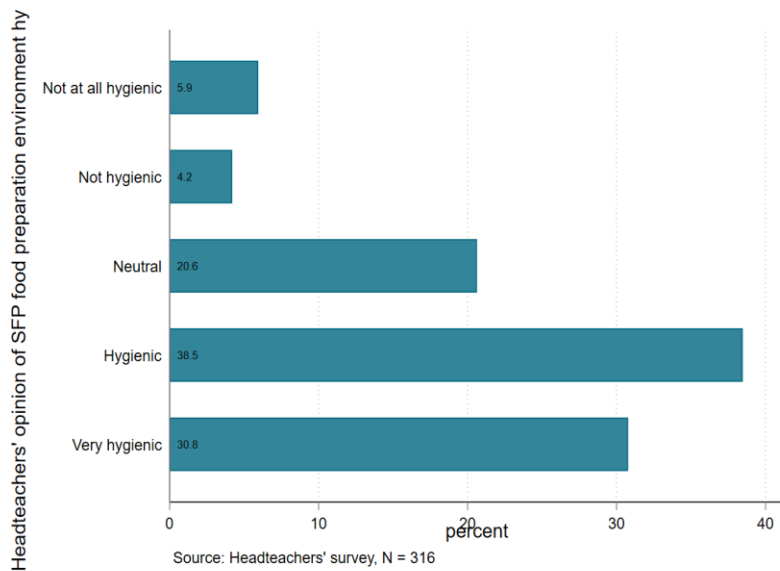


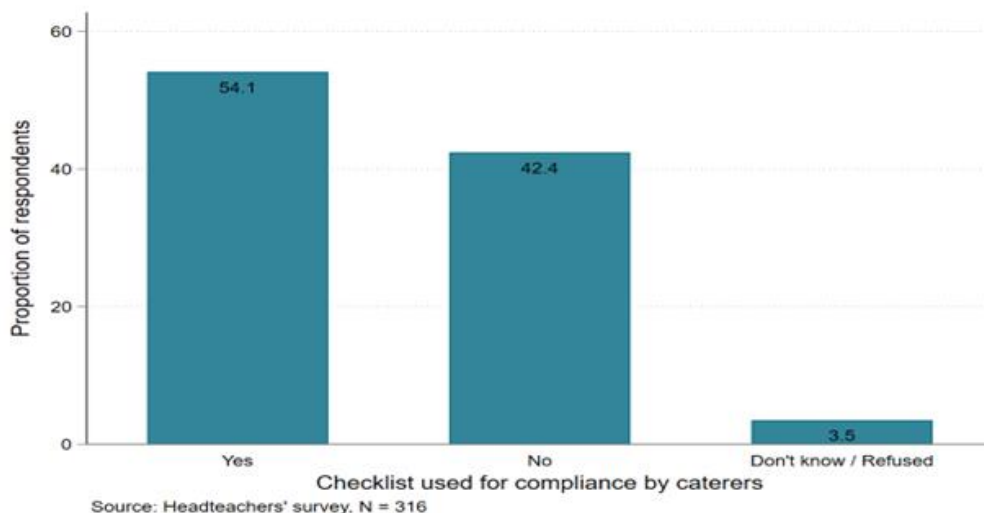
Figure 3.4: School head’s assessment of food quality and quantity

When it comes to the issue of food preparation in a hygienic environment, over two-thirds of school heads deem the environment in which meals are prepared for their school hygienic or very hygienic. Considering that 70% of caterers in our sample prepare meals in a designated space in the school premises, the assessment of school heads could be considered credible because most of them have an opportunity to observe hygiene more regularly. This finding highlights the importance placed by schools on ensuring that the food prepared for students is done so in an environment that prioritises hygiene. The presence of a designated spot not only signifies a commitment to maintaining cleanliness but also suggests a proactive approach to addressing potential food safety concerns. The dynamics of hygiene employed is next commented as summarily provided under Figure 3.5.



*Figure 3.5: School heads' assessment of school meals hygiene*

Another area of priority for examination was the existence of a checklist utilised to ensure compliance by caterers with government-mandated standards for school meal administration. The implementation of a checklist system fosters transparency and accountability within the catering process, as it provides a standardised framework to evaluate the caterer's performance. By regularly conducting compliance checks using the checklist, heads can ensure that the meals provided to students meet the necessary standards for safety, nutrition, and hygiene. The status of use of *Compliance Checklists Among Caterers to implement the school feeding arrangement is next reported on as in Figure 3.6.*



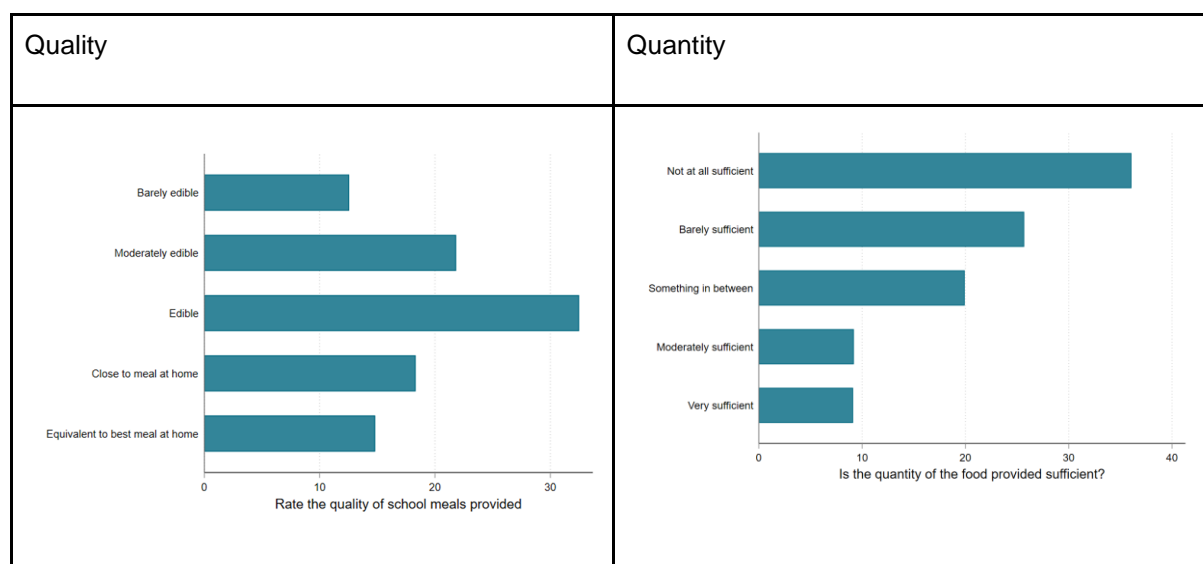
*Figure 3.6: Use of Compliance Checklists Among Caterers*

Figure 3.6 shows that 54.1% of the heads of schools confirmed the presence of a checklist that is used to assess the caterer's adherence to the government's mandates. Although a majority of the sample schools use checklists, it is still concerning that 4 in 10 schools do not have a reference to systematically monitor the delivery of school meals on a daily basis.

### 3.1.2.2 Parents

Parents' involvement in school feeding programmes is vital for ensuring the well-being of their children, monitoring food quality and safety, promoting transparency and accountability, encouraging healthy eating habits, and enhancing community involvement. As the adult representatives of the primary beneficiaries of the programme, they are a critical stakeholder with the ability to judge the performance of the programme on various dimensions.

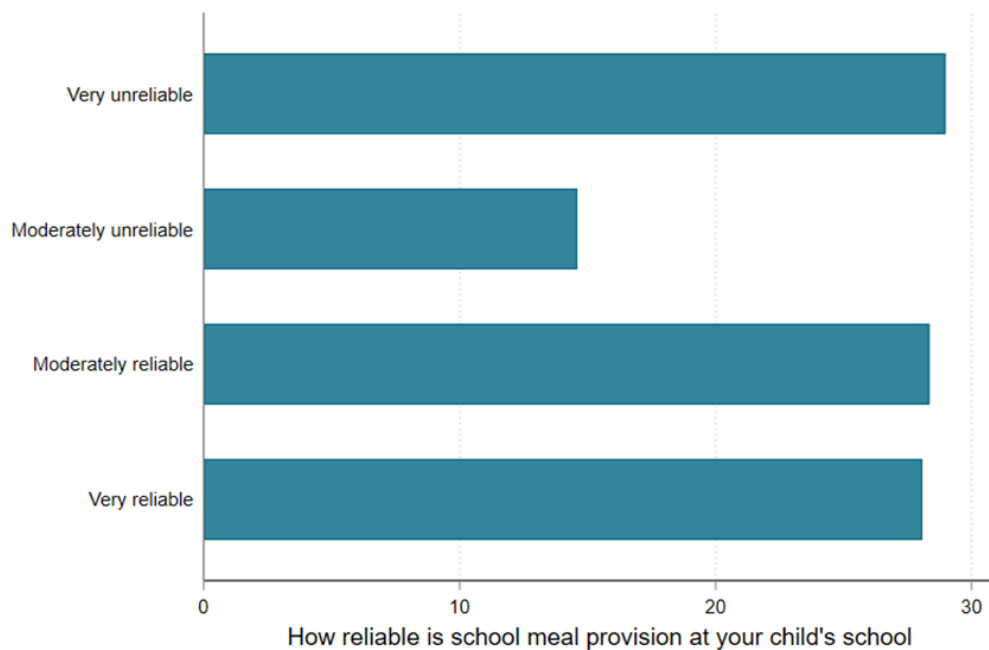
In order to triangulate the data obtained from school heads on quality and quantity of meals, we posed the same questions to parents. On the quality dimension, the assessment aimed to gauge their satisfaction and perceptions regarding the overall taste, nutritional value, and appeal of the meals provided to their children. The results in Figure 3.7 show that, similar to the opinions of school heads, the assessments of parents on meal quality are more or less equally split on the positive and negative ends with the neutral option (i.e. “edible”) representing the modal response. Just like in the case of school heads, there is less ambiguity regarding parents’ assessment of food quality. A majority of parents consider the quantity of food provided to their children less than sufficient. The quality and quantity of the school feeding programme are next related as in Figure 3.7.



*Figure 3.7: Parents' assessment of food quality and quantity*

The other domain which parents are uniquely qualified to assess is the reliability of school meals provision. A majority of parents indicated that, to the best of their knowledge, meals were provided to their children on a daily basis. But, still, a sizable portion of parents, more than 4 in 10, find the provision in their child’s school less than reliable (see Figure 3.8). This is an important indicator potentially bearing implications for the usefulness of school meals as a social transfer mechanism relieving the burden on parents of school children.





*Figure 3.8: Parents’ assessment of the reliability of school meals provision*

When school meals are not sufficiently reliable because of days on which meals are not provided or food is not sufficient for all children, parents need to have a backup plan. Around two-thirds of parents provide their children with money to purchase food in the absence of provision of school meals. By giving their children money, parents enable them to buy meals either within the school premises or from nearby food vendors. This option also provides flexibility and allows children to make choices based on their preferences and dietary requirements. The second most common coping strategy is having a child come home for lunch when school meals are not provided.

### 3.1.2.3 Children

Ultimately, school meals are all about the children who are supposed to benefit from them. As such, they are the prime judges of the performance of a school feeding programme. Since most primary school students are too young to reliably respond to complex survey questions, we asked them a few simple and direct questions to gauge their satisfaction with the provision in the GSFP and obtain their perspectives on the relevance of the programme.

Figure 3.9 shows that around 88 percent of surveyed children actually consume the meals served at their school. This implies a significant level of take-up, suggesting that the programme is well targeted. Apart from that, one of the most basic questions that could be posed to children receiving meals is whether they actually like the food they are being served. Even though many children might not be able to judge school meals on more sophisticated indicators of quality such as nutrition, they should be able tell - and it is important to know - if they like the food. In this regard, an overwhelming majority of sample students, representing 81%, reported that they like the food. The status of students’ take-up and state of satisfaction with school meals are also recounted in Figure 3.9

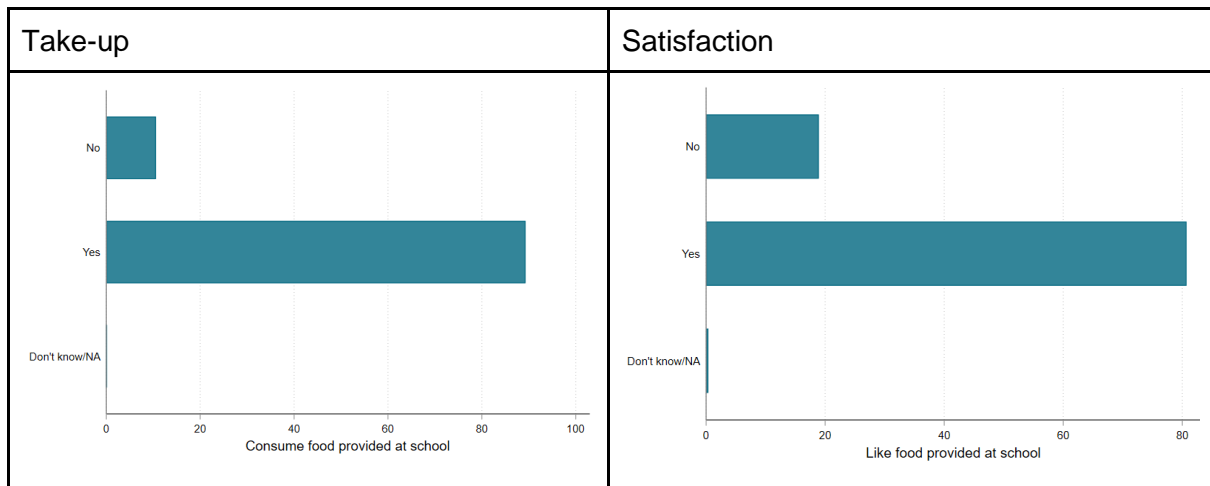


Figure 3.9: Students' take-up and satisfaction with school meals

Additionally, students were asked about the frequency of meal provision. The majority of students indicated that meals were provided on a daily basis, specifically five times a week (representing 63% of children surveyed). But that also means that a considerable proportion of students, around a third, reported that meals were provided less often than the government mandated frequency. In addition to the overall frequency of provision in a typical week, there are also issues of inconsistency that may affect reliability. In this regard, more than half of surveyed children said there were days on which they came to school but did not find school meals (See Figure 3.10). Close to 50 percent of these children indicated that this normally happened because food was finished before they arrived. This finding reinforces the assessment of school heads and parents that the quantity of school meals is not sufficient.

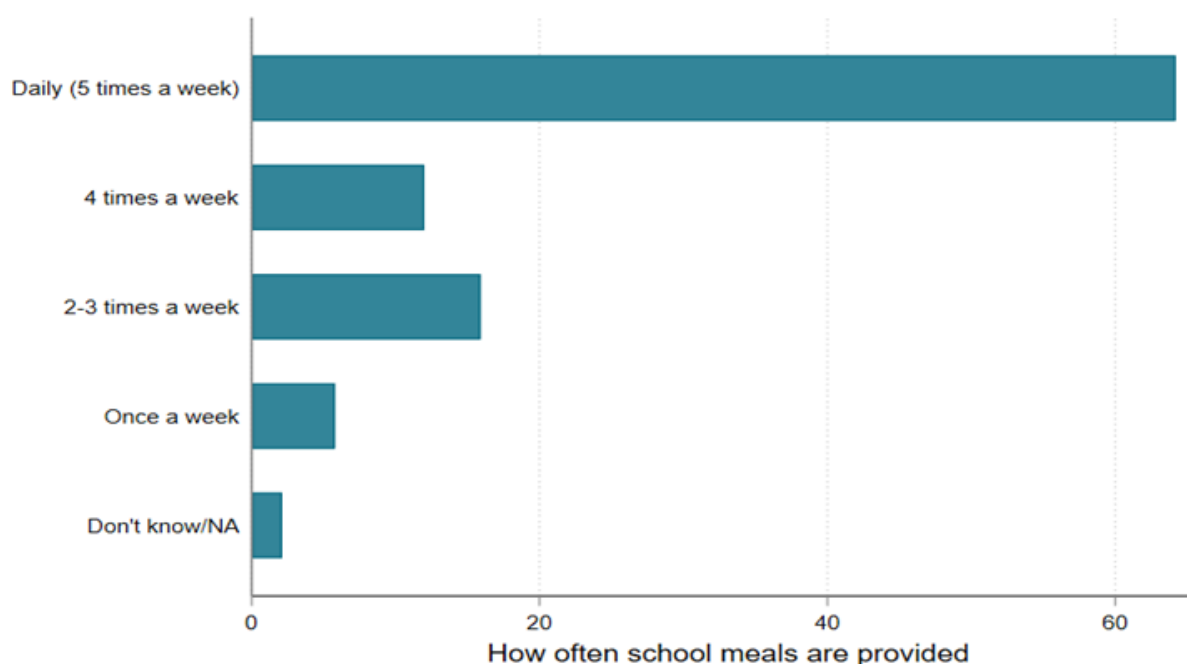
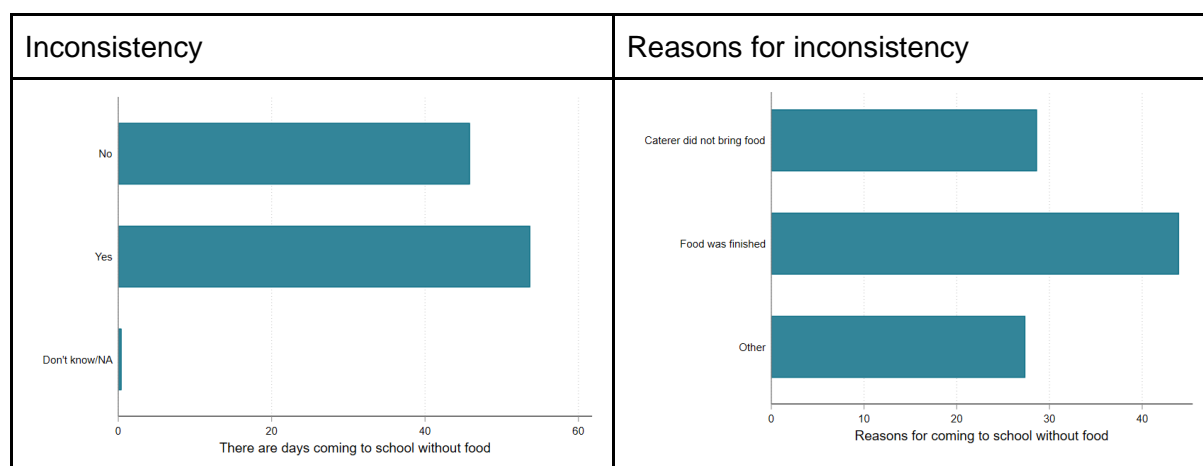


Figure 3.10: Frequency of Meal Provision According to students

The consistency or otherwise of food service by the service providers is next reported in Figure 3.11.



*Figure 3.11: Students' assessment of inconsistency of school meals provision*

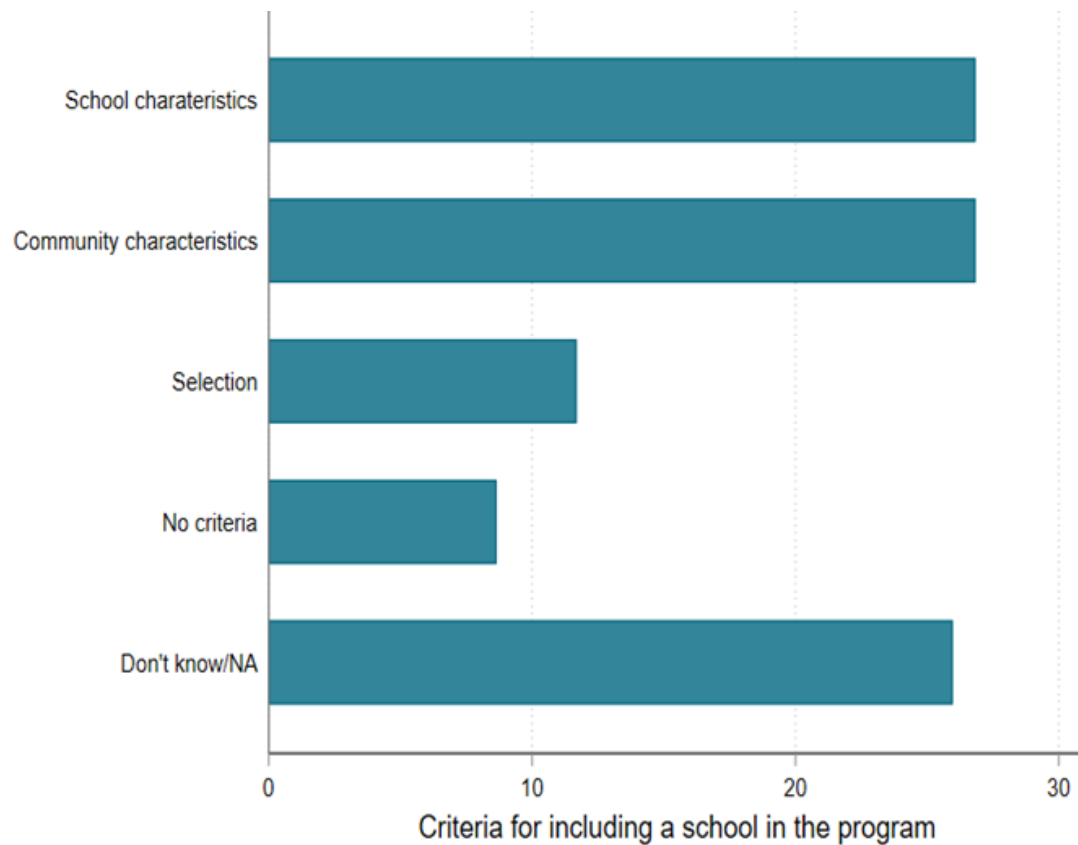
The survey also gave students an opportunity to express their suggestions for potential changes to the meals provided. Many students shared their views on areas where they believed improvements could be made. The students' suggestions primarily focused on two key aspects: the addition of new food options and enhancements to the quality and quantity of the meals.

#### **3.1.2.4 SHEP Coordinators**

The opinions of the SHEP coordinators regarding the information and criteria used for the selection of schools included in the school feeding programme, as well as the monitoring procedures in place were examined. The SHEP coordinators we learnt play a crucial role in overseeing and evaluating the outcomes of the programme at the district level. As part of this survey, the SHEP coordinators were asked to provide their insights and perspectives on the factors considered when selecting schools to participate in the school feeding programme. Their expertise and experience contributed immensely to our present understanding school feeding environment in Ghana..

Additionally, the coordinators were consulted regarding the monitoring procedures implemented to assess the progress and effectiveness of the programme. The coordinators' perspectives provide valuable guidance for improving the overall implementation and effectiveness of the programme at the district level.

Figures 3.12 provides a descriptive account of school and community characteristics that are the primary criteria taken into account when selecting schools for inclusion in the school feeding programme. These criteria provide valuable insights into the specific needs and contexts of each school and its surrounding community. The required information can typically be found in the school routine data or the EMIS (Education Management Information System) data.



*Figure 3.12: Distribution of SHEP Coordinator's Opinion on what Constituted Inclusion Criteria for GSFP Schools*

Two characteristics are first reported on, namely, school characteristics and community characteristics. In terms of school characteristics, using indicators such as enrollment size, location, infrastructure, and resources, programme coordinators can assess the capacity and suitability of schools to effectively implement the feeding programme. This ensures that schools chosen for participation have the necessary infrastructure, facilities, and organizational capacity to successfully provide meals to students.

Community characteristics, on the other hand, encompassed socioeconomic status, prevalence of food insecurity, and distance from local food sources among others. These aspects help identify schools situated in communities with higher levels of need and vulnerability. Including schools in areas where students may face challenges in accessing adequate nutrition ensures that the programme targets those who can benefit the most.

According to the coordinators, the responsibility for monitoring the school feeding programme primarily lies with the government. The monitoring process involves regular interactions with various stakeholders, including the school head, students, and caterers. The frequency of monitoring is conducted on a termly basis, allowing for consistent oversight and evaluation of the programme implementation and outcomes.

Government-led monitoring initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring the programme operates effectively and achieves its intended goals. By engaging with stakeholders directly involved in the programme, such as school heads, students, and caterers, the monitoring process gains

valuable insights into different perspectives and experiences related to programme delivery and impact.

Monitoring the programme on a termly basis allows for regular assessment of its performance and the identification of any issues or areas requiring improvement. By conducting periodic evaluations, programme coordinators can track progress, measure outcomes, and address potential challenges in a timely manner.

Interactions with stakeholders during the monitoring process provide an opportunity to gather firsthand feedback, observations, and suggestions. This engagement fosters collaboration and enables programme coordinators to understand the experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in the implementation and consumption of the school meals.

By relying on the structures of the SHEP coordinators interactions and regular monitoring of the school feeding programme is able to take place. This iterative process of evaluation and engagement helps in maintaining the programme's effectiveness, addressing emerging concerns, and promoting continuous improvement.

Overall, the government-led monitoring of the school feeding programme, conducted on a termly basis through interactions with key stakeholders, enables effective oversight, evaluation, and the implementation of necessary interventions. Thus the approach ensures that the programme remains accountable, responsive, and focused on delivering nutritious meals to students while meeting their needs and enhancing their overall academic and well-being needs.

## 3.2 Operational features of GSFP

The operational features of the school feeding programme was examined and four layers of findings became available. First it was identified that there are enterprise characteristics of service providers that feature prominently. Second, procurement and supply chain management related findings were identified. Third financing of the of the operations was also another finding that stood out. Fourth the constraints, adaptation and resilience considerations that actors take into consideration on school feeding are next reported. Details of the findings are consequently provided.

### 3.2.1 Enterprise characteristics of service providers

The analysis of the data revealed that most of the service providers do have experience and expertise in providing catering services. Specifically, the findings show that 85.6% of the service providers under the school feeding programme are caterers, with a further 12.8% describing themselves as cooks in general. Accordingly, in terms of experience with delivering meals, it can be inferred that the service providers under the GSFP have the requisite experience to deliver meals to school children. Furthermore, regarding their level of education, the majority of the service providers do have some formal education. 54.3% of the service providers do have pre-tertiary education qualifications (i.e., Junior High School and Middle School Leaving Certificate), with 9.3% having bachelor's degrees. Additionally,

1.6% noted that they have a master’s degree. Only 16.0% stated that they do not have formal education.

The data also shows that the service providers are engaged in other enterprises, in addition to delivering the school feeding programme. Apart from delivering the school feeding programme, 48% of the service providers reported that they have a shop for trading purposes (Figure 3.14). A further 18% of the caterers stated that they operate catering businesses, with 5% owning restaurants. Lastly, 16% of the service providers are also into farming activities. In terms of experiences with delivering meals to different schools, 54.7% of caterers responded that they however never provided meals for another school while 44.7% of the respondents stated that they deliver the meals to multiple schools. Accordingly, delivering school meals under the GSFP does not seem to be the sole economic activity engaged in by the service providers.

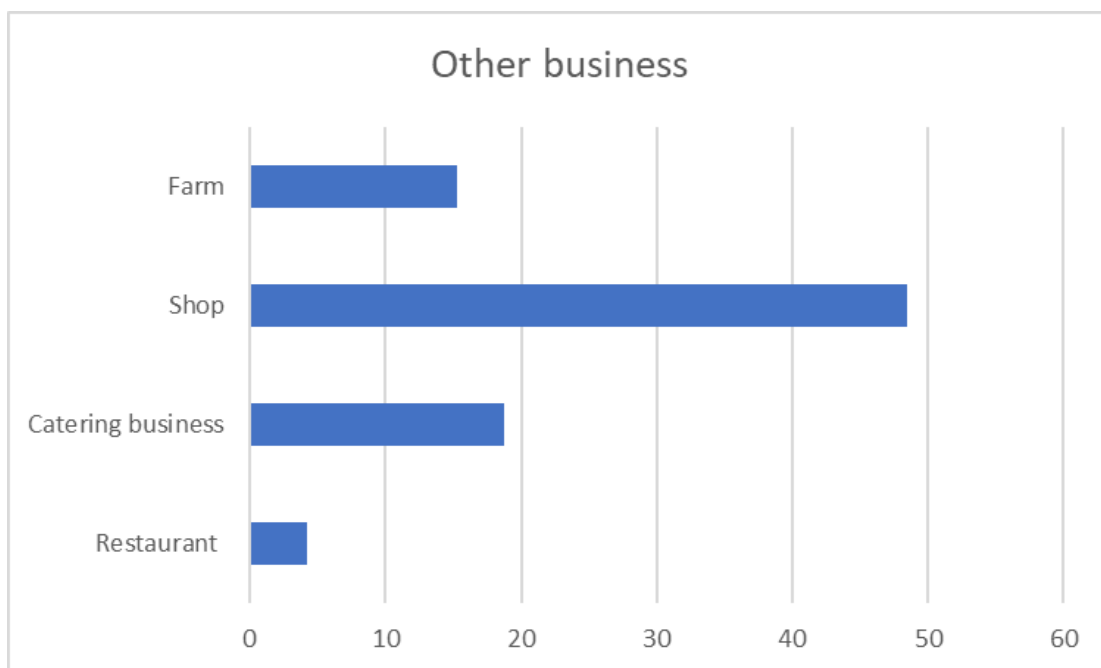


Figure 3.13: Distribution of Ownership of other businesses by caterers

Finally, the extant evaluative school feeding literature suggests that the process of recruiting service providers is as critical as the funding regime, to the sustainability of school feeding programmes. The social protection literature in the Global South has documented numerous examples of political forces politicising social programmes such as school feeding, especially through the recruitment process. Accordingly, the study tested the extent to which the processes of recruiting caterers in the GSFP have been politicised. The findings show that a significant number of respondents (42.94%) stated that they were recruited through political networks, while 44.09% of the respondents stated that they were recruited through the submission of applications to district assemblies and the school feeding secretariat. A small number of service providers (9.5%) were recruited on the recommendation of relatives or friends to the school feeding secretariat. Consequently, the findings confirm that political actors have politicised the processes of recruiting caterers to deliver meals to school children. This is reflected in the numerous candid descriptions and narrations by the

caterers, regarding how they were employed to run the service. Summarily we report the Recruitment of caterers in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Recruitment of caterers

Recruitment Type	Freq.	Percent
Political appointment	149	42.94
Recommended by relative or friend	33	9.51
Application or tender	153	44.09
Transferred from previous caterer	12	3.46
Total	347	100

### 3.2.2 Procurement and supply chain management

The efficient management of procurement and supply chains is critical in delivering social programmes such as school feeding. Accordingly, the service providers were asked to state the most important items procured for delivering the GSFP. The data shows that, as expected, the single largest expense for the service providers is food ingredients. Food ingredients account for the largest slice of the operating expenses of 85% of the service providers. This is followed by transport and cooking fuel, which were identified by 6% and 5% of caterers, respectively, as taking up the largest share of operating expenses as shown in further detail in Figure 3.15.

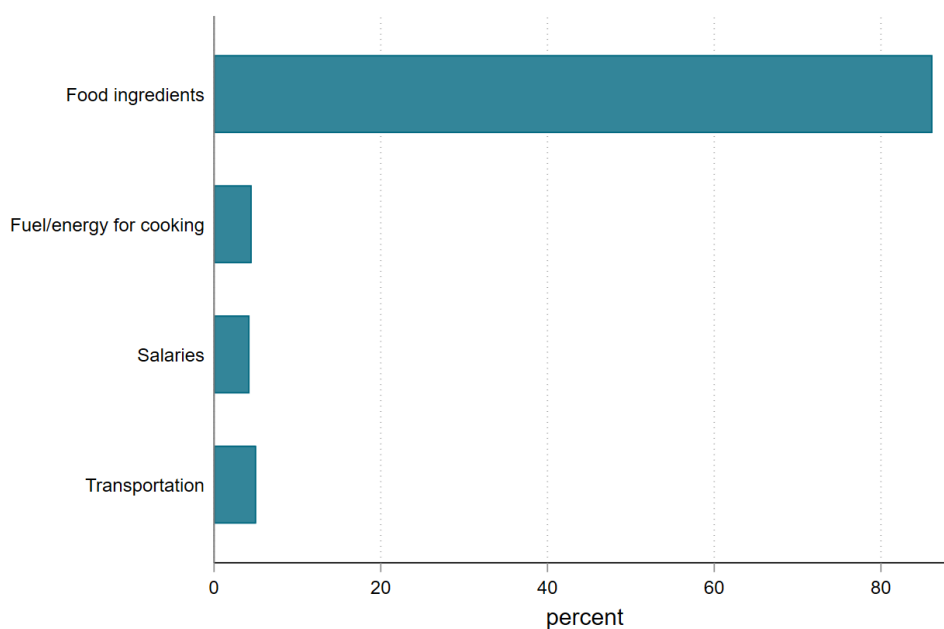


Figure 3.15: Largest operating expense (% of caterers)

Breaking the food items into specificities, the service providers note that the topmost food item procured in their delivery is rice, accounting for the largest share of spending for 50% of caterers. Beans and cooking oil, on the other hand, take the first two places as the second most important ingredient purchased by caterers. Therefore, overall, the findings indicate that the provision of meals in the GSFP is likely to be influenced by the supply and prices of rice, beans and cooking oil as three of the most significant purchases incurred by the service providers in their line of work. Regarding the frequency of purchasing these items, the service providers note that 43.35% of these purchases are made every month. They further note that 18.62% of the purchases are made more than once a month, with only 2.3% of purchases happening daily. Some of the purchases happen every week (13.83%). The next figure reports the status of the most common food ingredients procured

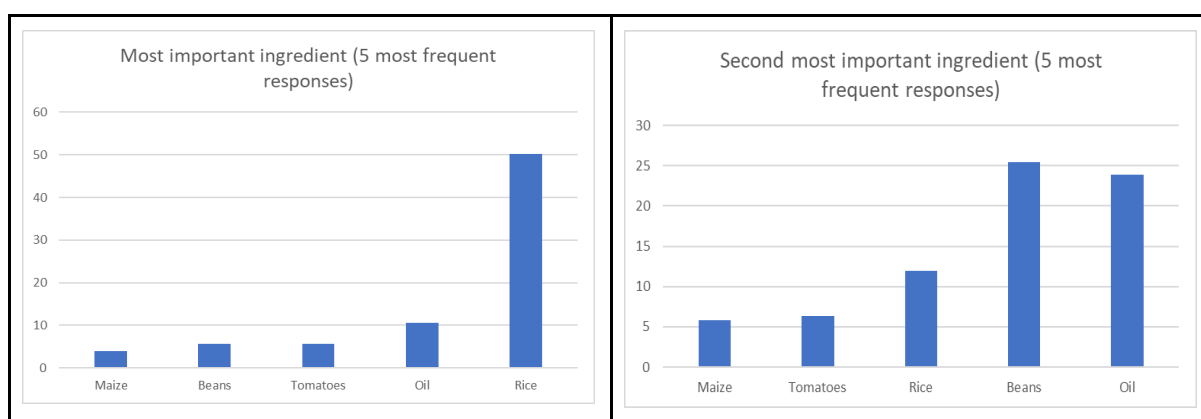


Figure 3.16: Distribution of the Most common food ingredients procured

The GSFP rules stipulate that service providers are paid by the government on a termly basis for the delivery of school meals at their contracted school. This means that service providers may need to fund the delivery of school meals for multiple months before they are paid by the government. Accordingly, the service providers note that they resort to credit purchases of food items. The caterers stated that as much as 75% of the food items purchased are on credit from traders. Only 22% of the purchases are paid upfront. For the plurality of caterers, the repayment period for these food items is irregular (41.0%). 18.0% of the service providers also note that the repayment period for credit purchases is monthly, with 8.8% reporting multiple times in a month. Only 8.6% of the respondents reported that the repayment period is semi-annually. The status of suppliers credit repayment periods and terms are recounted in Figure 3.17.

Repayment period	Credit terms
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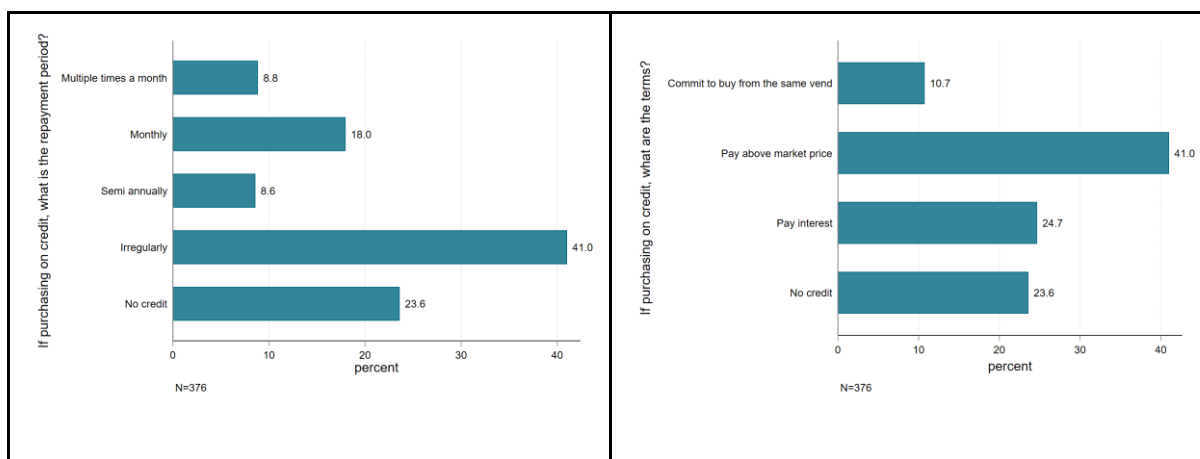


Figure 3.17: Distribution of suppliers credit repayment periods and terms

The data further shows that credit purchases from market women do come with varied terms and conditionalities. As a condition for credit supply, 41.0% of the service providers had to agree to repay at prices that are above market prices. Also, 10.7% of the service providers reported that they had to commit to buying further foodstuff only from the same vendor, whether the prices are competitive or not. The only basis for this agreement is the creditor's willingness to sell on credit. Finally, 24.7% of the service providers note that they had to pay interest on credit purchases.

Given that the feeding rate paid per pupil by the government is already seen as inadequate by the service providers, engaging in credit purchases where the caterers have to pay interest and/or purchase from possibly uncompetitively priced vendors, deepens the financial challenges experienced by the caterer. Despite these significant financial challenges experienced by the service providers, they do not receive any support from the government or the district assemblies. For example, 24% of the service providers reported that they receive no form of financial support. 31% of the caterers stated that they have to fund the service delivery from their resources.

### 3.2.3 Financing

Although most school meals catering business are small scale operations serving an average of 350 students, they still entail a significant startup funding requirement relative to the financial endowments of the service providers. Table 3.2 shows that more than a third (39.89%) of caterers indicated that they sourced funding from family and friends for startup capital to procure equipment and initial inventory. A total of 27% of the participants sourced funds from commercial agencies like banks, money lenders, cooperate unions, and microfinance institutions, whilst 21% sourced funding from 'other' sources.

**Table 3.2: Sources of financing**

	Startup capital	Working capital

Family and friends	39.89	20.22
Bank	13.3	30.6
Money lender	5.32	8.74
Cooperative union	4.79	7.65
Microfinance institutions	3.99	9.84
Other	20.74	22.9

In addition to the startup finance, caterers require working capital on a regular basis to cover daily expenses, particularly because they are often paid several months after delivering services. Around half of the sample caterers rely on external financing to fund their recurrent expenditure while the other half draw on their own resources. Of those who took loans for their working capital, Table 3.2 reveals that 30% sourced it from banks, followed by 20% from family and friends. The findings seem to suggest that it is easier to secure bank financing for working capital, once the businesses are in operation, than to do so for startup capital. However, as per [Figure 3.18](#), the overall assessment of a great majority of the caterers is that it is not convenient to access working capital loans for their operations.

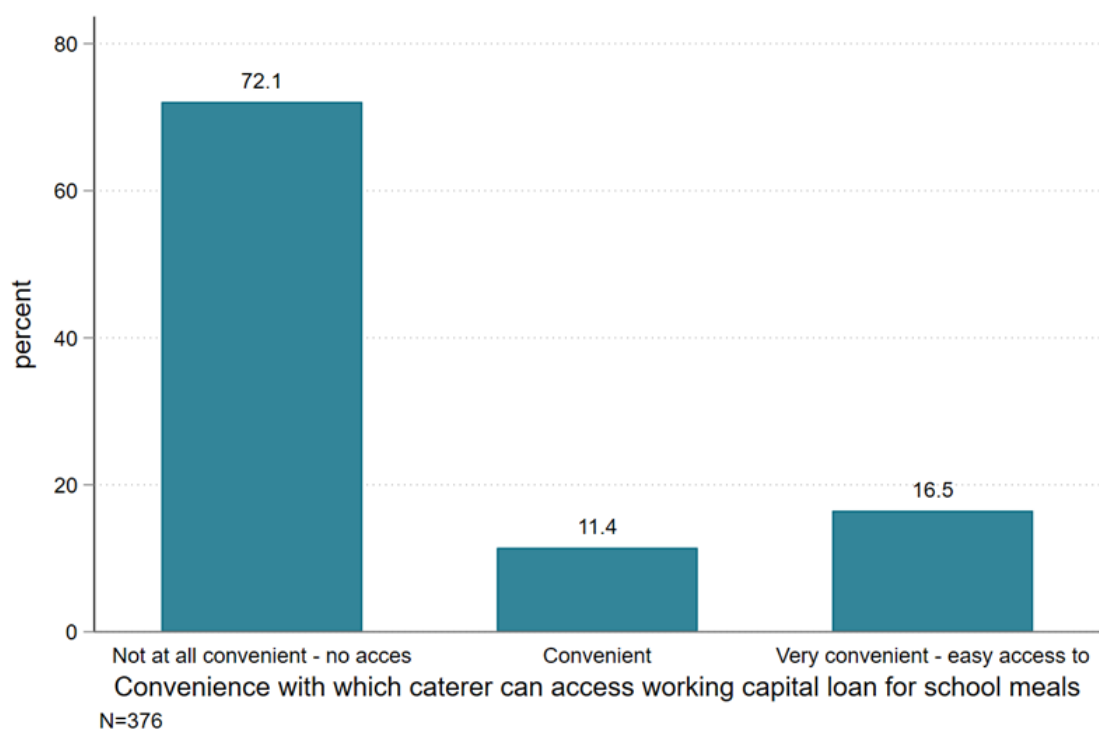


Figure 3.18: Caterers' assessment of ease of access to loans for their working capital

There has been extensive discussion in the media that the provision of adequate funding promptly is a significant constraint that is hampering the implementation of the GSFP. The main funding challenge is that the rates paid per child are inadequate. This is further compounded by an irregular reimbursement regime. That is, the service providers do not know when the next payments would be made. Often, when the payments are eventually effected by the government, the amount owed to the service providers is not paid in full.

The responses from caterers on the frequency of payment from the government shown in Figure 3.19 reveal a significant degree of inconsistency. Only a third of the respondents claim that they are paid on a termly basis as set out in the national school feeding policy. An equal number of caterers did not receive any payment over the last year. Around 13% of caterers receive payment more frequently than the mandated time frame (monthly or quarterly).

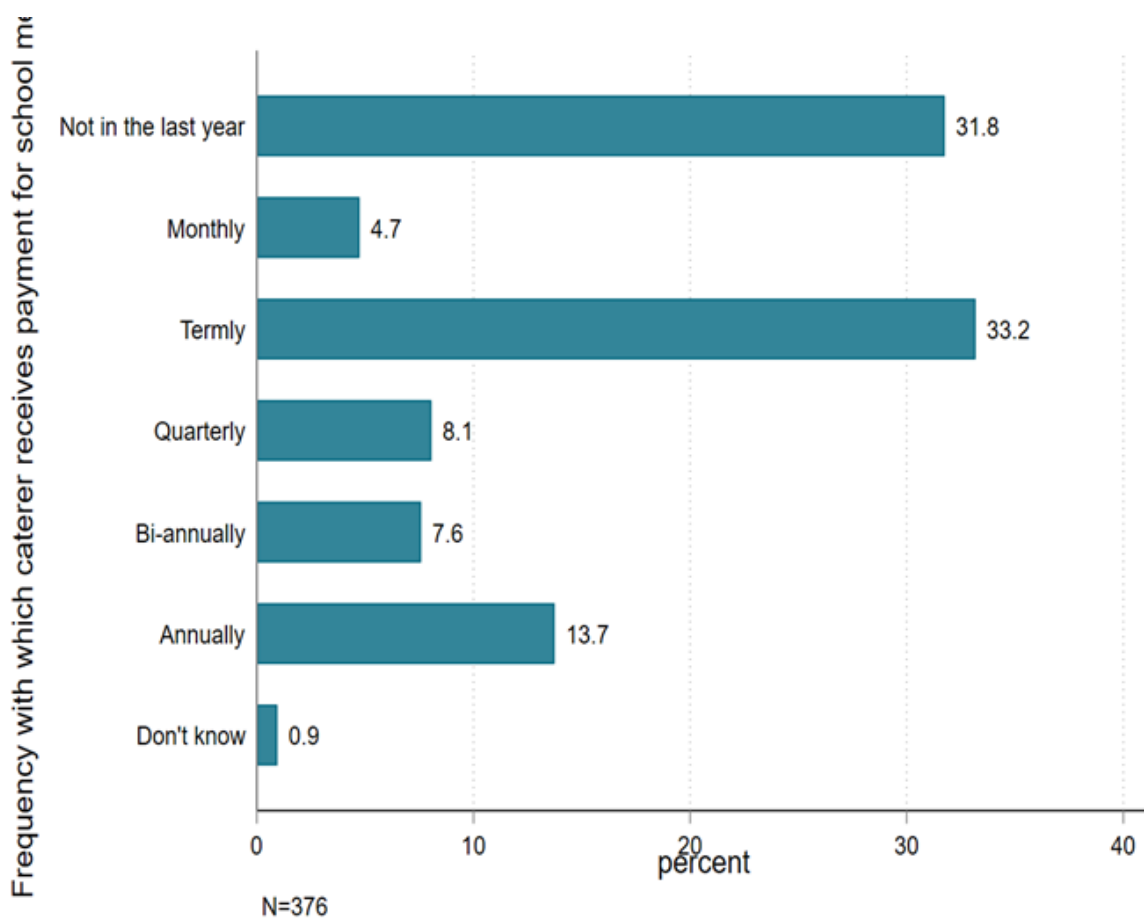


Figure 3.19: Frequency of payment from the government

The amount and regularity of payment from the government are so critical because there is almost no other or supplemental funding to sustain the GSFP. Despite some references to

community participation and contributions to the school feeding programme made in official documents, 90% of schools do currently receive any form of in-kind contributions.

### 3.2.4 Constraints, adaptation and resilience

Recent developments at the national level have shown that the lack of fiscal space is a serious constraint on the GSFP in general. How does this systemic constraint interact with idiosyncratic factors at the caterer level to affect the day-to-day functioning of such a decentralised programme ? In this regard, the responses of sample caterers to the survey question about the major constraints affecting their operation reflects the overall sentiment that has been captured by the public discourse on the GSFP in recent years. For more than 82% of caterers, cash flow is the foremost constraint impacting their operation. In the case of the second most important constraint, close to 60% cite procurement as a hindrance on their operations. Considering that working capital is a big part of the procurement problem (as shown in the previous sections), this finding reinforces further the role of the financing regime for the performance of the GSFP. The major constraints identified by caterers in their operations are reported in Figure 3.20.

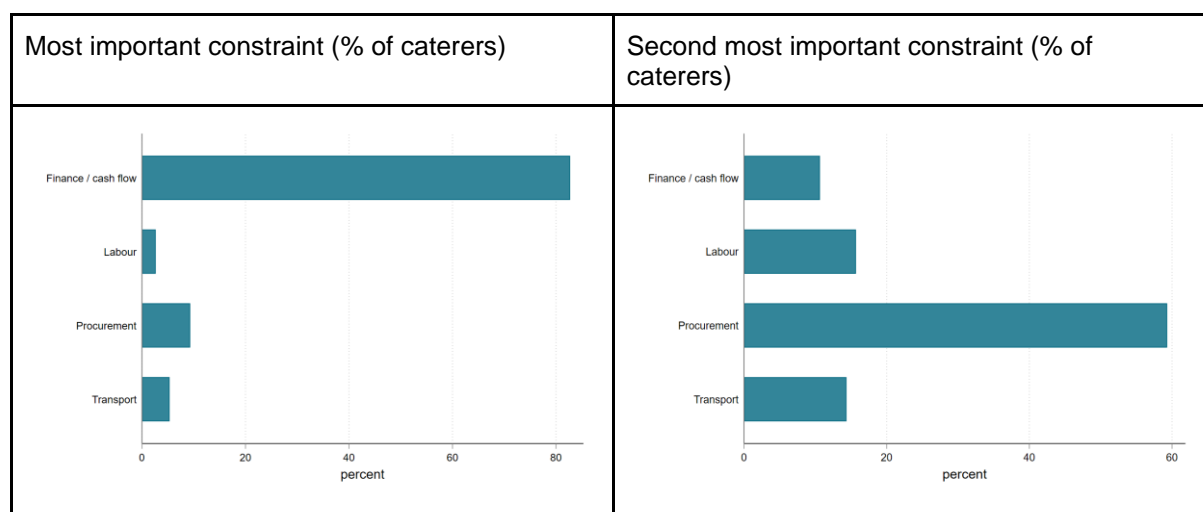


Figure 3.20: Distribution of major constraints identified by caterers

One of the operational issues that may necessitate adjustments and adaptation by caterers over the course of programme implementation is a discrepancy in the headcount of people consuming meals from the contracted number. This is sometimes raised as a challenge for school feeding programmes in developing countries because school meals could attract more children than are originally planned for particularly when there are nearby schools not included in the programme. However, this does not seem to be much of an issue for the GSFP as nearly 80% of caterers report no discrepancy between numbers of children contracted for and meals usually served. The limited amount of underutilization also suggests that the programme is well targeted. The discrepancy between contracted and the number of people served is recounted in Figure 3.21.

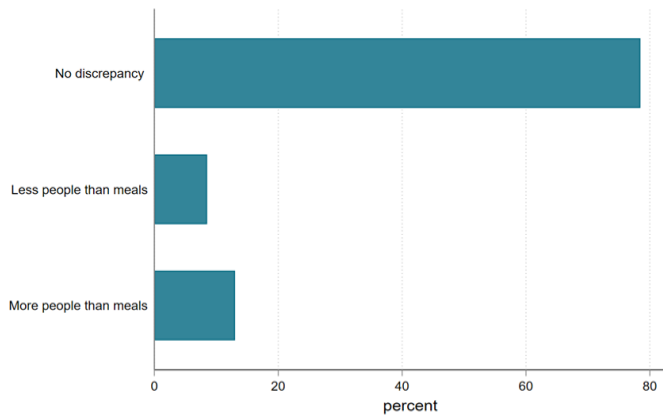


Figure 3.21: Distribution of discrepancy between contracted and the number of people served

From the ongoing, caterers' contract with the government to feed school children, is challenged with several issues, critical among which is the flow of money from the government. One of the things already established is the fact that most funding for start-ups and working capital is sourced through loans and other means, yet other challenges confront caterers in the course of their work. It is against this background that the survey explores strategies the caterers adopt to cope with increasing cost of operation and financing bottlenecks. We thus followed through with the distribution of coping strategies employed by caterers in the phase of the identified discrepancies in Figure 3.22.

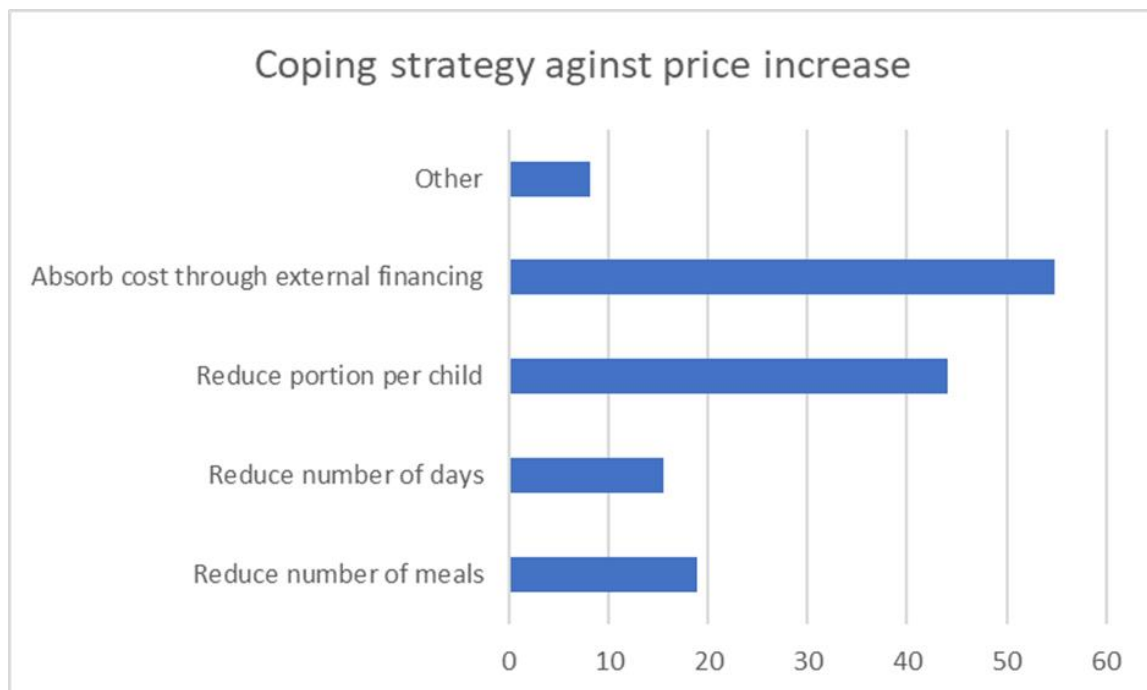


Figure 3.22: Distribution of Coping strategies employed by caterers

From Figure 3.22, two major coping strategies employed by caterers are, absorbing the cost through external financing (55%) and reducing the portion of food given to each child (44%). Other options employed include reducing the number of days for feeding or the number of meals given to children (16%). The implications of the findings to the GSFP can be numerous, as the lack of flow of money from the government in a timely and consistent

manner, coupled with the difficulties associated with accessing loans would inevitably impact on the quantity and quality of meals served. Particularly, this finding reinforces survey results in earlier sections showing that portion size of meals has become the apparent victim of the financial challenges the GSFP is experiencing.

### 3.3 Monitoring and accountability

The evidence from this study reveals that clearly defined monitoring and accountability structures may be lacking across administration levels, although it is also evident that some such processes do exist. The success of any programme depends on a stringent and timely monitoring system that will ensure that the fidelity of the programme can be maintained. Such monitoring is needed to determine any weakness to facilitate early remediation.

The monitoring and accountability systems have been put in place to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the SFP. According to the headteachers, the accountability and monitoring system seeks to ensure that the quality, quantity and hygiene of the meals served are up to the required standard as depicted in Figure 3.35.

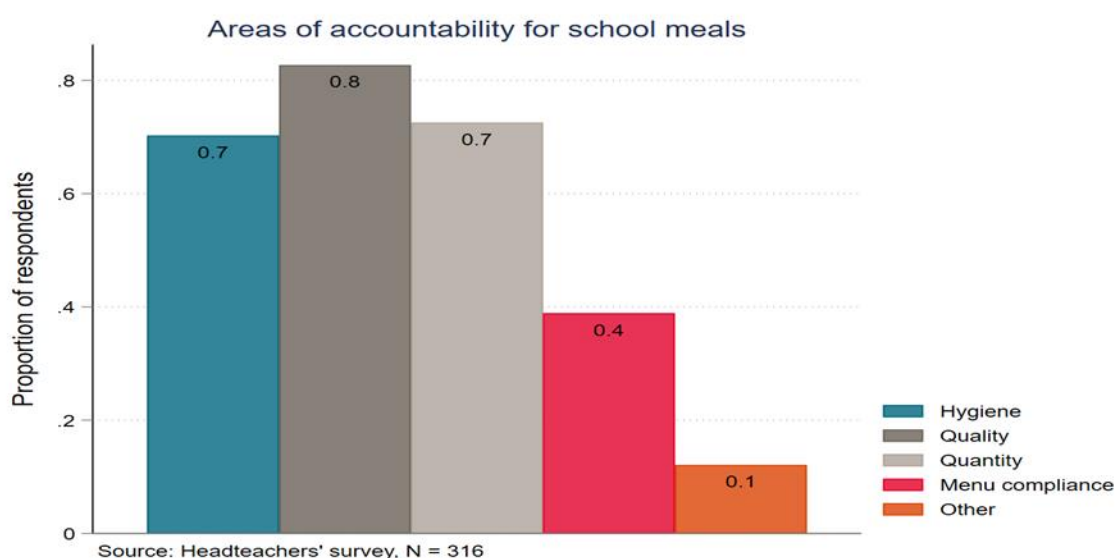


Figure 3.35: Areas of accountability of SFP from headteachers' perspective

The survey findings reveal that monitoring primarily focuses on the quality of meals served to the pupils. Aside from the quality of meals, there is emphasis also on the hygienic conditions of the meals as well as the quantity of meals served. There is a relatively lower number of schools monitoring menu compliance although the menu set by the government is supposed to be an instrument to improve nutrition outcomes through school meals.

At the school level, the responsibility of monitoring the SFP according to most of the headteachers (80 percent) of beneficiary schools rests with district officials. A sizable proportion (nearly 30 percent) of headteachers also indicated that central government officials are also responsible for monitoring the programme. Entities such as the School Management Committee were also identified by the headteachers as being responsible for monitoring the SFP (see Figure 3.23 for a detailed distribution of possible responsibility holders).

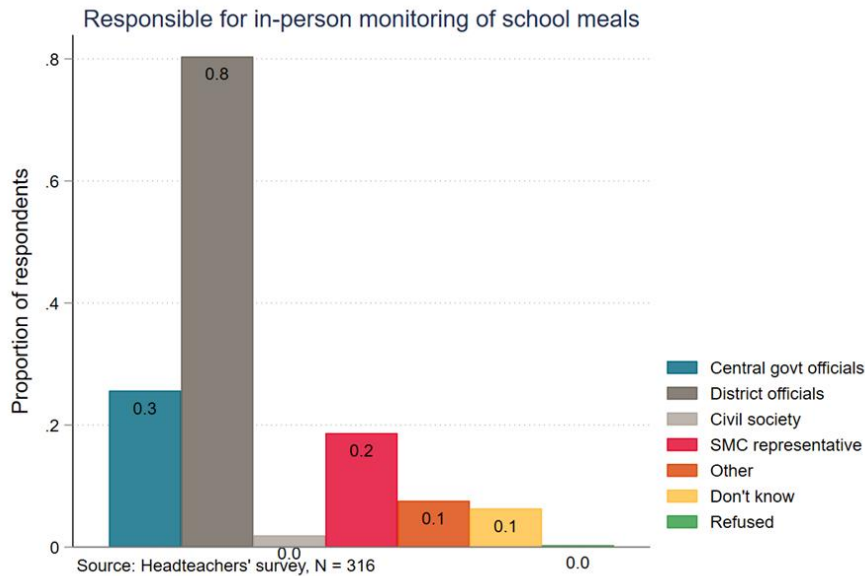


Figure 3.23: Headteachers' views on whose responsibility it is to undertake monitoring of GSFP

The perspective of district level SHEP coordinators reveals incoherence, however. Unfortunately, the majority of the SHEP coordinators indicated that they do not know of any monitoring system earmarked for the school feeding programme as can be seen in Figure 3.23. Over 30 percent of the coordinators indicated that there is a government instituted inspection. Others (around 10 percent) noted that there is a school-based coordinator who monitors the programme. Very few of the coordinators felt there was no monitoring system for the SFP in their districts (less than 5 percent). A further probe was made on the respondents to identify entities responsible for the monitoring of SFP in the schools. Most of the SHEP coordinators (around 85 percent) were of the view that the SFP is monitored by the government with few indicating that schools have coordinators who monitor the programme.



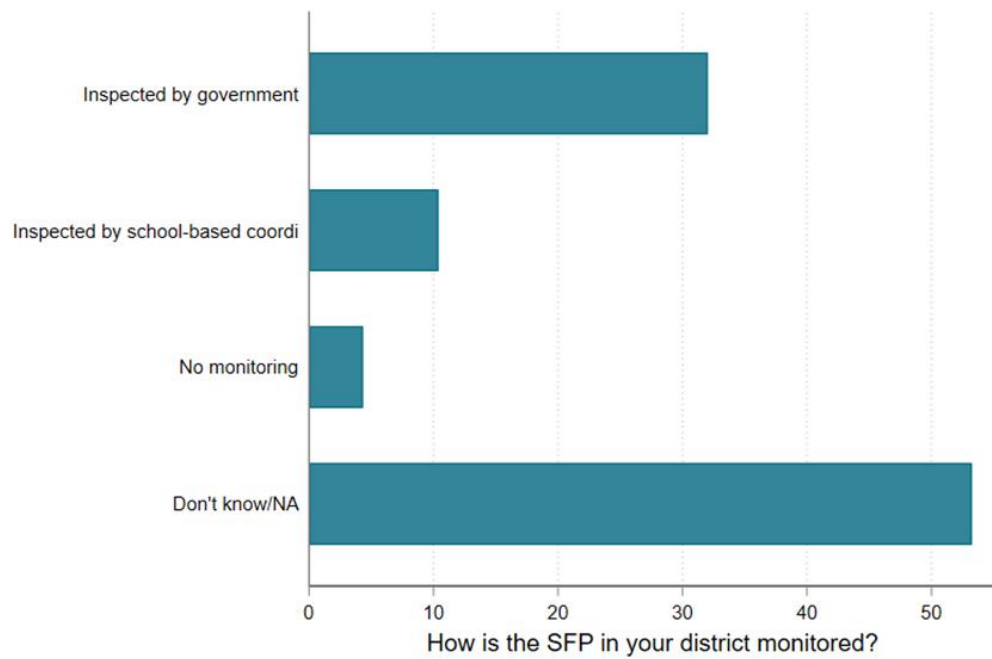


Figure 3.24: Distribution of Opinion of SHEP Coordinators on how SFP is monitored in Districts

The caterers of the SFP on the other hand indicated that the monitoring of the programme is done either by a designated teacher or the headmaster of the school. Very few caterers (less than 5 percent) noted that the parent teacher association (PTA) of their schools monitor the SFP. These findings suggest that, for the caterers, monitoring constitutes the more regular oversight by school staff whereas, for school heads, it is the less frequent programme level monitoring by local government officials.

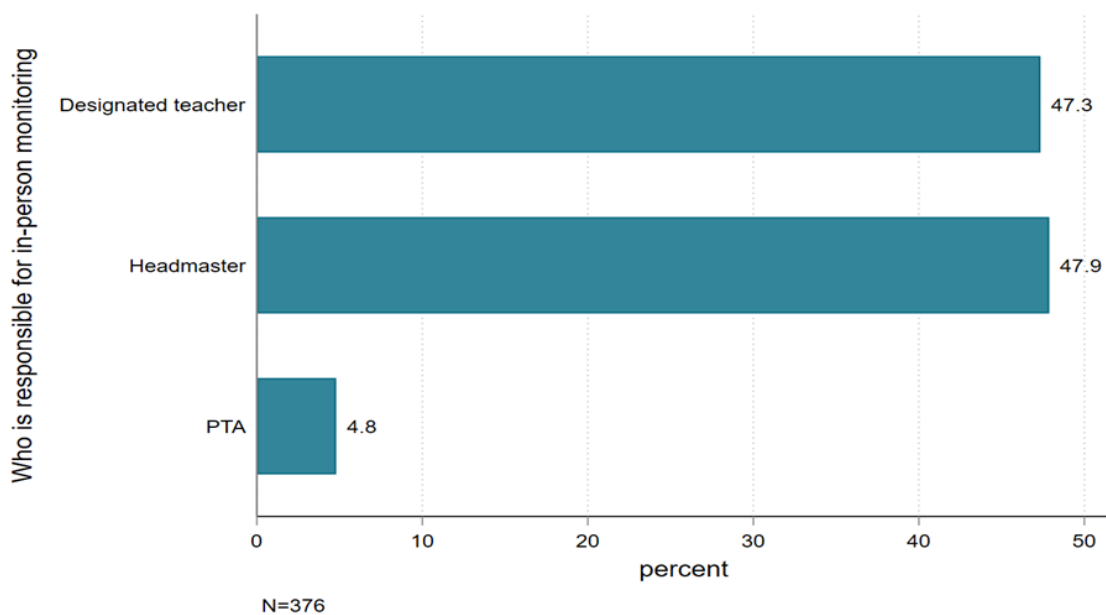


Figure 3.25: Distribution of Caterers' views on who monitors SFP

When it comes to frequency of monitoring, the plurality of respondents across all types of stakeholders - school heads, caterers and SHEP coordinators - indicated that monitoring of the SFP was mostly done once in a term. However, a significant proportion of headteachers (24 percent) also noted that the monitoring of the SFP is performed once a year, suggesting that government oversight on provision in some schools may have serious gaps. This concern is reinforced by the fact that around 30 percent of surveyed SHEP coordinators are not aware of how often the SFP is monitored.

Ultimately data collected is as good as the decisions they are used to make. The evidence from the survey shows that the SHEP coordinators were split on what information from the monitoring exercises conducted are used for. Some noted that collected information is used to make decisions regarding the SFP while others blatantly indicated that they do not know what the information is used for as can be seen in Figure 3.32.

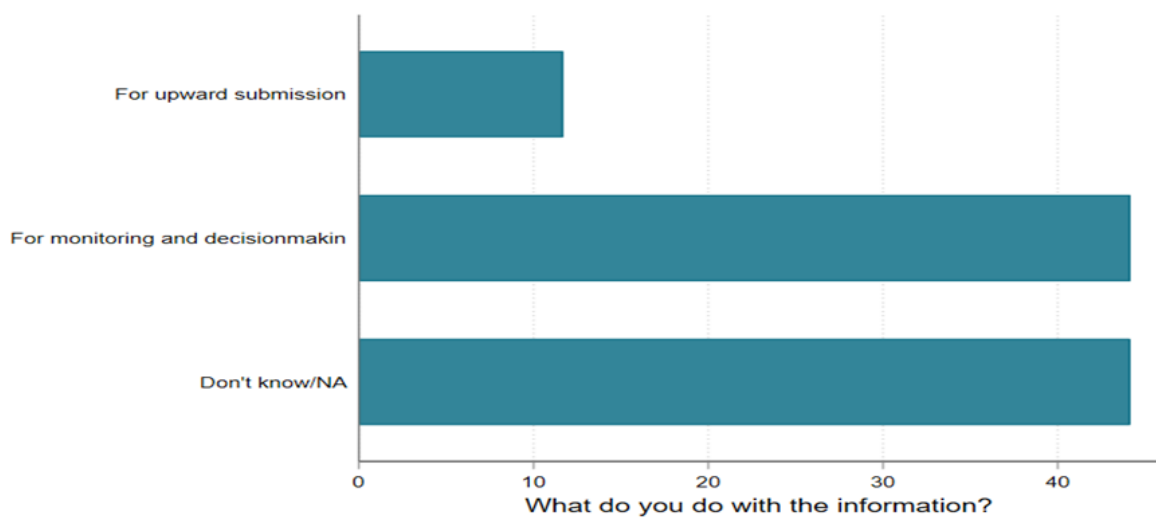


Figure 3.32: SHEP responses on uses of monitoring information

The success and sustainability of any intervention depends on how implementers of the programme are held accountable for their decisions and actions. Thus, for high level fidelity of implementation of the SFP, there must be an accountable system to ensure that appropriate and designed strategies are implemented. The research sought to identify accountability mechanisms instituted to ensure effective and efficient enactment of the programme. Figure 3.33 depicts responses of SHEP coordinators regarding accountability mechanisms.



Figure 3.33: SHEP coordinators' views on accountability mechanisms of the SFP

The responses brought to the fore that the majority of the coordinators are not aware of any accountability mechanisms put in place to ensure the success of the SFP. However, a sizable proportion noted that some data is collected for monitoring and accountability checks conducted during meetings or visits. Less than 10 percent of SHEP coordinators reported that the district assembly held the caterers accountable, or that payments were tied to reports of implementation.

When caterers are found to have not complied with the requirements of the SFP standards, the evidence shows that they are cautioned and advised to desist from such behaviour according to the plurality of SHEP coordinators interviewed in the survey (Figure 3.36). However, it is worrying that a larger proportion of SHEP coordinators responded either that they do not know what happens to defaulting caterers or there is no action taken against such caterers.

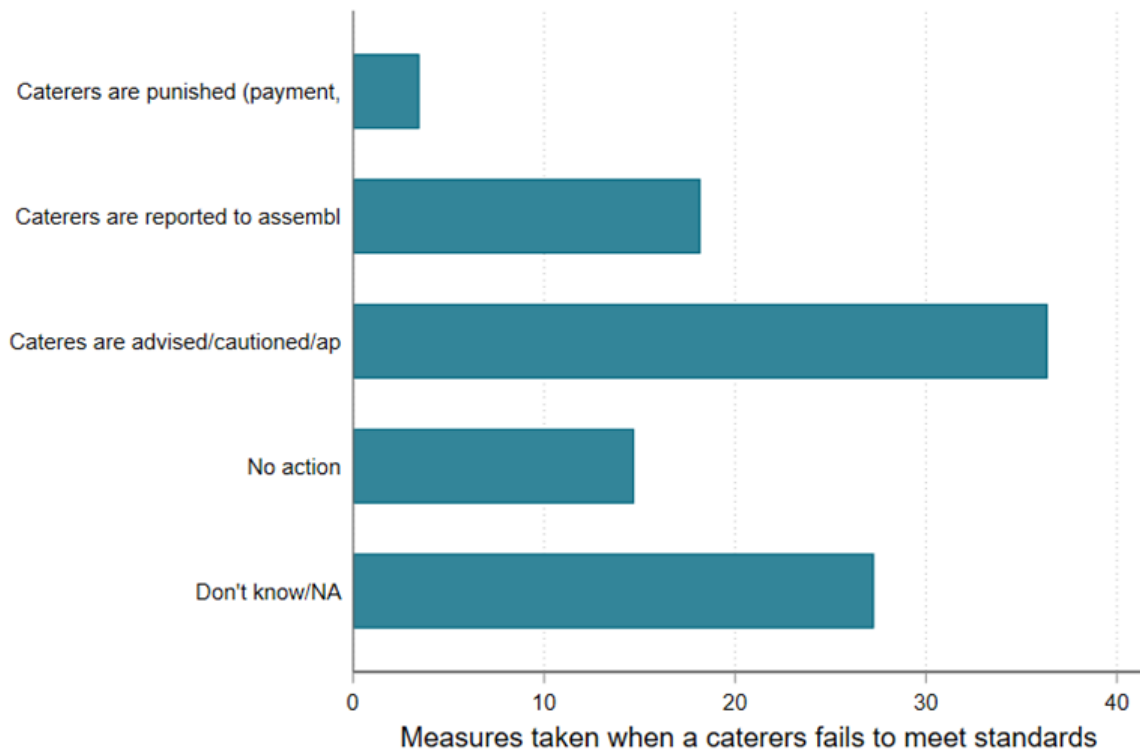


Figure 3.36: SHEP coordinators' views on consequences of caterers not meeting standards

### 3.4 Cross cutting features

The GSFP, like any other food-based programme, is susceptible to the impact of rising prices as advanced in section one of this report. Increases in fuel prices affect operational costs associated with procuring, storing, and preparing food. Rising food prices directly affect the cost of procuring ingredients for propelling the school feeding programme implementation. The increasing prices of food and food related items have implications for nutritional quality of food served. Higher costs strain the financial resources allocated to the programme, limiting the quantity and quality of meals provided by caterers to school children in schools with school feeding. With the rising prices, there is a risk of compromising the nutritional quality of meals supplied to school children to maintain affordability. This may result in reduced portion sizes or substitutions with cheaper, less nutritious options, thereby undermining one of the SFP's objectives of improving children's nutrition. The rising prices have the tendency to pose challenges to sustainability. If the GSFP faces persistent increases in food prices, it may face challenges in sustaining the programme in the long run. Higher costs can strain budgets, leading to difficulties in meeting the nutritional needs of the targeted beneficiaries.

As reported in the section on “Relevance, design and performance” (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), the value of school meals is more important than ever to beneficiaries - close to 8 out of 10 parents stated that they would prefer their children to receive school meals

than take-home rations or cash, and nearly 60% of sample students confirmed that they would be affected if school meals were not provided. Still, there are concerns about the quality. As we reported in the section 3.1.2.2, nearly 45 percent of parents rate provision of school meals at their child’s school unreliable to some degree and 13% the food was barely edible (Figures 3.7 and 3.8). In our survey more than a quarter of headteachers (28%) and household heads (37%) consider food not or barely nutritious. But how nutritious school meals are might have to wait in line because the more fundamental and important issue reported by all stakeholders is that there is not enough food to start with. In the face of rising costs, caterers in our sample report using costly coping strategies, like reducing the quantity of food (40 percent) or number of meals or days offered (around 20 percent each), as shown in Figure 3.37 below.

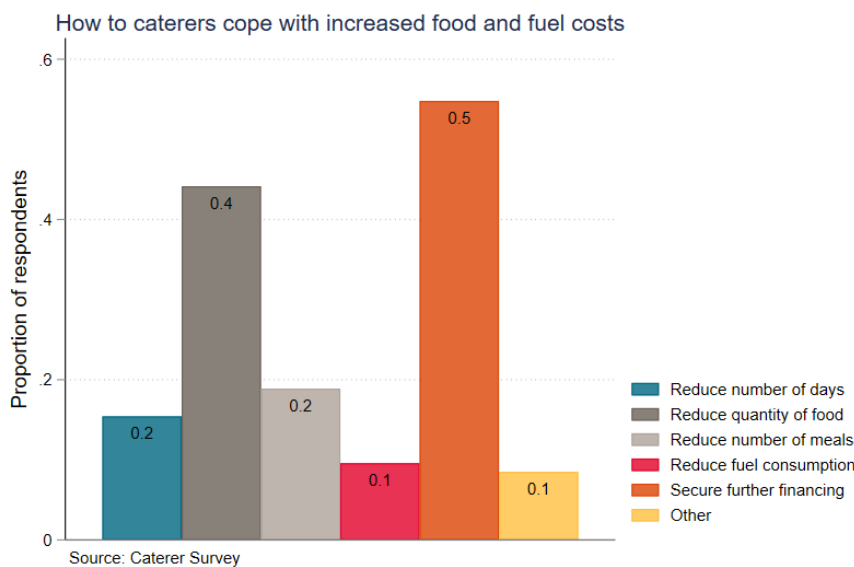


Figure 3.37: Coping strategies against increased food and fuel costs, reported by caterers

More than 60% of headteachers and household heads say food is not or barely sufficient. More than 30% of children want to increase food quantity when asked what they want to change about meals provided. 44% of the children in the survey also cite “Food was finished” as the reason why children come to school without food to eat. Nearly 67 percent report sending money with their kids to school when meals are not provided (see Figure 3.38 below).

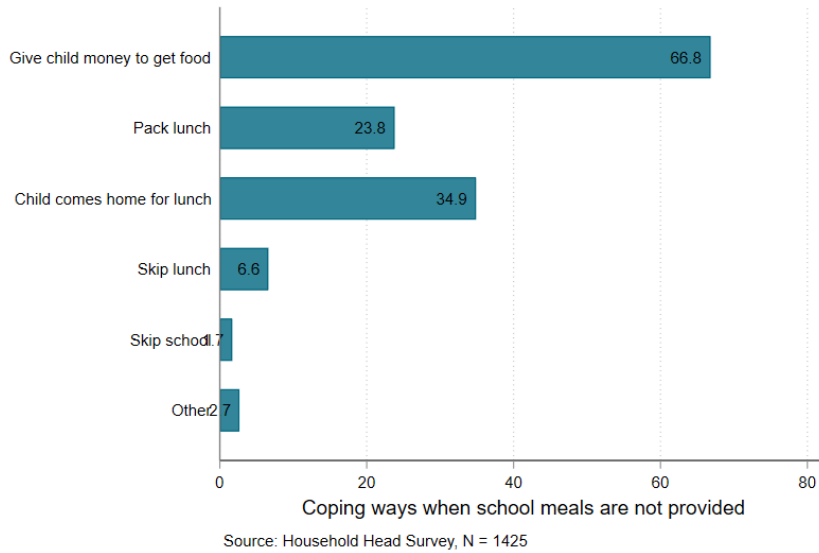


Figure 3.38: Coping strategies in the absence of school meals, reported by household heads

Key to ensuring resilience in the programme is to offer providers support to cope with and smooth these shocks, but from our findings across surveys we find that the economic environment around school meals provision is driven by uncertainty. As we showed in Figure 3 in section “Working capital (source and terms), over 30 percent of caterers have not received a payment in the last year. Around 14 percent only receive payments annually. Only a third of our caterer respondents receive payments termly. To cope with this uncertainty, around 40 percent of caterers respectively use loans or personal capital to compensate for delayed payments and ensure smooth operations (see Figure 3.38 below)

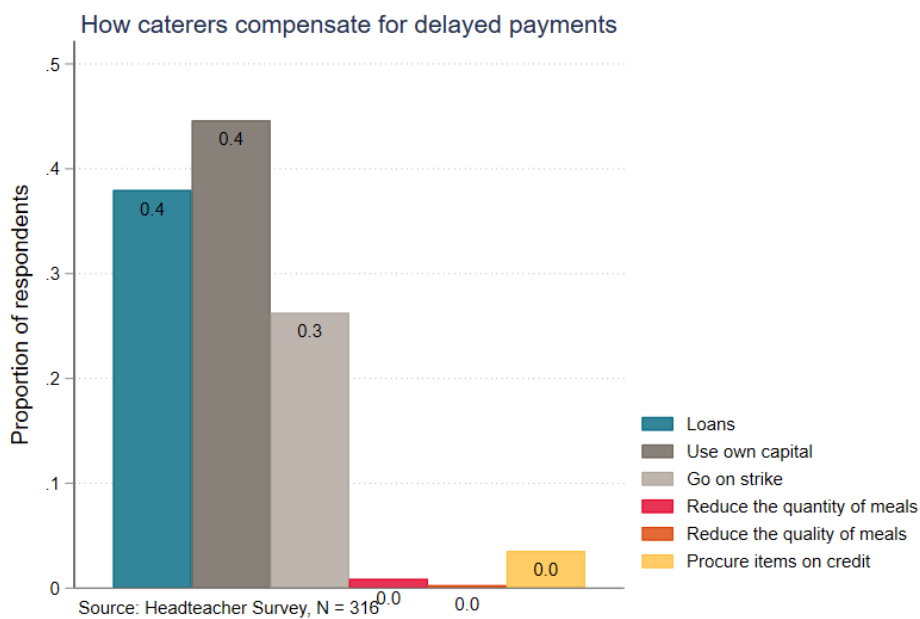


Figure 3.39: Coping strategies against delayed payments, reported by caterers

As we show in both Figure 1 and 2 above, half of the caterers in the sample are forced to secure additional financing through loans or their own capital to deal with the rising prices and uncertain payment schedule but as we discussed in the 3.18 in section 3.2.3 on Financing, over 70 percent of caterers report that it is not at all convenient to access working capital financing. Consequently, as we reported in the section on Constraints (Figure 3.20), 4 out of 5 caterers say finances and cash flow constraints is the primary barrier to improving service delivery.

Support and monitoring for school meals operations in general could be enhanced. Over 20 percent of SHEP coordinators surveyed reported that they are not aware that any support mechanism is in place at the district level to support caterers with procurement or loan acquisition. Although 42 percent of caterers report submitting M&E information with the district SHEP unit once every term, and another 20 percent reporting monthly, 43 percent of district SHEP coordinators did not know how the SFP was monitored in their district, as reported in Figure 3.40 of the Monitoring and accountability section. The majority of SHEP coordinators surveyed (70 percent) responded “don’t know” when asked what other options of financing were available to caterers, as well as (55 percent) when asked about the main accountability mechanisms in place for caterers.

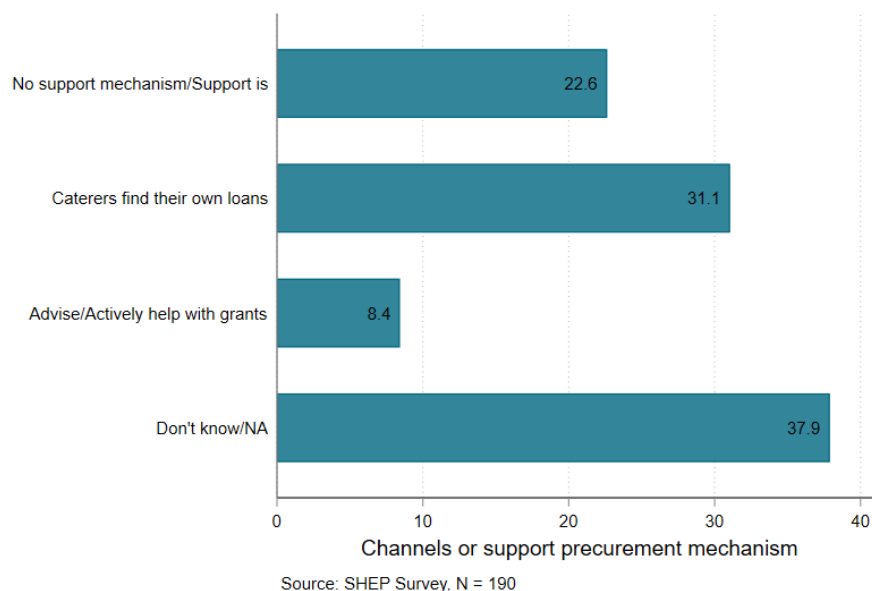


Figure 3.40: Support offered to caterers for procurement, as per district-level SHEP coordinators

## 4.0 Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

The present study explored the resilience of the school feeding programme despite the economic and other challenges faced by stakeholders involved in this social safety net. A number of valuable insights have become available as a result of this study. In this section, we present the concluding remarks based on the findings. In the second, we make recommendations to the plethora of actors - ministries, departments and development partners who work in the space of school feeding. Finally, we propose next steps and follow-on research based on the data and findings generated from this study to engage scholars and practitioners.

### 4.1 Concluding Remarks

This study has brought out various issues that affect the implementation of the SFP, through the lens of key stakeholders namely the school heads, students, caterers, parents and SHEP coordinators. The main aspects reviewed were the outputs, the operations or processes surrounding school feeding implementation, constraints and barriers faced, support offered, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Caterers surveyed are providing services i.e. delivering meals to students in an environment of heightened uncertainty and low support. Financial constraints resulting from rising prices and chronically delayed payments have restricted caterers' abilities to remain profitable through school meals provision. Firstly, the limited flexibility to purchase raw produce and secondly the use of credit with interest charges which led to inputs having a higher market price. These ultimately place a burden on the caterers which has direct implications for the sustainability of the school feeding programme.

The output of the programme from the perspective of the school heads focused on the quality of the food served as well as the relevance of the programme to students. The school heads were satisfied with the food quality and the processes put in place to ensure activities related to feeding were done in a hygienic environment. The school headteachers reported taking charge of providing a hygienic environment, making use of a checklist that conforms to government prescription, monitoring by both headteacher and external education officers.

In the case of the parents, they related to the output from the perspective of frequency, reliability and quality. There was a wide variation in their perceptions of the reliability and quality of food provided ranging from excellent to poor. Students interviewed confirmed the parents' reports of the frequency of food provided in schools. Unlike the parents, the majority of students were satisfied with school meals provision, although they would have liked an improvement in the quantity and variety. It can be concluded that parents had higher expectations of the SFP than students.



The SHEP insights of the SFP concluded that there is an effective monitoring and evaluation in place to ensure quality. Funding of SFP is a key constraint in terms of late and irregular payments to caterers for services provided, high and changing costs of inputs, difficulty in getting external support and no supplementary funding. These challenges will make it difficult to sustain the SFP.

## 4.2 Policy recommendations

Based on the findings some relevant policy recommendations are provided to help policy makers and other technocrats inform their operations to the betterment of the school feeding sector. That the policy is important and there is a high need for it to be successful is recognised by all stakeholders. This study has also brought out various issues that affect the implementation of the SFP, through the outputs, the operations or processes carried out, constraints, monitoring and evaluation. In view of this finding, it is recommended that a multidisciplinary approach should be activated by the school feeding secretariat to engage the identified challenges more comprehensively. The multidisciplinary actors could include ministries, agencies, departments and development partners and civil societies working in the space.

In view of the caterers reducing the quantity of food served and undertaking credit with interest charges which lead to higher charges, we recommend that the amalgamated multidisciplinary body so suggested by this report find a way to engage banking service providers to open new lines of credit for this service providers in the School Feeding programme sector. We see value in such an activity since it has implications for the sustainability of the school feeding programme.

Since it was found out that most of the coordinators were not aware of the accountability mechanisms, the M&E structure should be more open and stringent. Key stakeholders should be oriented, informed and held accountable for their activities. This goes for the caterers, school heads, SHEP coordinators, District officers and SMCs.

Leveraging on the findings that school heads perceived the school feeding programme as achieving its objectives in three main areas; improving school attendance, enhancing the nutrition status of pupils and ultimately improving learning outcomes policy, it is recommended that policy makers engage philanthropies and foundations to support the government financially to strengthen the sector. Furthermore, parents, guardians and other stakeholders could be brought into the picture to think through ways of making the school feeding arrangement more resilient to the present shocks on record.

Could parents who are able to support the payment for the cost of school feeding be made to do so? The fact is that there is data on Ghanaians now - made possible on the registration of people living in Ghana - making it possible for individuals who are

achieving at some level of financial capabilities to be identified nationally. Such individuals could be engaged or tasked to support the school feeding sector - that way, there could be an equalising imperative where the financially empowered support those who are financially less empowered.

### 4.3 Research and development recommendations

The present report has showcased key action points related to resilience and long-term sustainability of the GSFP. These findings provide a basis to seek yet more answers to a number of extended research questions. For example, suggested areas of inquiry such as:

- How have the design and operation of school feeding at the school or district levels impacted the quality and consistency of provision?
- What are the political economy determinants of the efficiency and sustainability of school feeding at the local level?
- How have rising food prices affected the implementation of school feeding at the district level?
- How has the presence of school feeding affected the responses of households in terms of the allocation of children's time between schooling and labour?

are but some of the secondary questions to explore further.

Additionally the present understanding and contributions of this study begs for evidence in testing several key hypotheses, that we hope to elaborate upon in future pieces of work, including engaging whether:

- Established caterers with large-scale operations tend to provide better quality meals with more consistency
- Better access to flexible financing is correlated with well-functioning school meal programme
- Schools with more coherent oversight tend to have better functioning school meal programme
- Inclusion error is more common (and wastage higher) among schools added to the programme later on
- The political economy determinants of the efficiency and sustainability of school feeding at the local level, especially in highly contentious electoral districts, are related with efficiency of school meals provision.

## 5. References

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## 6. Appendix

Theme	Caterers	School heads	Parents	Children/Students	SHEP
<p><b>RELEVANCE AND OUTPUTS OF GSFP</b></p>	<p>How long have you been providing school meals in general?</p> <p>How many children do you prepare meals for in this school?</p> <p>Did you in the past or do you currently provide meals for any other school?</p> <p>Given the change in the economic environment in terms of rise of food prices and fuel, how have you coped?</p> <p>Have you ever received training as part of the program</p>	<p>How often do caterers deviate from the menu set by the government?</p> <p>In your opinion, is the quantity of food offered sufficient?</p> <p>In your opinion, is the food provided prepared in a hygienic environment?</p> <p>Is there a checklist that you use to check compliance by caterers to govt mandated standards for school meals</p> <p>Do you think school feeding will continue to be offered in your school next year?</p>	<p>In the last term, how frequently were school meals provided in your child's school?</p> <p>How reliable is provision of school meals for your child in school?</p> <p>How would you rate the quality of the food offered at school meals?</p> <p>In your opinion, is the food provided nutritious?</p> <p>In your opinion, how regular is the quality of food served to your child?</p> <p>In your opinion, do you think the SFP in its current form is a sustainable social program?</p> <p>How do you cope when school meals</p>	<p>How often are school meals provided in your school?</p> <p>Do you like the food you are offered at school?</p> <p>Is there anything you wish you could change about the school meals offered in your school?</p> <p>Are there days that you come to school and do not get food to eat?</p> <p>Do you think you would be affected if meals were no longer provided at your school?</p> <p>If yes, how would you be affected?</p>	<p>How long have you been a SHEP coordinator in this district? (enter integer - number of years)</p> <p>How many schools in your district have a SFP in 2023 AY? (enter integer)</p> <p>How many schools do not have a school feeding programme in your district? (enter integer)</p> <p>How many schools in your district had SFP in 2020 AY?</p>

			<p>are not provided?</p> <p>What other forms of social assistance programs do you currently have access to?</p> <p>Would you prefer take-home rations to on-sight school meals for your child?</p> <p>Would you prefer to receive the value of school meals in cash?</p>		
<b>DESIGN</b>	<p>How were you selected for the catering job?</p>	<p>What type of school free meals scheme is available at the school?</p> <p>Why was the school selected for school meals?</p> <p>In which year did school feeding start being offered in your school?</p>			<p>What are the main criteria for including a school in the program?</p> <p>What data source(s) are used to determine schools' eligibility for inclusion in SFP? ( Write what you do – text only)</p>
<b>OPERATIONAL</b>	<p>Do you usually purchase inputs on credit?</p> <p>How frequently do you receive the payment for</p>	<p>How do caterers normally compensate for rising prices or delayed payments?</p>			<p>Does the district support schools/caterers with procurement of provisions for school feeding? (Yes / No). If yes, how?</p>

	<p>the school meals you are providing for this school (from 2022 to now)?</p> <p>Do you have access to working capital loan to fund the school meals operation</p> <p>What are the most common terms for repayment of the loan: repayment period, interest rate?</p> <p>Given the change in the economic environment in terms of rise of food prices and fuel, how have you coped?</p> <p>How did you finance the initial capital investment for the school meals operation?</p> <p>What are the top 3 constraints on expanding your school feeding operation or improving your</p>	<p>What is your opinion of the consistency of the food offered at school meals?</p> <p>Has there been any supplemental financing in addition to government funding to support school meals in your school? B34 (II) If yes, what was the source of supplemental financing?</p> <p>Is there any form of in-kind contribution to the school feeding operation in your school?</p> <p>Do you think school feeding will continue to be offered in your school next year?</p> <p>Was there another form of school feeding at your school (such as provided as a WFP-run</p>			<p>If no, could you comment on the other channels or support for procurement-related issues you know about?</p> <p>Does the district support caterers by facilitating access to financing/school-feeding loans? (Note - this is different from initial capital; it relates to working capital loans.</p> <p>If yes, how? (text) If no, what other options for financing/loans are you aware of that caterers access? (text)</p>
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	<p>services? (Ranked) (Among responses is “ Finance / cash flow))</p> <p>Do you have any other businesses?</p> <p>How many full-time workers does your school feeding operation employ?</p> <p>In the last term, how frequently did you provide school meals at this school</p>	<p>program) prior to the current program?</p> <p>How many meals are typically WASTED?</p> <p>How many meals are typically RETURNED?</p>			
<b>MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	<p>Who is responsible for routine monitoring of school meals provision?</p> <p>How often do in person monitoring and accountability checks occur?</p> <p>How often are you required to share monitoring information with district assemblies or other authorities?</p>	<p>Is there a checklist that you use to check compliance by caterers to govt mandated standards for school meals</p> <p>What are the areas of responsibility and accountability for school meals in your school?</p> <p>What is your role in the</p>			<p>How is the SFP in your district monitored?</p> <p>Who does the monitoring?</p> <p>What is the frequency of monitoring?</p> <p>What kind of data do they collect? How do the monitors collect this data?</p> <p>What do you do with the information?</p> <p>What are the main accountability</p>

		<p>school meals administration?</p> <p>Which of the following school related structures are involved in the monitoring and accountability of the school meals programme?</p> <p>How often do in person monitoring by government/external agents occur?</p> <p>Who is responsible for such checks?</p>			<p>mechanisms?</p> <p>If a caterer is found to not be providing meals, or the quality of meals being provided is below standards, what measures are taken?</p> <p>Is there any district-level initiative introduced recently to improve the performance of the SFP? If yes, comment on the district-level initiative introduced recently to improve the performance of the SFP.</p>
<b>CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS</b>	<p>How many children do you prepare meals for in this school?</p> <p>Given the change in the economic environment in terms of rise of food prices and fuel, how have you coped?</p> <p>Do you have access to working capital loan to fund the school meals operation</p> <p>How often are</p>	<p>In your opinion, is the food provided prepared in a hygienic environment?</p> <p>Do you think school feeding will continue to be offered in your school next year?</p> <p>How do caterers normally compensate for rising prices or delayed</p>	<p>How reliable is provision of school meals for your child in school?</p> <p>How would you rate the quality of the food offered at school meals?</p> <p>How do you cope when school meals are not provided?</p>	<p>Do you think you would be affected if meals were no longer provided at your school?</p> <p>If yes, how would you be affected?</p>	<p>Does the district support schools/caterers with procurement of provisions for school feeding? (Yes / No). If yes, how?</p> <p>If no, could you comment on the other channels or support for procurement-related issues you know about?</p> <p>How is the SFP in your district monitored?</p>



	<p>you required to share monitoring information with district assemblies or other authorities?</p>	<p>payments?</p> <p>Which of the following school related structures are involved in the monitoring and accountability of the school meals programme?</p>			
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