

## The Contribution of The Community in Supporting the School Feeding Program Among Selected Ward Secondary Schools in Dar Es Salaam City Council

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**Abstract:** This study examined the contribution of the community in supporting School Feeding Programs (SFPs) among selected ward secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City Council. School feeding remains a critical intervention globally, enhancing students' nutrition, attendance, and academic performance. Drawing on Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, the study emphasizes that fulfilling students' physiological needs particularly food is essential for effective learning. A qualitative research approach and a multiple case study design were employed to gather detailed insights from 47 participants, including students, teachers, parents, school committee members, Ward Education Coordinators, and City Education Officers. Data were collected through interviews, documentary reviews, and observation, and analyzed thematically through coding, categorizing, and interpretation. The findings revealed that parents play a central role in sustaining SFPs through financial contributions and direct food support; although most are low-income earners who struggle to meet the required contributions due to financial constraints, food price inflation, and limited awareness. Government support was minimal and inconsistent, leaving much responsibility to parents and local communities. Additionally, educational stakeholders and local leaders such as CAMFED and ward officials were found to support vulnerable students and mobilize community engagement. However, several challenges hindered effective implementation of SFPs, including inadequate infrastructure (lack of kitchens, dining halls, and food storage), political interference, poverty, inflation of food prices, and irregular parental contributions. The study concludes that sustainable school feeding requires strong community involvement, reliable government support, and improved infrastructures. Ensuring consistent access to nutritious meals is essential for students' attendance, concentration, and academic success. The study provides recommendations aimed at strengthening community participation, enhancing government involvement, and improving the sustainability of school feeding programs in public secondary schools in Dar es Salaam.

**Keywords:** Community Support, School Feeding and School Feeding Program.

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## Introduction

School feeding programs (SFPs) have been implemented worldwide as a crucial intervention to improve student enrollment, attendance, and academic performance. Historically, school feeding initiatives date back to the early 20th century in Europe and North America, where they were introduced to combat malnutrition and enhance learning outcomes among children from low-income families (Gelli et al., 2018). Over time, the focus has shifted from merely providing food to ensuring the sustainability of these programs through active community participation. In developing nations, including those in Africa, governments and development partners have emphasized the role of community involvement in sustaining school feeding initiatives to address financial and logistical constraints (Ogidi & Ugi, 2024).

In 1930, the USA and the UK adopted the Food for Education (FFE) program to enhance the well-being of young people. The

projects resembled School Feeding Programs (SFPs), where beneficiaries were encouraged to have supper during school hours. The UK and the USA aimed to ensure the development of well-organized children in schools by incorporating the system as a key aspect of their national projects (Niyonzima, 2018). Additionally, In the United States, school feeding programs have evolved from charity-based initiatives to government-funded schemes, such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which serves millions of children daily (Fox et al., 2022). Similarly, Canada has seen extensive collaboration between government agencies, non-profits, and communities to ensure the sustainability of school feeding programs (Polsky & Garriguet, 2020).

European nations have also prioritized sustainable school feeding programs through community-driven approaches. In the United Kingdom, policies supporting universal free school meals emphasize the involvement of parents and local communities in decision-making processes (Dalma et al., 2016). France has successfully

integrated local agricultural production into its school meal programs, ensuring sustainability and community involvement (Flores, 2023). Similarly, Sweden's City-based school feeding model fosters community collaboration in funding and implementation, reinforcing the importance of shared responsibility (Waling & Olsson, 2020). These cases suggest that sustainable school feeding initiatives thrive when communities actively contribute resources and management.

In Nigeria, the Home-Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) has enhanced sustainability through active local farmer involvement and parental contributions (Adepoju, & Akinleye, 2021). Ghana's school feeding strategy integrates community support through participatory planning and food production, ensuring consistent meal provision (Akuamoah-Boateng, & Sam-Tagoe, 2018). In Senegal, the decentralized community management of school meals has contributed to program sustainability, demonstrating the effectiveness of localized decision-making (Diouf et al., 2022). These models underscore the crucial role of local actors in sustaining successful school feeding initiatives.

In Kenya, the national school feeding program incorporates parental contributions and local government partnerships to sustain school meals (Kimani, 2019). Uganda has implemented cost-sharing strategies where communities provide in-kind support, such as food supplies and cooking services (Nsubuga, 2020). Rwanda has also seen success in school feeding through cooperative partnerships between schools, parents, and local businesses, ensuring continuous food availability (MoE, 2020). These examples demonstrate that the sustainability of school feeding programs depends on robust community involvement.

In Tanzania, school feeding programs have been implemented with varying levels of success, largely dependent on community participation. The government, in collaboration with international organizations, has launched several initiatives to enhance school meal programs (WFP, 2017). However, financial constraints and inconsistent community support have led to challenges in sustaining these programs (Rector et al., 2022). A study by Komba and Mchopa (2021) found that active parental engagement and local food production significantly improved the sustainability of school feeding initiatives in rural areas. In urban centers like Dar es Salaam, community involvement in school feeding remains inconsistent, with a reliance on external funding threatening the program's longevity (Mkonongwa et al., 2020). These findings indicate the need for more structured and community-driven strategies to ensure sustainability.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Review

The study is guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, which explains that human motivation progresses through five levels: physiological needs, safety, social belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The theory assumes that humans are constantly seeking to satisfy increasingly complex needs and that higher-level needs emerge once lower-level ones are met. Its strengths lie in helping managers and educators understand human behavior and provide appropriate support, such as ensuring students' basic needs especially nutrition are met to enhance learning. However, the theory is criticized for being overly simplistic, lacking clear cause-

and-effect links, and not accounting for diverse motivations that may not follow a strict hierarchy. For School Feeding Programmes (SFP), the theory implies that meeting students' physiological needs through adequate, nutritious food fosters better health, motivation, participation, and a positive learning environment.

### Empirical Literature Review

School feeding programs are well-structured and widely recognized as essential for enhancing students' nutrition and academic performance. According to Kosilei et al. (2018), community awareness about school feeding programs in the United States is relatively high, largely due to extensive government campaigns and media advocacy. Similarly, a study by Thompson and Richards (2021) in Canada found that parents and stakeholders were well-informed about the role of school meals in reducing food insecurity among children. In Brazil, government-led initiatives, such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), have significantly raised awareness, as noted by Adekunle and Christiana (2016), who emphasized the impact of parental involvement in sustaining school feeding efforts.

In Europe, awareness of school feeding programs is generally high due to strong policy advocacy. In the United Kingdom, research by Tagoe (2018) found that government-led school meal initiatives have increased public awareness of the importance of nutrition in education. In Germany, a study by Morgan (2025) highlighted that school feeding programs are widely accepted, with communities playing an active role in their implementation. Meanwhile, in France, research by Dubois and Mrabet (2020) suggested that although school feeding programs are common, awareness levels vary between urban and rural communities, with urban populations demonstrating higher engagement.

In Asia, community awareness levels vary across countries. In India, the Midday Meal Scheme has been instrumental in increasing awareness about the benefits of school feeding, as highlighted by Kumar (2011), who found that rural communities were more aware due to local government efforts. In China, a study by Li and Thakur (2021) revealed that although school feeding programs exist, awareness remains moderate, with urban areas having more knowledge than rural communities. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, efforts to educate parents and communities on the importance of school meals have been increasing, as reported by Rahman and Putri (2022), who employed a qualitative research approach in their study and ultimately found that school-based awareness campaigns significantly influence parental attitudes toward feeding programs.

In Kenya, awareness of school feeding programs is relatively high, mainly due to extensive government efforts and the support of international organizations. A study by Benjamin (2021) found that public awareness campaigns led by the government and NGOs have contributed to a better understanding of the benefits of school feeding, especially in arid and semi-arid regions where food insecurity is prevalent. The research further indicated that parents and community members actively participate in the implementation of school feeding programs by providing local food resources and engaging in meal preparation. Additionally, local radio and television programs have played a critical role in educating communities about the importance of school meals, further increasing awareness and acceptance.

In Uganda, awareness campaigns have also played a crucial role in enhancing community engagement in school feeding initiatives. Daitai (2022) noted that local government authorities, in collaboration with NGOs such as the World Food Programme (WFP), have been conducting sensitization programs to educate parents and school committees about the significance of providing meals in schools. As a result, more parents are now willing to contribute food items or financial support to sustain feeding programs. However, the study highlighted that despite these efforts, some rural communities still lack adequate knowledge of the long-term benefits of school feeding, with misconceptions and financial challenges hindering full participation.

Similarly, in Rwanda, the government has implemented a policy of free school meals, which has significantly improved public knowledge and acceptance of school feeding programs.

In Tanzania, several studies have examined the level of awareness among community members regarding school feeding programs. The findings indicate that while there is a growing recognition of the benefits of these programs, significant gaps still exist, particularly in rural areas where information dissemination is limited. Some authors who explained about the school feeding program include the following;

Msuya (2020) conducted a study in Tanzania on the importance of school feeding programs. It was a quantitative study involving a survey research design. The findings found that awareness levels in urban areas have increased due to government initiatives and media campaigns aimed at educating the public on the importance of school feeding. Radio and television programs have been particularly effective in reaching urban populations, making them more informed about how school meals contribute to student well-being and academic success. However, in rural communities, awareness remains low due to inadequate communication channels, poor infrastructure, and a lack of formal education among parents. This gap has led to lower participation rates in school feeding programs in remote regions.

Komba and Mchopa (2021) revealed that while some parents in Tanzania are aware of school feeding programs, their level of engagement remains limited. Their study employed a qualitative approach and utilized a multiple case study design. The findings found that parents generally support the idea of school meals but do not actively participate in the planning or implementation of the programs. This lack of involvement is often due to economic constraints, as some parents struggle to afford contributions toward school feeding initiatives. Additionally, the study noted that in some areas, there is a misconception that school feeding should be entirely the responsibility of the government, leading to a passive approach among community members.

Nyoni and Rwehumbiza (2022) highlighted those financial constraints are a significant barrier to community participation in school feeding programs. The researcher employed a qualitative method to collect the data. Many households in low-income areas cannot afford to contribute food items or financial resources to support school meals. As a result, some schools face challenges in sustaining feeding programs, leading to intermittent disruptions that affect students' nutrition and academic performance. The study emphasized the need for government subsidies and donor support to ensure the continuity of school feeding initiatives, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities.

Furthermore, Mbwambo (2023) highlighted the role of local government authorities in promoting awareness of school feeding. The study employed a qualitative method and a case study design to collect and analyses data. The study found that district education officers and local leaders have been actively involved in sensitizing communities about the importance of school feeding. Strategies such as village meetings, workshops, and public announcements have been used to educate parents about the benefits of school meals in enhancing student concentration, reducing dropout rates, and improving academic performance. However, the study also noted that some government officials face challenges in mobilizing resources and securing community support, which hinders the effective implementation of awareness campaigns.

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, enabling the researcher to interact directly with participants and capture their views, experiences, and attitudes regarding community support in sustaining school feeding programs. A multiple case study design was used to generate rich, detailed data from various ward secondary schools within the Dar es Salaam City Council. Dar es Salaam was selected as the study area due to its diverse population, high food prices, and the new implementation of compulsory school feeding programs in secondary schools. The target population included key education stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents, school committee members, ward education coordinators, and city education officials. Using both purposive and random sampling, a total sample of 47 participants was selected. Data were collected through documentary review, interviews, and observation, allowing triangulation to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures that involved familiarizing with the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and defining them, and presenting results with supporting evidence. To ensure reliability, validity, and trustworthiness, the study employed strategies such as triangulation, audit trails, stepwise replication, and peer review. Credibility was enhanced by using multiple data sources, while transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the context and purposive sampling. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through consistent procedures and triangulation of methods. A pilot study refined the interview instruments, and ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining permits, ensuring participant confidentiality, and protecting all participants from harm throughout the research process.

## Findings and Discussions

This study sought to explore community contributions in supporting school feeding programs among selected secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City Council. Therefore, the following themes were revealed, presented and discussed as follows

### Parents' Income

The researcher found that fee-free education was introduced to help lower-income earners who cannot afford to pay school fees and other contributions for their children. Therefore, parents were allowed to take their children to fee-free education schools. Most of the parents in these schools are lower-income earners who cannot afford to pay various contributions, including food

contributions, for their children. For instance, during in-depth interview with one of the respondents from Y City the following was stated:

The reasons why parents take their children to these schools are financial. These schools cater to lower-income earners, whereas private schools and other boarding schools are typically for middle- and higher-income earners. (Interview, City Executive Director from City, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2025).

This indicates that lower-income earners who cannot afford to pay the fee are advised to take their children because education is free. In all schools, education is provided, but with some differences in quality and resources. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children receive quality education delivered in a conducive teaching and learning environment with adequate infrastructure and resources. This is why parents are expected to make various contributions to support the overall educational experience. Supporting this, Komba and Mchopa (2021) highlight that parental involvement, including financial contributions, is crucial for sustaining school programs and improving student outcomes. Additionally, Nyoni and Rwehumbiza (2022) emphasize that despite financial constraints, parental support remains essential to maintain the quality and continuity of education services, especially in resource-limited settings.

Additionally, the research findings revealed that a significant proportion of parents in the study area lived in poverty and were unable to contribute to their children's school meals. Only a small number of parents made contributions, and students often had to share the limited food available. Moreover, some parents lacked understanding of the meaning and importance of school feeding programs, which led to reluctance in contributing. This underscores the importance of community members effectively taking up roles in local governance, as noted by Inkoom (2011), where active participation and awareness can contribute to improved service delivery and better development outcomes, including more sustainable school feeding initiatives.

Findings from the interviews focused on how parents participate in school feeding programmes. The result of the interviewed parents showed that many parents participated in the implementation of the programme. Parents were the ones who encouraged the programmes to exist by contributing food to schools for their children's meals during school hours. One parent said:

The first provider of school meals is the parent. This is due to the fact that the community recognises the importance of students' meals during school hours. The Government contributes a little bit or not at all. Many parents prioritize ensuring their children have enough to eat, often preparing meals at home before sending them to school. However, this places a heavy financial burden on some families, especially those with limited resources. Without sufficient government support, schools struggle to implement formal feeding programs that could benefit all students equally. (Interview, Teacher from School A<sub>1</sub>, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2025)

This implies that students from low-income families may be at a disadvantage due to inconsistent access to nutritious meals during school hours. Taylor et al. (2022) highlights that inadequate nutrition negatively impacts children's cognitive development, concentration, and academic performance, reinforcing the critical role of consistent meal provision in schools. The burden on parents

to provide meals can exacerbate financial stress, particularly among vulnerable households, limiting their capacity to support other essential needs. Without adequate government support, schools struggle to ensure equitable opportunities for student well-being and learning, which can widen educational disparities. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, fulfilling basic physiological needs such as hunger is fundamental before students can focus on higher-order functions like learning and social development. Thus, addressing nutritional gaps is essential to close attendance and achievement disparities and promote holistic student success. Overall, this highlights the urgent need for more comprehensive school feeding policies and government involvement.

Another parent responded:

Yes, we participate positively in the implementation of this programme because we see the impact of the schools feeding programme on the improvement of our students' attendance as well as performance since the programme was introduced. Many students who were previously unable to focus due to hunger are now more attentive and motivated in class. This has created a more positive learning environment overall. (Interview, Teacher from School A<sub>1</sub>, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2025).

The researcher found that parents provide direct financial support to ensure their children have access to meals at school in school A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>. They pay 1000/= daily, while in other schools, B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub> failed to contribute to the school feeding program. In both schools A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> they contribute through cash payments. Additionally, students from low-income families are assisted by the school. Data indicate that parents play a vital role in sustaining school feeding programs through financial contributions, which help cover food costs and operational expenses. However, the level of contribution varies depending on the family's income level.

To support these findings, Zuilkowski et al. (2018) explained that low-cost private schools are widespread in Kenya, particularly in urban areas, where the study examined the reasons parents send their children to fee-charging schools in a context of free public education. Parents who chose low-cost private schools for their children were more driven by concerns about quality. Therefore, despite being termed as low-cost schools because they charge a lower fee, the fees charged by schools primarily serving people experiencing poverty were often a heavy burden to families. Similarly, Nyoni and Rwehumbiza (2022) highlighted that in many low-income communities, the financial capacity of parents is overstretched, limiting their ability to contribute to school development initiatives, including those related to meals and learning resources. Based on the findings, there is a need to improve the teaching and learning environment in these secondary schools to help students acquire quality education in a conducive environment. This can be achieved by applying the values of the financing public schools' theory, which include public funding, public instruction, and secular control. The aim is to balance the quality of education and the teaching and learning environment between government day schools and government boarding schools by paying more attention to resources and infrastructure, and financing these schools more effectively through increased budgets, in order to produce a productive population and a decent society.

Also, Lembani (2021) commented that, the Government of Tanzania should ensure all schools provide adequate mid-day meals on regular basis through support of community/village government, ensuring food security for school feeding, parents and guardians required to provide breakfast to their children before they go to school or snack for eating while at school, district council include school feeding issues in their plans implement and monitor activities, Non-Government Organizations, Civil Societies and Faith Groups encouraged continuing support of school feeding activities.

## **Government Contribution to School Feeding Programmes**

Most respondents stated that the government did not contribute anything to the implementation of the programme. However, very few respondents said the government contributed a little to the students who come from far away, as the programme was supported by parents only. Findings from the interviews showed that the government supports this programme partially, as the responses from teachers and educational stakeholders were somewhat similar. In some schools, the Tanzanian government has contributed minimally to the implementation of the school meals programme, particularly for schools with hostels. The rest of the schools had no governmental support for the implementation of the programme. Evidence showed that a larger portion of the school meals was provided by parents, with a certain contribution coming from the schools themselves. The Government contributed only a small share to students' meals during school hours, and not uniformly across all schools.

This situation underscores the importance of strong community engagement in school management. Local leaders, parents, and teachers actively participating in School Management Committees (SMCs) contribute to decision-making regarding resource allocation and service delivery (Nsubuga, 2020). Such participatory governance models not only increase accountability but also help ensure that limited resources like those for school feeding are directed where they are most needed. In the absence of full government support, the effectiveness of the school feeding programme heavily relies on coordinated efforts at the local level to sustain and improve implementation. One respondent said:

In my best experience, it is essential to feed students during school hours to support them physically, mentally, and academically. Therefore, I request that the government support this programme for students' meals. When students are well-nourished, they are more likely to concentrate and participate actively in lessons. This also helps reduce absenteeism and improves overall school performance. Without proper support, many children risk falling behind due to hunger-related challenges. (Interview, Teacher from School A<sub>1</sub>, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2025).

This implies that adequate nutrition is directly linked to students' ability to learn and succeed academically. Without proper meal support, students may struggle with concentration and motivation, leading to poorer performance. It also suggests that government involvement is crucial to ensure all students have equal access to nutritious meals. Ultimately, neglecting this need could widen educational disparities and hinder overall community development.

This aligns with Luswaga and Nuppenau (2020), who assert that students with insufficient nutrition often face challenges in

cognitive functioning, attendance, and academic achievement. Similarly, Msuya (2020) found that awareness and support for school feeding programs significantly improve student performance and school participation, particularly when supported by both government and community stakeholders. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, basic physiological needs such as food must be met before a child can focus on learning or reach their full academic potential. When these foundational needs are unmet, students are unlikely to thrive in school, underscoring the critical role of meal programs in educational success.

Another respondent said:

School feeding is not effective because parents are not serious about their contributions and often do not provide them on time as agreed. Therefore, education is urgently needed to raise parents' awareness about the importance of timely food contributions. Without consistent support, the feeding programme cannot run smoothly and fails to benefit the students as intended. Improving communication and engagement with parents is essential to ensure the success of the programme. (Interview, Teacher from School B<sub>1</sub>, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2025).

From the statements above, it was evident that the government did not take the programme seriously because it contributed only a little to a few schools in the whole Cityity. The main sponsor of the programme was the parents. These findings were noteworthy because, in previous studies, the government appeared to be the primary provider, collaborating with WFP in the implementation of the programme in primary schools. WFP does not exist in secondary students' school meals. This lack of government involvement in secondary schools creates a gap in support for older students who also need adequate nutrition. As a result, the burden on parents increases, which may not be sustainable in the long term. It highlights the urgent need for expanded government commitment to ensure equitable meal provision across all school levels.

This is supported by Nyoni and Rwehumbiza (2022), who found that the financial burden of sustaining school feeding programs often falls heavily on parents, especially in low-income areas, leading to irregular implementation and inequalities in access. When the government's role is minimal, the effectiveness and consistency of such programs are compromised. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, if students' basic physiological needs such as food are not met, they cannot effectively focus on learning. Therefore, the absence of consistent meal provision at the secondary level poses a serious threat to students' academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being.

## **Education Stakeholders and Local Leaders**

When sharing knowledge with the participant, the study findings revealed that there are stakeholders who support the feeding program, especially for students from low-income families and special groups, as well as girls, to rescue them from temptations such as the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), which contributes money for girls' students from low-income families. This organisation contributes directly through cash transfers to those students. The findings indicated that stakeholders such as CAMFED have reduced the burden on parents and schools, although their contributions are project-based and temporary. Additionally, local leaders play a role by influencing individuals

and organizations with the capacity to donate money toward feeding programs in schools within their jurisdictions.

These findings align with Kamya and Mugisha (2022), who noted that partnerships between local governments and NGOs like the World Food Programme (WFP) have played a crucial role in mobilizing resources and sensitizing communities about the importance of school meals. Similarly, Mbwambo (2023) emphasized the role of local authorities in leveraging community networks and philanthropic support to sustain school feeding efforts, particularly in areas with limited government funding. Together, these stakeholders help fill the gap left by insufficient state support, ensuring that vulnerable groups especially girls and students from low-income households have consistent access to food and educational opportunities. During an interview with one respondent, he stated that;

We worked closely with the ward nutrition and food officer and the councillor to educate parents about the importance of school meals for students. Through community meetings and workshops, we emphasized how proper nutrition supports children's learning and overall health. Many parents began to understand their crucial role in contributing to the programme. This collaboration helped improve the consistency of food contributions and strengthened community support for the feeding initiative. (Interview, Ward Education Officer, 19 August 2025) (Interview, School Committee Chairperson, School A1, 17 August 2025).

This implies that local leaders play a crucial role in mobilizing community members to support the school feeding programme. They help encourage parents to understand the importance of the initiative and motivate them to contribute financially. Community engagement and collaboration with these leaders are vital for the programme's success, as educating parents increases their awareness and willingness to participate actively in supporting student nutrition. The improved consistency in food contributions suggests that informed and involved communities are better able to sustain such initiatives. Overall, the active involvement of local authorities in bridging gaps between schools and parents fosters strong partnerships, leading to more effective and sustainable feeding programmes that benefit all students. This aligns with Waheduzzaman and As-Sabre (2015), who emphasized that community participation in local development projects enhances governance and improves service delivery. Their findings show that when communities are actively involved in development efforts, project outcomes significantly improve, reflecting their ownership and understanding of local needs.

Similarly, Mbwambo (2023) found that local government leaders in Tanzania played an essential role in sensitizing communities about school feeding programmes through public meetings and village forums, which led to increased parent engagement. In addition, Daitai (2022) highlighted that collaboration between local leaders and NGOs significantly improved school feeding awareness and parental contributions, particularly in underserved communities. From the perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the active role of community leaders in securing food for students helps fulfill children's physiological needs the foundation of the hierarchy. Meeting this basic need enables students to concentrate in class, pursue higher levels of academic success, and ultimately achieve their full potential, showing how strong community structures contribute to holistic child development.

## **Factors Affecting the Effective Implementation of the School Feeding Program**

In addition, researcher investigated on factors affecting the effective implementation of school feeding programs among selected secondary schools in Dar es Salaam City Council. The findings have been presented as follows:

### **Financial Constraints**

It has been noted that the main reason parents fail to pay food contributions on time for their children is financial constraint. Most parents who take their children to government schools are middle and lower-income earners. They have a meagre income, and sometimes they fail to fulfil even their basic parental responsibilities. Data from interviews with participants indicated that, due to financial constraints, some parents in schools refuse or delay paying or do not pay various contributions, including food contributions, money for school logos, tours, and holiday packages. When parents fail to pay school contributions, the school fail to accomplish its responsibilities smoothly.

This is supported by Diouf and Ndiaye (2022), who revealed that inadequate funding in school feeding programs leads to irregular food supply, reduced meal quality, and frequent program interruptions. When financial support from families is unreliable, the overall effectiveness and consistency of these programs are compromised. Likewise, Mketo et al. (2022) found that limited government support and heavy reliance on donor funding make school feeding programs unsustainable, particularly in rural or low-income areas where parents face daily economic hardships. These financial barriers result in implementation challenges that undermine the long-term success and scalability of the programs. A participant from school B<sub>2</sub>, when asked questions in this regard, had the following to say:

Last week, we had a parent meeting with classes six and three, as well as parent and examination classes for the next year. We introduced them to different contributions, including food. We told them that they are supposed to contribute Tsh. 1000 per pupil per day for their children to get food and Tsh. 500 per week in order for their children to take examinations every week, most of them refused (Interview, Teacher from School B2, 12th August 2025).

This means that most parents in these schools are unable to pay various contributions for the school's development and for their children's education because they are financially struggling. That is why they even prefer to pay less for the afternoon meal. The inability to meet even minimal food contributions highlights the broader economic hardship faced by families in these areas. Therefore, there is a need for the government and other educational stakeholders to subsidies food that can be given to students, especially in these day schools, in order to help students, obtain food at a lower cost and ensure no child is excluded due to poverty. This aligns with Rector et al. (2021), who noted that schools in low-income communities often struggle to secure consistent financial support, resulting in gaps in meal distribution and program sustainability. Without regular funding, these schools cannot maintain meal services, which in turn negatively affects student nutrition and academic performance.

Similarly, Li and Thakur (2018) pointed out that rural schools often face logistical challenges, including food transportation

issues due to poor infrastructure and the long distances from supply centres. These logistical constraints add to the overall cost of running school feeding programs, further justifying the need for government subsidies to ensure reliable and affordable meal provision. In connection to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, food is a basic physiological need. When students are not guaranteed access to regular meals, their ability to focus, engage in learning, and succeed academically is compromised. Subsidizing meals not only eases the financial burden on parents but also ensures students' foundational needs are met, allowing them to pursue higher-order goals such as educational achievement and personal development.

## Lack of Food Infrastructures

Resources and infrastructure are crucial in providing quality education and determining a school's performance in all spheres, including academic and disciplinary aspects. According to the study, it was revealed that the number of students is too high compared to the available infrastructures and resources for schools. Findings show that many schools face the problem of lacking kitchens, storage facilities, and dining halls. These challenges highlight the need for investment in infrastructure as part of sustainability efforts. The school feeding program requires a proper kitchen that uses gas energy instead of charcoal or firewood to ensure efficiency, safety, and environmental sustainability.

Observations found that inadequate infrastructure, such as poor kitchen facilities and lack of storage, significantly hampers the effective implementation of school feeding programs, especially in rural and underserved areas. Their study emphasizes that improving school infrastructure is essential not only for meal quality but also for the overall success and sustainability of feeding initiatives. Also, at school A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>, there's no dining hall, which is very important in ensuring that students get their meals in a safe place rather than eating in the classrooms or sitting under the trees.

**Figure 1** Observations show Lack of dining hall at school A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> forces students to eat lunch in unsafe conditions



**Figure 2** After observation the researcher found that there was Poor kitchen infrastructure at school A<sub>1</sub>



Figures above indicate that there are no dining halls. As All respondents (100%) indicated there was no dining room in their schools. The researcher discovered that all secondary schools had no specific place for students' meals. They sat anywhere around the school compound during eating. They had their meals outside the schools' buildings.

This is supported by Adepoju and Akinleye (2021), who emphasize that a lack of community engagement leads to poor management and accountability, resulting in food wastage and low-quality meals. It is also supported by Wondimu et al. (2020), who found that community-supported feeding programs demonstrate greater resilience to economic challenges and maintain more consistent meal delivery. From Maslow's hierarchy of needs perspective, the absence of proper dining facilities and poor meal quality threatens students' basic physiological needs such as adequate nutrition and a safe eating environment which are foundational for their ability to focus, learn, and achieve higher-level needs like belonging and self-actualization. Ensuring proper infrastructure and community involvement addresses these basic needs, thereby supporting students' overall well-being and academic success. Moreover, the researcher interviewed the school heads about the dining rooms for students.

We don't have dining room we asked assistance from the government but also, we wrote proposal to NMB bank, because last year they helped us tables and chairs so asked again to help in the construction of dining room, so we wait for response from them, also we don't have store for food storage, we just continue to wait support from different stakeholders including government (Interview, Head Master from School A<sub>1</sub>, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2025).

They pointed out that there were no plans to build the halls. Therefore, students will continue to be safe while taking their meals. The primary focus of this study was to investigate the storage of school food. According to the responses, students stated that their food was stored at the school stores, even though there was no specific store designated for food only. The school store was a one-stop shop for everything, not just food. All food contributed by parents or the government was under the supervision of school management and stored on-site. However, the researcher found that some schools had one room for storage which was used for all materials, not just food. Supporting this, Kimaro et al. (2022) found that community-led school feeding programs often achieved higher success rates than those dependent solely on government support, largely due to increased community ownership and accountability. Furthermore, Patel et al. (2020) revealed that many rural schools lacked adequate cooking facilities, making it difficult to prepare nutritious meals for students. This situation can be understood through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where access to safe, nutritious food and a secure environment forms part of the most basic physiological and safety needs. When these foundational needs are unmet such as when food is stored in unsafe conditions or cooking facilities are lacking it becomes difficult for students to focus on learning or achieve higher levels of personal development.

## Interference from Politicians

When sharing knowledge with participants, it was reported that there are instances when parents fail to pay for their children's food. In such cases, they report to political leaders, who order

teachers to allow the children to continue their studies without disturbing them or chasing them away due to financial constraints. Political leaders mislead parents by telling them that education is free and that they are not supposed to contribute anything, as the government finances all the necessary items for their children to receive free education, including food. Politicians interfere in various decisions made by schools regarding contributions. Therefore, when schools introduce any contribution, some parents refuse to pay due to arrogance, which politicians influence. For instance, during the interview, one of the participants from school B<sub>2</sub> had the following to report:

Politicians have greater influence on the management of schools when they differ in their perceptions of how schools should be managed during this era, especially regarding the implementation of school feeding programs. This also causes parents to react differently to the issue of contributing to support their children's school development. Most parents think that it is not their responsibility to contribute to food and other school development costs, but rather the responsibility of the government (Interview, Teacher from School B<sub>2</sub>, 19th August 2025).

This implies that politicians can significantly influence the implementation of school feeding programs either positively or negatively given their direct access to the public and the level of trust they often command. As public figures, politicians have a platform they could use not only to advocate for better funding and infrastructure but also to educate communities on the shared responsibilities of both government and parents in supporting children's education. Their role in shaping public perception and policy direction is therefore crucial.

This aligns with findings by Minaker and Hammond (2016) on the National School Lunch Program, which highlighted how inconsistent funding allocations and rising food costs posed major challenges to the long-term sustainability of school feeding initiatives. Similarly, Akuamoah-Boateng and Sam-Tagoe (2018) identified weak government oversight and lack of policy enforcement as key factors contributing to inefficiencies, including mismanagement of funds and poor-quality meals. Together, these studies underscore the importance of strong political will, transparency, and community engagement in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of school feeding programs. Politicians, therefore, have both the responsibility and the opportunity to act as catalysts for improving school feeding by promoting policy enforcement, facilitating community involvement, and ensuring adequate resource allocation. Also, during an interview with a teacher from English medium school A<sub>1</sub>, the following was reported:

Some parents are stubborn when it comes to paying different contributions. When the school takes action, forcing them to pay, they report to the City Council, where City officers and political leaders advise us to convince them to pay rather than chase the students, as these parents are the voters. We threaten them, but they do not fear because they are arrogant, influenced by politicians and City leaders (Interview, Head Teacher from School A<sub>1</sub>, 12th August 2025).

The findings indicate that political and City leaders often hinder the effective functioning of school management teams by interfering in their responsibilities. This interference typically arises from political motivations, such as favoring parents who are

unwilling or unable to contribute financially to school programs. Such actions undermine school governance and create inefficiencies that negatively impact school operations, including the delivery of essential services like school feeding.

To address this challenge, it was recommended that parents be educated on the importance of making timely and consistent contributions. Strengthening parental awareness and engagement would not only ease the financial burden on schools but also enhance overall management performance. Moreover, minimizing political interference in school affairs is crucial for promoting accountability, transparency, and operational efficiency.

These concerns align with the findings of Luswaga and Nuppenau (2020), who reported that limited government funding and excessive reliance on donor support render school feeding programs particularly unsustainable in rural areas. They emphasize the need for more reliable, long-term funding models such as public-private partnerships, community involvement, and government subsidies to ensure the continuity and success of these programs. Viewed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these challenges are particularly concerning. When students lack access to regular meals and basic school services due to poor management or unstable funding, their physiological and safety needs remain unmet. As a result, their ability to focus, learn, and achieve higher-level cognitive and personal development goals is significantly impaired. Supporting this view, Sakamoto (2021) emphasized the need for clear policy guidelines and robust monitoring systems to ensure compliance with national nutrition standards. Their findings highlight the importance of political commitment and structured oversight in achieving consistent educational outcomes, particularly in areas like school feeding programs, where policy clarity and enforcement are essential.

## **Inflation of Food Product**

The fluctuation of food prices, especially the rise, negatively affected the implementation of the school feeding program. The researcher noted that, even those who are given the tender to supply food and prepare it for students sometimes fail to do so in an effective way because of the situation. The recap of one participant from a successful school indicated that;

There was a time when the price of good rice rises up to Tshs 2500/= per kilogram, and other ingredients their price rise, but parents are supposed to contribute only 1000/= based on the permit given by the regional education officer, which allows parents to contribute only such amount. (Interview, Teacher from School A<sub>2</sub>, 04<sup>th</sup> August, 2025)

This finding suggests that school feeding programs are highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations, which can significantly affect the quality and quantity of meals provided. Fixed parental contributions, while essential, often limit the program's financial flexibility and hinder its ability to respond to rising food prices or inflation. As a result, schools may face shortages or be forced to provide lower-quality meals, which compromises their ability to meet established nutritional standards. This, in turn, can negatively impact students' health, concentration, and academic performance.

Kumar and Yuan (2021) highlighted similar concerns in their study of the National School Lunch Program, noting that fluctuating food costs and rigid funding structures often challenge the sustainability and nutritional adequacy of school feeding initiatives. Likewise,

Luswaga and Nuppenau (2020) observed that over-reliance on fixed funding sources such as donor aid or static parental contributions makes school feeding programs in rural areas particularly susceptible to disruption during times of economic instability. From the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, inadequate or inconsistent school meals threaten the fulfillment of students' basic physiological needs. When these foundational needs are not met, students may struggle with hunger, fatigue, and poor health, all of which hinder their ability to focus on learning and achieve higher-order developmental goals, such as academic success and self-actualization. To ensure the long-term sustainability of school feeding programs, there is a clear need for more adaptive funding mechanisms such as variable contributions, government subsidies, or public-private partnerships that can absorb the shocks of inflation and fluctuating market conditions.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the sustainability of School Feeding Programs in Dar es Salaam's ward secondary schools relies heavily on community involvement, particularly parental contributions, despite financial hardships, limited infrastructure, and minimal government support. To strengthen these programs, it is recommended that the government increase financial subsidies for school meals, develop clear policies to prevent political interference, and invest in essential infrastructures such as kitchens, dining halls, and food storage facilities. Parents and community members should be sensitized on the importance of timely contributions and active participation, while partnerships with NGOs, local leaders, and private stakeholders should be expanded to support vulnerable students and reduce the burden on low-income households. Strengthening collaboration among all stakeholders will enhance the effectiveness, equity, and long-term sustainability of school feeding programs.

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