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School Feeding with Local Procurement in Ethiopia

AVE Study 35b/2024

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Ways out of poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity

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Abbreviations and Local Terms

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
Busa Gonofaa	Traditional self-help organisation of the Oromo, today a semi-governmental aid organisation
CHILD SFP	Comprehensive Home-grown, Inclusive, Learning and Development School Feeding Project, funded by the GPfE
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DC	Development cooperation
ENA	Ethiopian News Agency
Ensete	*Ensete ventricosum* from the *Musaceae* family, also known as the "false banana" (important food for the poor in Ethiopia)
EPDC	Education Policy and Data Centre
ESDP	Education Sector Development Programme
ETB	Ethiopian Birr (in April 2023 official rate approx. 60 Birr / 1 Euro; market prices rather at approx. 85 Birr / 1 EUR)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGM	Female Genital Mutilationg gram
gcnf	Global Child Nutrition Foundation (USA)
GPfE	Global Partnership for Education
HDR	Human Development Report
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
injera	Flat pancake-like bread made from teff
I-NGO	International NGO
Kebele	Lowest administrative unit in urban and rural areas
kinche	Wheat meal as a component of school meals
M+E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
MRGI	Minority Rights Group International
NGO	Non-governmental organisation/s
ODA	Official Development Aid
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
p.c.	per capita
p.d.	per day
PPP	purchasing power parity
PTA	Parent-Teacher-Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals (of the Agenda 2030)

SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SF	School feeding
shiro	Widely used sauce made from chickpeas or beans
StC	Save the Children
teff	Dwarf millet (*Eragrostis tef*)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
Woreda	District or county

Project Background

The Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen carried out a research project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) from October 2015 to early 2020. The research project was intended to help reach extremely poor, vulnerable and food-insecure population groups in the partner countries of German governmental development cooperation (DC) more effectively than before as part of primarily bilateral measures, thereby, helping to lift them out of poverty in the long term. The research project will continue until the end of 2023, focusing on holistic agricultural promotion, access to financial services for poor smallholder farmers, and school feeding as a contribution to poverty reduction and social security.

Although extreme poverty has decreased worldwide in relative terms in recent decades, depending on the choice of indicators and calculation method, the absolute number of poor people has largely remained the same. This is despite numerous adapted national poverty reduction concepts, increased measures taken by many countries (above all Brazil, China, India, but also Mexico, the Philippines, Pakistan, and other *middle-income countries in particular*) and, with a view to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an increasing commitment by industrialised countries to financing development. This is partly due to poor governance and international power relations, but also to population growth, particularly in the world's poorest countries where resources are often severely limited. The increasing effects of global climate change also play a role. On the other hand, there are also a number of reasons for inadequate poverty reduction, which can be found in the instruments of DC in the particular situation of the poor themselves as well as the interplay of both factors.

People living in extreme poverty and suffering from vulnerability and food insecurity have little capacity for self-help. As documented in the literature, they are also often unable to articulate their interests publicly, so that they and their ideas and wishes are not taken into account in the planning of development measures or are, at least, not the focus of the measures (see Bliss / Heinz 2009 and 2010). National and international planners must also increasingly ask themselves whether, for example, old people, households without available labour, or people with disabilities can be reached at all with the means of traditional DC, which focuses on helping people to help themselves and implements measures primarily with the aim of economic sustainability.

The research project has been located at this interface, the specific conditions of poverty and food insecurity, on the one hand, and the – possibly inadequate – instruments of DC, on the other. Based on the analysis of previous problems in reaching the target groups mentioned above through DC and successful examples of poverty reduction, promising projects (*good practices*) are to be identified and examined in detail. In doing so, it is important to precisely analyse the circumstances of the respective success in order to work out the transfer conditions for a broader circle of DC measures in other situations and countries and make them usable for those responsible in the ministry and implementing organisations as well as for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), knowing full well that there can be no blueprints in DC.

Summary

Since the 2020/2021 school year, Ethiopia and many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa have not only decided to offer general school meals nationwide, at least in the first four classes of primary school, but also give special weight to the local procurement of the required food ("home-grown" in the language of the World Food Programme: WFP).

The importance of school feeding (SF) has increased noticeably in many national social programmes, particularly as a result of COVID-19, as around 50 million pupils on the African continent alone had to interrupt their school attendance for a longer or shorter period of time due to the pandemic. Many of these children were also not allowed to return to school due to pressure from their families. School meals are, therefore, an attempt to make parents and pupils a lucrative offer to reverse this dropout or to motivate extremely poor families to send their children to school at all.

In addition, more recent studies, including of low- and middle-income countries, confirm that regularly offered school meals not only promote school enrolment and attendance, but also have a considerable, positive effect on adolescents' weight gain. Hence, they can also reduce malnutrition. The studies also confirm positive effects on the learning situation and learning success of the schoolchildren involved in the feeding programmes. School meals, especially in primary schools, are, thus, increasingly proving to be an important and effective contribution to food security and, beyond the narrower field of education, to social security as a whole. The increase in their school attendance and the longer time they stay in school alone also has a positive effect on girls, who are often disadvantaged in education.

The first contributions to school meals in Ethiopia date back to the 1970s, but remained project-based until a few years ago. In addition, apart from the capital Addis Ababa, they were limited to individual schools in areas particularly affected by poverty and/or drought. Since the 2020/2021 school year, the national and state governments have declared school meals to be a general state task and introduced them for all publicly owned primary schools. In Addis Ababa, for example, there is very generous funding from the capital city budget by national standards. Here alone, 700,000 schoolchildren are currently given a hot meal once a day.

In 2023, the public sector provided US$ 85 million for SF throughout the country. However, the individual federal states of Ethiopia contribute to the costs to varying degrees. While the costs in Addis Ababa are borne almost entirely by the state, in Oromia the state is directly involved with funds, but the majority of the costs here are borne by a nationally active aid organisation, *Busa Gonofaa*, in the form of donations in kind and money, as well as by the schools themselves (e.g. from the income from leased farmland). International donors also contribute to the costs, such as the Global Partnership for Education. It supports numerous schools in several federal states, for example in Sidama, which was included in this study, through the I-NGO Save the Children by supplying basic foodstuffs, such as maize, wheat meal, cooking oil, and iodised salt, as well as technical advice. The World Food Programme also continues to support the national SF programme both financially and by providing technical advice.

With this very strong expansion of SF, Ethiopia, similarly, for example, to Benin in West Africa, is one of the countries that have expanded their SF projects particularly quickly and on a large scale during the COVID-19 pandemic and transformed them into national programmes that cover almost the entire country today. For the first time, the financing of the measures, which was previously more or less left to the international donor community, is being

supplemented by greater contributions from the country within the framework of state budgets or, in the Ethiopian context, the budgets of the federal states.

The visit to ten schools as part of this study, including one in Addis Ababa, four in Oromia, and five in Sidama, showed that school meals are actually being provided, albeit at very different levels and still burdened by a lack of important infrastructure. Drinking water is difficult to obtain in many parts of Ethiopia, and many schools only have access to this basic requirement, which is essential for school meals, through water vendors. Funding is also only secured for the absolute basic foodstuffs. Everything that goes beyond the few basic components of school meals mentioned must be procured by the schools or parent organisations, to a lesser extent from school gardens, otherwise from local retailers, and is, therefore, limited to herbs, spices, onions, garlic, and perhaps a few beans. A large part of the school budget also has to be used to buy firewood, although some schools have started to set up their own small firewood plantations.

It is, therefore, important to introduce improved, i.e. energy-saving cookers, for which there are already a number of contributions from the German Technical Cooperation. However, the cooks must be persuaded to do the extra work that they see as a result. Another fundamental problem with SF in Ethiopia (similar to other countries in our study) is the very poor, in some cases only symbolic pay of the "voluntary" cooks. By working up to eight hours a day for almost no pay, they hardly have time to earn money for their families. Accordingly, swift action must be taken here and a solution for reasonable pay must be found.

Nevertheless, the effects of SF to date have been reported as very positive. In particular, school attendance by both boys and girls has increased significantly and, in contrast to the past, the number of school dropouts has fallen to almost zero. Parents are also relieved because, regardless of their material situation at home, they can now be sure that their (school) children will get a warm meal once a day during the week.

The study was conducted between February and May 2023 by two INEF freelancers, Prof. Dr Frank Bliss (development anthropologist and team leader) and Tamene Hailegiorgis Gutema (freelance consultant), on the basis of secondary analyses, digital surveys, and a three-week on-site mission in March–April. The interim results were discussed with the Director of the Directorate of the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa, which was set up specifically for SF in Ethiopia in 2022, during the on-site study in April 2023.

1. Introduction

School feeding (SF), especially in primary schools, is increasingly proving to be an important and effective contribution to social security and particularly to combating hunger and malnutrition. According to the UN World Food Security Report 2022 presented on 12 July 2023, this remains the most serious problem for around 735 million people who suffer from hunger throughout their lives (see FAO et al. 2023). In addition, according to the report, 2.4 billion people or 29.6 % of the world's population are currently food insecure. Of these, 900 million suffer from severe food insecurity. Given the trend of increasing food insecurity due to and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also questionable whether the goal agreed upon by all countries of the world at the United Nations General Assembly to eradicate hunger worldwide by 2030 is even realistic.[1]

A recent study on Ethiopia comes to the conclusion "that school feeding can serve as an optimal strategy for addressing the nutrition needs of adolescents" (Bekri et al. 2023: 2). The study team also confirms the general observation that SF has a small but significant positive effect on adolescents' weight gain in low- and middle-income countries. Countless other studies confirm positive effects on the learning situation and learning success of schoolchildren participating in the feeding programmes.[2]

In addition, pupils from poor households can benefit particularly from a hot meal during school hours, many of whom would not even be sent to school by their parents without this offer. It has been shown that girls especially are able to attend school significantly more often where school meals are available, stay at school longer, and are later allowed to transfer to middle or secondary school more often.

The COVID-19 pandemic has noticeably increased the importance of school meals in many national social programmes – also in bringing children back to school, who had practically given up attending school or been forced to do so by their families. After all, according to the African Union in a 2021 report, the pandemic has triggered one of the biggest education crises in recent history having devastating effects on the lives of children, with around 50 million pupils in 42 countries on the continent alone having to interrupt their school attendance (see AU 2021).

Local procurement has been gaining importance for some years now when it comes to providing the food needed to prepare school meals. Whereas wheat, rice, maize, or cooking oil used to be purchased *en bloc* for entire countries, in some cases, donated from production surpluses in North America and Europe, the countries involved are now increasingly endeavouring to purchase food nationally, regionally, or even locally. This model of home-grown school feeding (HGSF) not only has the described advantage of increasing and securing school attendance, but also achieves economic effects by supporting local value creation and,

[1] For the content of the 2030 Agenda, see UN (2015) and Martens / Obenland (2015); for the current implementation status, see the SDG Tracker at https://sdg-tracker.org and the official annual report on the 2030 Agenda at SDSN (2023).

[2] A recent analysis on Ethiopia, for example, by Derese and Senapathy (2023), which found statistically significant influences on children's examination results and particularly progress in reading and writing their mother tongue as a result of school meals. See also Greenhalgh, as early as 2007, on child growth and cognitive performance or, most recently, the meta-study by Cohen et al. (2021) on school attendance, school performance and the contribution of SF to general food security, among other things.

if planned correctly, participatively, and well organised, can also strengthen social cohesion in and around the schools.[3]

An impact analysis was carried out in Cambodia in 2018 as part of the INEF–BMZ research project "Ways out of poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity", taking place at 18 of 84 schools with local procurement at the time, which fully confirmed the broad range of effects of this procurement approach (Bliss 2017). The HGSF has already been practiced in thousands of schools in Brazil for around 30 years, where, depending on the programme, a certain proportion of the food even has to be purchased from local smallholder farmers (see WFP et al. 2018). Since the 2020/2021 school year, populous Ethiopia, among other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has not only decided to offer SF nationwide, at least in the first grades, but also to give special weight to the home-grown aspect.

However, it has been shown that in, the short term, it is hardly possible to procure all the food required at the local level alone in the country. Ethiopia suffers from severe regional drought and has a very diverse agricultural and livestock sector even under normal weather conditions. For example, staple foods, such as cereals or pulses, can hardly be produced in zones with predominantly pastoral farming or there are simply no surpluses from local production on the market in drought-stricken areas. Accordingly, "local procurement" is defined generously, to the extent that the food required is produced in the country itself wherever possible, and even if it may not come from the region itself, it should still be purchased from local traders.

School feeding has been increasingly practiced in Ethiopia since the 1990s. For a long time, however, the country had most of the projects, which only ever comprised a few schools, paid for by international donor organisations. However, there has been a significant increase in the ownership of SF in the last three years. This is expressed not only in new concepts and guidelines, but also in a steeply rising financial commitment, which, in the current year 2023, comprises US$ 85 million from the state budget (ENA 2023). In addition, there are the measures of the federal states, especially those of the most populous state of Oromia,[4] as well as the efforts of the civil society organisations around the schools and contributions from the schools themselves from the yields of the garden and arable land often allocated to them in rural districts, which are leased to farmers in exchange for crop sharing.

However, SF (with local procurement) has so far been experimented with on a large scale, with efforts being made to dovetail the food on offer with the use of energy-saving cookers for food preparation and the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) sector, among other activities. As Ethiopia is a federal state, there are also regional differences in the decision-making processes for food procurement and utilisation, and, thus, additional models for SF.

For this reason, Ethiopia was selected alongside Benin and Cambodia as a reference country for a qualitative study in order to familiarise ourselves with the practice of local procurement and the forms of management within the framework of SF and to be able to draw

[3] The FAO study by Luana Swensson et al. (2021) takes a comprehensive and up-to-date look at public procurement in the design and implementation of SF. Numerous country-based case studies are also cited here. Also see WFP et al. (2018) on the HGSF. For a summary of the status of SF worldwide, see WFP 2022.

[4] The INEF team was informed by the responsible Ministry of Education (Bureau of Education) of Oromia of the sum of US$ 4.9 million for 2022/2023 (excluding the indirect benefits via self-help funding by *Busa Gonofaa*, see Chapter 3 and Box 3).

conclusions for German (state) DC both from good practice and by considering fundamental problems.

The practical part of this study is intended as an introductory qualitative study of some models of SF in Ethiopia in order to familiarise ourselves with the rapid progress that has been made, on the one hand, and to find out about the implementation problems and particularly the conditions for success for comparison with other countries, on the other. The results are clear, concerning at least individual points (e.g. the role of female cooks), but are not generally representative for Ethiopia.

The study is based on a secondary analysis of existing specialist literature on SF in Ethiopia as well as project documents from various governmental organisations and NGOs. Ten schools were visited in Ethiopia between 1 and 18 April as part of an on-site investigation following discussions in the capital, Addis Ababa, with the responsible state authorities for SF programmes, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), and the representative of the German Embassy.

These were distributed across three political units (see Fig. 1):

(i) the state capital Addis Ababa, whose administration runs its own SF programme and provides by far the most funding for it in the country (one school);[5]

(ii) the state of Oromia, which has introduced SF across the board for the first time for the 2022/2023 school year (four schools); and

(iii) the federal state of Sidama. The national Ministry of Education awarded a new contract in January 2021 to the NGO Save the Children (StC) for the supervision of 20 primary schools in the *woreda* (district/county) of Boricha (five schools).[6]

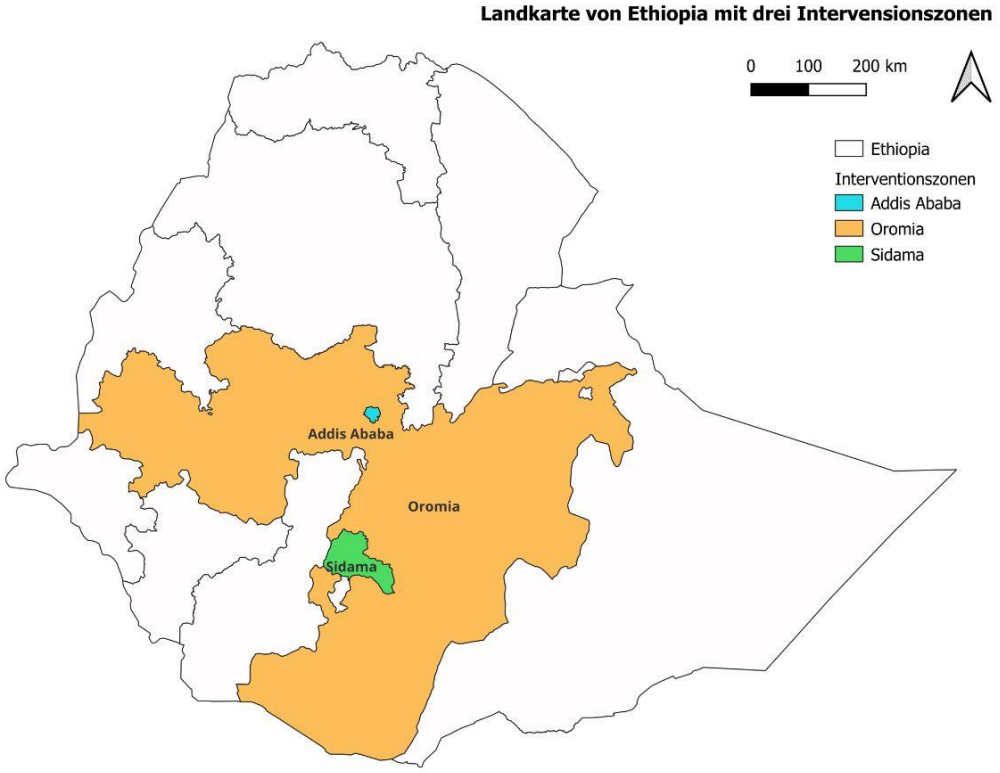
There were already several regionally limited SF programmes in both federal states, as well as in Addis Ababa, which never even came close to a nationwide offer.

A tour of the entire institution took place in each school, focusing on the rooms used for SF (kitchen, dining area, storage room, and, where available, WASH equipment). Discussions were held subsequently in groups or individually with the school management, teachers, the Parent-teacher Association (PTA), some older pupils (grade four in Oromia, grades seven–eight in Sidama), the cooks (only women, with the exception of one school), and occasionally members of the education committee of the *kebele* (rural community) or their head (who is also head of the *kebele* administration). It was not possible to interview either suppliers or producers, unlike in the parallel 2023 INEF studies in Benin and Cambodia, because the procurement of food is currently still rather diffuse and unstructured (Oromia state) or deliveries are put out to tender centrally (Sidama).

[5] In 2022, the city received a prize for its commitment, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) Award ("Addis Ababa's School Feeding Program ranked top in the Sustainable Diet and Nutrition category to win the 2022 Milan Pact Award, beating 133 cities in the world"; see Ethiopian Monitor 2022).

[6] An agreement has been in place with the I-NGO since January 2021 for the implementation of the Ethiopian "Comprehensive Home-grown, Inclusive, Learning and Development School Feeding Project" (CHILD-SFP) for over 500 schools in Ethiopia, which looked after around 163,000 children at the start of the project (cf. information from MoE). Funding is mainly provided by the Global Partnership for Education (GPfE), which has invested around US$ 30 million in the project to date (see GPfE 2023). Germany was GPfE's third largest donor in 2022 with US$ 88.8 million.

Fig. 1: Map of Ethiopia with Addis Ababa, Oromia, and Sidama (highlighted) (© Nadia Noor / INEF 2023).



The study was conducted by two INEF freelancers, Prof. Dr Frank Bliss (development anthropologist and team leader) and Tamene Hailegiorgis Gutema (freelance evaluator), on the basis of secondary analyses, digital surveys, and a three-week on-site mission in March–April 2023. Initial preliminary results were discussed at the end of the mission with the director of the new directorate of the Ministry of Education, which was set up specifically for SF in Ethiopia in 2022, and the WFP co-ordinators responsible for SF programmes in the country in Addis Ababa.

The study was supported by the head of the School Feeding Directorate at the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, the heads of the education offices of the federal states of Oromia and Sidama, and the heads and directors of the school boards of the districts (*woredas*) visited. The headteachers and teachers of the schools visited also made important contributions to the content of the study and, by involving all relevant stakeholders at school and village level, provided the opportunity to conduct group surveys and discussions in the schools themselves.

2. Ethiopia's Socio-Economic Foundations

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. The country ranks 175th out of 191 countries surveyed in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) list (UNDP 2022). The index value (Human Development Index) is 0.498 (Germany 0.942 or 9th place). In 2021, the nominal average gross national income per capita (p.c.) was US$ 925.08, or US$ 2,361 taking into account purchasing power parity (*PPP)*[7].

2.1 Economy and Poverty

The ***annual economic growth*** in Ethiopia between 1981 and 2021 – from an extremely low starting point – averaged 5.8 %, with an all-time high of 13.9 % in 1986 and an absolute minimum of -11.1 % in 1984. The annual growth rate in the last ten years has fluctuated between 10.4 % in 2014 and 6.1 % in 2019, 6.3 % in 2020 and 6.1 % again in 2021 (see Tradingeconomics 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic caused considerable economic hardship for parts of the population, particularly in urban areas, but no significant economic slump.

The ***population of Ethiopia*** is currently estimated at around 116.5 million (CIA 2023),[8] which is divided into Oromo (35.8 %), Amhara (24.1 %), Somali (7.2 %), Tigray (5.7 %), Sidama (4.1 %), Gurage (2.6 %), Welaita (2.3 %), Afar (2.2 %), Silte (1.3 %), Kefficho (1.2 %), and around 70 other ethnic groups (together 13.5 %) (see CIA 2023, MRGI 2023).

Ethiopia has a very ***young population***, with an average age of 19.8 years. Overall, 40 % of people are under 15 years old with a fertility rate of four children per woman (and more in rural areas) (CIA 2023). The number of pupils, which was estimated to be 20.1 million in 2022 for primary school alone and will reach 21 million in 2027 and 33 million in 2030 (WFP 2023), is correspondingly large and will continue to rise dramatically in relation to the country's total population in the near future.[9]

Based on multidimensional ***poverty indicators,*** the Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for 2021/2022 classifies Ethiopia as a country with "low human development". This makes it one of the 20 poorest countries in the world (behind The Gambia and ahead of Eritrea) (see UNDP 2022).

However, Ethiopia has made some ***progress in reducing poverty*** in the last two decades. While the poverty rate according to international criteria (US$ 1.25 p.c./p.d.) applied to 56 % of the population in 2000 and is still 44 % according to national criteria, it is said to have been less than 30 % and 31 %, respectively, in 2011 (see World Bank 2015). By the middle of the decade, the rate had once again fallen significantly to around 23.5 % (see Woldehanna et al. 2018) and today – taking into account a number of setbacks due to repeated years of drought

[7] Similar to many other countries, a significantly inflated adjustment factor was chosen for Ethiopia, particularly in view of the mass of the poor population. As extremely poor people have to spend a high percentage of their income on basic foodstuffs, which in Ethiopia are mostly at world market level, the actual purchasing power of the Ethiopian Birr (ETB) is likely to be significantly lower for them than the US$ value suggests.

[8] Published statistical material on Ethiopia is very often inaccurate and contradictory, on the one hand, and frequently significantly outdated, on the other. For around 15 years, figures on the total population and its subgroups have been based solely on estimates extrapolated from the last census in 2007.

[9] Where applicable, the data from the sources cited is supplemented by information from the notes or unpublished sources of our interviewees from the administration.

in a large number of *woredas* and, most recently, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the civil war in the north – it stands at around 27 % (World Bank 2021).[10]

2.2 Food Situation and Social Security

The ***food situation*** in various areas of Ethiopia has barely improved in recent years due to repeated droughts. The conflict over Tigray in the north has also massively worsened the food situation and caused a humanitarian crisis beyond the narrow borders of the federal state to Afar and Amhara. In addition, there are repeated regional heavy rainfall events, locust infestations, and other human-made and natural damaging events. The Tigray conflict had already caused the number of severely food-insecure people to rise from 10.9 million in April 2021 to more than 18 million at the end of the same year (see WFP 2022a). In 2022, the situation also deteriorated increasingly due to further drought events.

At the time of the INEF investigations, the ***humanitarian situation*** in Ethiopia was as follows: 20.1 million people living in (extreme) poverty and food insecurity in the country are supported by various food aid programmes, i.e. more than 20 % of the total population. A total of 4.4 million people, partly overlapping with the former, receive another, partly additional form of social support. Nevertheless, the WFP believes that insufficient measures have been implemented for 9.4 million people who should actually be receiving support (see WFP 2023a). The problems are exacerbated by the fact that a relevant proportion of food-insecure people are internally displaced people whose self-help capacities are extremely limited.[11] Against this backdrop, the Ethiopian government's SF policy takes on added significance (see Chapter 3.2).

Undernutrition and malnutrition primarily affect children under the age of five and (expectant) mothers. *Stunting* (children too small for their age) and *wasting* (children too light for their age) continue to be widespread. The correlation between high *wasting rates* among children under the age of five from households with low family income is highly significant. In these cases, the children receive too little food and live in poor sanitary conditions, which makes them more susceptible to infections, while, at the same time, the families have poor access to basic healthcare services because they cannot afford to pay for them. An underweight condition among children in the age group mentioned is particularly prevalent in northern and eastern areas of Ethiopia, especially in Tigray, Afar, Somali, and some areas of Gambela (see Kuse / Debeko 2023, Toma et al. 2023).

In the overall setting of food security, especially in the school context, ***access to drinking water*** and ***wastewater disposal*** or the lack thereof play an important role. While the supply rate of (hygienically safe) drinking water in urban areas in Ethiopia was estimated to be

[10] Due to the different criteria, there are considerable deviations in the poverty figures for Ethiopia in the datasets of the World Bank, UNDP, and others. The OPHI/UNDP, for example, listed 41.9 % of the population as being in "severe multidimensional poverty" in 2019 (2022). More recent reliable figures were not available at the time this study was prepared.

[11] According to the WFP, 1.1 million people in Amhara alone are listed as internally displaced from the Tigray conflict, among others, and even in Oromia, which is further away from the centre of the conflict, there were 175,000 individuals in March 2023 (WFP 2023a: 3). Little is known about the fact that the internally displaced people also include tens of thousands of Oromo who have been displaced from the Somali region since 2017, some of them in temporary shelters and dependent on food aid (oral information from April 2023). In addition, there are more than 823,000 refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, and South Sudan (see UNHCR 2023), to which tens of thousands more refugees from the acute war of the generals in Sudan are likely to be added in these weeks (i.e. April–May 2023).

around 98.5 % in 2020, the rural situation is expected to be 70.2 %, at best, which would amount to a nationwide level of 76.4 %. In the sanitation sector, urban areas could have a reasonably safe or "improved" supply for 52.5 % of the population, while rural areas could have a supply of 8.1 % at best, which would mean an average national level of 17.7 % (see CIA 2023).

Fig. 2: Harvesting *teff* at a marginal site in the highlands.

Teff (*Eragrostis tef* or dwarf millet) is a staple food in Ethiopia, especially for many Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo people. The market price for *teff* is at least as much as its nutritional-physiological equivalents in the form of maize, rice, or wheat.

However, the ***data particularly on drinking water supply should be treated*** with caution. According to the author's findings, the statistics also include fortified but open wells, which almost always carry water of dubious quality, as well as facilities that have long been out of operation and where the local population once again has to draw its drinking water requirements from extremely unsafe sources. The present study has shown that even a relatively large number of small grid-connected water supply systems, which are listed as operational in the supply statistics, are completely or partially inoperable for a wide variety of reasons (primarily drying up or a reduction in the water supply from the water source, damage to the pipework system).

Against this backdrop, long-term ***social security programmes*** are particularly relevant alongside emergency aid. An important contribution to social security in Ethiopia is the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), which was launched in 2005 and provides tens of thousands in all drought-affected *woredas* in the country with at least a modest income through *food-for-work* and primarily *cash-for-work measures,* while, at the same time, offering people who cannot help themselves through work basic security through unconditional cash transfers.[12]

School meals have always played an important role, especially in areas particularly affected by drought, although they were mainly aimed at primary school classes 1–4 in previous years and did not cover all schools by any means. It was only through the PSNP that children from extremely poor households in the other schools and in all classes also received a contribution to food security, at least in part, albeit only indirectly through support for their parents.

[12] See Sabates-Wheeler / Devereux (2010), Bliss (2019), and Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2020).

However, the new policy of the Ethiopian central government aims to ensure food security for all schoolchildren in grades 1–8 and preschools directly and independently of the respective emergency situation by developing SF into a standard state service with broad social anchoring of the topic (see Chapter 3.2).

2.3 Challenges for a Feminist Development Policy

The International Rescue Committee's "Tigray Gender Analysis" from May 2021 states that "sexual harassment, assault and rape were prevalent not just during the conflict, but have continued – not only were there previous Gender-Based Violence (GBV) violations, but an increase and continuation of the same" (IRC 2021: 1). Thus, ***ongoing violence against women*** appears to be the rule rather than the exception in Tigray, and this situation is not unique to Ethiopia's northernmost state.

A "Free Press Limited" study (2021) notes that gender equality in Ethiopia, understood as ***political empowerment***, has, on the one hand, improved.[13] On the other hand, women continue to be subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), especially in rural areas. Forced marriage also continues to affect very young women, who are excluded from education and suffer from domestic violence. In addition, women's workloads are high and little recognised. Women often have no ***control over resources*** and cannot participate in decision-making, even when it comes to organising their own lives (PRIMED 2021). Persistent child marriage, especially in rural areas, is also criticised by a committee of the European Parliament. On the one hand, the legal situation with a prescribed minimum age of 18 years is good, but the practice looks different (European Parliament 2023: 3). The same report also points to the persistence of FGM and the weak enforcement of the existing law.

A fundamental problem that the Ethiopian government is trying to alleviate through the recent formal registration of the respective married couple as joint owners of land is ***women's lack of access to productive resources***, which has negative consequences for their own and the household's income and, thus, for the food security of the family and, in turn, the children (and the women themselves). In addition to access to land, this also applies to livestock in the case of livestock-keeping ethnic groups, whereby women are primarily granted the less profitable and prestigious animals (mainly poultry, less frequently goats, and even less frequently sheep).

Almost all sources on gender in Ethiopia call for ***improved education programmes*** for girls and women as the basis for empowerment as a basic condition for a structural change in gender relations. Accordingly, it will be important not only to enable girls to attend school in general, but, above all, to guarantee their school attendance throughout until they complete primary school and also to massively increase the proportion of girls in the transition to secondary education until they graduate. While the Gender Parity Index for primary school attendance (grades 1–8) for the capital Addis Ababa was 1.13 in favour of girls in 2019/2020, the index for the country as a whole only shows a value of 0.91, with 0.75 for Somalis (see

[13] After all, the country has a female president in Sahle-Work Zewde, even if she fulfils a more representative role. She was also the only female head of state in Africa at the time of her election in October 2018. The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality also recognises the role of women in key political positions. A total, for example, of 42 % of the members of the national parliament (House of People's Representatives) are women (see European Parliament 2023). Women are also more strongly represented in the police force and the army in Ethiopia than in most other sub-Saharan African countries.

FDRE 2020). Surprisingly, the dropout and repetition rates are at a similar level for boys and girls, with dropout (grades 1–8) at 13 % for girls and 14 % for boys, and repetition rates for both at 5 % of each year group.

Fig. 3: Woman carrying Water.

Women and girls everywhere in Ethiopia have to fetch water for their households, sometimes over kilometre-long distances. While men and older boys transport the water by cart (mostly for sale) or donkey, many women and girls have to carry the water on their backs.

The bottom line is that 68 % of girls and 73 % of boys complete year 8. In 2019/2020, 48.6 % of girls and 53.5 % of boys made the transition from primary to secondary school (grades 9–10), but together they only accounted for 28.9 % of all school-age children of the same age (ibid. FDRE 2020). The percentage of grade 8 graduates fell to 29.3 % of boys and 23.5 % of girls at the transition to secondary level 11–12. Addis Ababa, with 72.8 % of girls, distorts the overall statistical picture: in Tigray, only 19.6 %, in Somali 13 %, and in Afar only 7.7 % of girls reached grade 11. If one looks at all children in the respective age group, the proportion falls again to 12.6 % of girls with 5 % in Somali and 3.4 % in Afar (with still 47.7 % in Addis Ababa) (ibid. FDRE 2020).

In our interviews with school administrators and teachers, the reasons for the ***inadequate enrolment rate*** and the ***considerable dropouts*** among boys and slightly more among girls were

Fig. 4: Rural primary school in the Ethiopian state of Oromia.

primarily the poverty of families in rural areas and its consequences: Firstly, despite the free school, many families would not be able to afford even the mostly low ancillary costs (e.g. clothing, exercise books, pens). Secondly, however, the children are needed as labourers in the household and agriculture, whereby girls, as we have observed time and again, also have to relieve their mothers of the burden of looking after small children. Against this background, it was repeatedly stated that school meals were an important compensatory factor. If the children were adequately fed at school, this could compensate for the costs of feeding them at home and, thus, often enable them to be released from domestic and agricultural labour.

Another serious reason for the absence of girls in the higher grades is the lack of proper toilets that can also be locked. A girl who has her period will not even come to school during this time if there are no toilets. For this reason, some school support projects emphasise the construction of separate toilets for boys and girls as well as the free distribution of hygiene products at school.

3. School Meals With Local Procurement

"Before the COVID-19 pandemic, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to more children than at any time in human history, making school feeding the most extensive social safety net in the world. [...] In a post-COVID-19 world, school feeding programmes are even more of a priority investment because they help countries to build back better: creating human capital; supporting national growth; and promoting economic development." (WFP 2020a: 16f)

3.1 Basics: Centralised Versus Local Procurement

School meals are a ***cornerstone of social security***. The poorer a country's population is, the more important and relevant a nutritious meal a day is for children's food security, preferably at the start of lessons.[14] The 2022 annual report of the WFP states that the scope of SF worldwide has recently returned to or even exceeded the level before the COVID-19 epidemic. Currently, 418 million schoolchildren benefit from a hot meal during the school day. Of all children in primary schools, 41 % receive free or subsidised school meals. However, at 61 %, the proportion is significantly higher in wealthier countries than in countries with medium or even low human development (see WFP 2022b: 4).[15]

Above all, the ***further development of SF*** after COVID-19 was financed by most countries from their own budgets, 91 % in total, and almost all countries have developed national strategies as the pandemic subsides which should help to turn the current accelerated development into a long-term commitment. The WFP also emphasises the importance of the additional jobs created by SF. Four million direct jobs have been created as a result, statistically speaking 1,377 per 100,000 pupils. In most cases, these mainly local jobs relate to food preparation and small-scale food suppliers, in both cases, mostly women (ibid.). The often low pay, which is particularly meagre in Ethiopia, will be discussed in Chapter 3.3.

Ethiopia is one of those countries that are taking their ***commitment to the comprehensive introduction of SF*** increasingly seriously, i.e. they are trying to plan and implement the most comprehensive programmes possible in a short period of time and also endeavouring to anchor SF in their national budgets, even if the full assumption of costs will still pose a considerable challenge. Other countries continue to rely almost exclusively on donor funds, which must raise doubts about the seriousness of the government's commitments and, accordingly, about the ownership of the programmes and, thus, their sustainability.

While 55 % of the ***costs for SF*** at public schools in Ethiopia, totalling around US$ 21.4 million, were borne by the state in the 2017/2018 school year, this figure rose to 58 % in 2020/2021, with total costs rising sharply to US$ 77.9 million. However, the figures published in the last comprehensive Global Child Nutrition Foundation survey do not include private involvement in the sector. We know from discussions with various stakeholders in the education sector that a large number of private schools also offer their pupils a daily meal, and not just in primary school classes. However, the costs for this are neither borne by the state nor do they usually come from donor funds (ODA), but are raised from the sometimes high school fees.

[14] This is our experience in Cambodia (see Bliss 2017), where most children have to go to school without breakfast, which also applies to many pupils in Ethiopia.

[15] "Medium human development" or "Low human development", see UNDP 2022.

According to the latest information from Carmen Barbon, Director of the WFP School Feeding Department in March 2023, the Ethiopian public sector has now provided US$ 85 million for ***SF programmes*** in the current budget (see ENA 2023). This will reach around 700,000 primary school pupils in the capital Addis Ababa alone and also create jobs for 16,000 women across the country.[16] As the individual programmes in the federal states are not included in the figure of US$ 85 million, the final sum is likely to be much higher. In the West Arsi zone of Oromia alone, almost 37,000 tonnes of grain are expected to be donated this year for the school kitchens of the 1,360 public primary schools with 438,000 pupils, which will be distributed via *Busa Gonofaa* offices in the *woreda* offices.[17] The majority of the donations had already been received by April 2023, which emphatically demonstrates the commitment of the people of Oromia and the regional government.

Practice in Ethiopia shows that, at least so far, ***local procurement*** is primarily understood to mean that no imported food is used. The tenders, therefore, refer explicitly to national products that are (or could be) produced in the country itself, such as wheat, maize, lentils, soya beans, salt, and possibly also sugar and tea. However, oil, which is included in all packages that are adapted to regional availability, is imported from abroad. We were, for example, able to find Turkish sunflower oil everywhere during the study.

The temporary procurement problems encountered during the investigation of the "Comprehensive Home-Grown, Inclusive, Learning and Development School Feeding Project" (CHIOD SFP) implemented by Save the Children in Boricha *woreda* (Sidama state) are also due to the fact that it was initially not possible to procure the quantities of wheat meal and fortified flour (40 % wheat, 40 % maize, and 20 % soya) required for the second quarterly delivery (April to June 2023) locally in Awassa. In the end, the contract had to go to a trader in the north of Amhara, around 1,000 kilometres away from the schools to be supplied.[18]

The latter may have its suppliers scattered throughout the country. Consequently, some partial deliveries could perhaps also come from Sidama and can, at least indirectly, be considered local procurement. However, even if food is available regionally, the less flexible tendering system still leads to nationwide procurement with very small local effects at best.

This contrasts with the ***procurement approaches in Addis Ababa***, where the schools are able to purchase food through financial contributions from the city administration, and in Oromia, where they have to procure their own food with the support of *Busa Gonofaa* (see Box 3). In the latter case particularly, food is sometimes purchased very locally or the schools receive food donations from the respective *woreda*, most of which are also raised within the district.

The debate about possible quality problems that may arise when food is purchased locally has so far been largely ignored in the discussion about local procurement in Ethiopia, where maize plays only a minor role in staple foods. In other countries, particularly in East Africa, the fact that it is less possible to carry out quality checks on the products supplied when purchasing locally compared to centralised procurement seems to be discussed, at least in some cases. In our discussions with experts, for example, reference was made to the fact that

[16] More on this in the practical report in chapter 3.3, which questions the significance of this figure.

[17] Assuming a value per tonne of only US$ 250, this would amount to around US$ 6.750 million. Added to this are the 141.9 million ETB donated so far, which amounts to an additional US$ 2.365 million.

[18] A problem that the implementing NGO should have been aware of, so that the call for tenders could have been carried out much earlier, now resulting in a very significant (hopefully only temporary) dropout of students as collateral damage (see chapter 3.3.4).

harmful aflatoxins could occur in harvested maize (which may have been poorly stored and placed on the market). These aflatoxins are considered to be the primary carcinogen for humans.[19]

Aflatoxins and other harmful substances (mycotoxins) that occur mainly as moulds can generally be found in many basic products, but practice shows that they can also occur in rice or (especially stored) peanuts.[20]

However, it can be assumed that the vendors and traders involved in rice in Cambodia or *teff* or wheat meal in Ethiopia, for example, are aware of the risks and pay attention to the necessary quality. Overall, it can also be assumed that the contamination of food with harmful substances in farming households and, therefore, the quality of the food for children is hardly any different than in the SF measures with local procurement. In addition, in many countries, more precise controls that go beyond visual inspection are only carried out in the context of the food security programmes of international donors. When weighing up the options, therefore, exposure to aflatoxins and other potentially almost universally occurring contaminants can only be used as an argument against local sourcing to a limited extent.

3.2 The Institutional Framework in Ethiopia

3.2.1 The Basic Education System

Ethiopia currently offers its pupils an eight-year compulsory primary school divided into two cycles and a four-year secondary school, also consisting of two cycles (junior and senior secondary school). There were 20.1 million children of primary school age in the country in the 2020/2021 school year, of whom around 18 million were actually enrolled in school (89.3 %). Just over nine million children are of secondary school age, of which only a good 3.5 million (= 39.2%) actually attend a secondary school. In addition, there are around eight million children of kindergarten age, of whom only just over 36.7 % (approx. 2.9 million) can actually attend kindergarten. Of these combined 37.1 million children of kindergarten, primary, and secondary school age, around 24.4 million or almost two-thirds (65.8 %) will actually have the opportunity to attend a school or kindergarten in 2020/2021.[21]

Gender and social structure disaggregated data on the school system for Ethiopia mostly end in 2018 and, in some cases, also refer to previous years (e.g. World Bank 2023, EPDC 2018). Regarding the 2016/2017 school year, for example, 25 % of all boys and 25 % of all girls aged seven to twelve did not attend school. While this figure was only 10 % in urban areas, the proportion of both genders in rural areas was 27 %. The figure was – again taking boys and girls together – 9 % in the more affluent groups ("richest fifth") and 41 % in the poorest fifth (see EPDC 2018).

There are also clear gender differences in school attendance among children of secondary school age (15–18 years). "Only" 46 % of boys did not continue school after primary school,

[19] On aflatoxins, see Fischer 2013.

[20] This was the case in Germany, for example, with rice that was sold in 2022 and publicly warned against consumption (see the recall of "Taste of Asia" brand rice at produktwarnung.eu (2022).

[21] The figures in this and the following sections are based on data from the comprehensive study "The Global Survey on School Meal Programmes", case study Ethiopia, by the US Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) based in Seattle (2021), which builds on a previous study for the 2017/2018 school year and covers several dozen countries (see GCNF 2019, 2021).

compared to 55 % of girls. The bottom line is that 50 % of all young people in Ethiopia did not attend secondary school – 55 % in rural areas and 36 % in urban areas. The figure was 36 % among the young people in the best-off quintile, while it was almost two thirds (65 %) among those in the poorest quintile (ibid.).

Fig. 5: Preschool class for children between the ages of four and six in a typical school that does not receive assistance from a special support project.

The unsatisfactory school attendance rate results in a general literacy rate (= over 15-year-olds who can read and write) of just half of the population (51.8 % in 2017), with 57.2 % for male and 44.4 % for female adolescents and adults (see CIA 2023 for 2017).

The main reasons for the dropout rate, which is particularly high among poor households – and this is one of the most important reasons for the failure to complete primary school and the lack of transition to at least the first cycle of secondary school – are as follows:

- the limited material resources of the families concerned which are unable to continue to finance the (relatively low) costs of school attendance for their children;
- additionally, the need to keep the children working in order to be able to secure food (mainly for themselves); and
- early marriage for girls (the primary school girls are only 14 to 15 years old in the eighth or final year, but some are still married at 14 or even younger).

3.2.2 Conceptual Basis for Health, Basic Education, and School Meals

The history of SF in Ethiopia began in 1994. With the support of the WFP, the first SF programmes organised under state supervision were initially carried out in five of the nine federal states in a total of 40 schools in areas threatened by hunger. This enabled around 25,000 children in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, and other states to receive a hot meal daily. In 2002, the

programme was extended to the Somali region. Food was still procured centrally during these years and was supplemented by emergency imports.[22]

In addition to these joint projects, the mayor and administration of Addis Ababa proved to be important pioneers in SF at an early stage. Initially launched by Ethiopian NGOs in 2015, around 210 state primary schools in the city were already included in the programme in 2018, reaching over 21,000 pupils.[23] According to the directorate responsible in the Ministry of Education, US$ 75 million alone of the US$ 85 million earmarked in the Ethiopian budget for SF contributions for the current 2022/2023 school year is likely to be invested in the 700,000 pupils currently being provided for in the capital.

The term "home-grown" in the context of school meals first appeared in 2012, again in a pilot programme carried out jointly with the WFP in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (including Sidama at the time, which is now an independent region), which covered 37 schools. In addition to the ongoing emergency imports, locally produced food was now purchased wherever possible and, at least here, imports were completely avoided.

What, until the 2019/2020 school year, was still more of a joint project between the state and the WFP, became a nationwide programme by the 2020/21 school year at the latest, with the state assuming primary responsibility at both national and regional level, supported by a very clearly articulated political *commitment* on the part of central government.

Ethiopia has had a "School Health and Nutrition Strategy" since 2012. School feeding is understood in this context as:

> *"A social safety net instrument that targets children in chronically food insecure areas and protects them against the worst consequences of household food insecurity and contributes to better learning and educational outcomes as well as to better nutrition." (FDRE 2012)*

Section 4.3.3 of the strategy identifies SF programmes as a contribution to reducing temporary (short-term) hunger and an aid to enable children to concentrate on their lessons and, thus, achieve better learning and school success. By promoting SF, pupils in schools are to be offered balanced meals, especially for children from poor and food-insecure households and areas, but also for those who suffer from natural or human-made emergencies. Children from more affluent families should be encouraged to bring nutritious packed lunches to school.[24]

Social communities should also be involved in the planning, resource mobilisation, and management of SF programmes. The Ministries of Education, Health, and Agriculture as well as other ministries and development partners should work closely with communities to encourage and support them to produce a minimum amount of local food in order to introduce SF with local procurement and ensure the sustainability and ownership of the programmes.

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[22] The authors would like to thank the director in charge of the Directorate for School Feeding in the Ministry of Education, which reports directly to the Minister of Education, for providing important basic information, which was supplemented in Oromia and Sidama by the respective heads of the School Improvement Departments responsible for SF and those responsible in the *woredas* visited. We would also like to thank the programme manager responsible for the WFP's SF contributions in Addis Ababa. The survey team also received massive support in organising the data collection in the schools from the respective headteachers and the representatives of the PTAs.

[23] See the evaluation by Michale Genene (2021).

[24] Apparently, the planners did not have the courage to include a SF for all children when they formulated the strategy at the time.

The 2012 strategy already stipulated that the ministries involved should develop standards and regulations in order to be able to monitor those involved in handling food and the programmes as a whole, i.e. food storage, its preparation, and the quality of the food served to the pupils. This includes training those involved in the hygienic preparation of food (ibid.: 19).

In a further section, school meal programmes are addressed once again under the heading of "children's rights", particularly regarding vulnerable children living in poverty and in marginalised areas (who should, therefore, be reached as a priority by SF) (ibid.: 20).

A total of 1.675 million children in Ethiopia received public SF in the 2020/2021 school year, all of them at primary school level, which corresponds to a rate of 9.3 % of children actually enrolled in school. This would be 6.9 % of all children enrolled in kindergartens and schools. This is only 4.5 % of all children of the relevant age, which includes many children from poor or extremely poor families who are unable to attend school. This represents a significant decline compared to the 2017/2018 school year, as just over 2.5 million or 13.4 % of 18.9 million primary school pupils were reached by public SF at that time. Thus, while the number of children reached by SF declined between 2017 and 2020 – only to "explode" significantly in 2021/2022 – a stabilisation and even expansion of the government's previously clearly recognisable commitment to the sector can be observed. As far as the decline itself is concerned, the Global Survey 2021 unfortunately does not explicitly state any reasons, which is regrettable in that the Ethiopian government's budget for SF almost quadrupled from US$ 11.7 million to around US$ 45.5 million between 2017 and 2020 and at least the total expenditure recorded (including the donor share) rose from US$ 21.4 million to almost US$ 77.9 million (GCNF 2019, 2021).

Fig. 6: Primary school in the Sidama region.

Pupils queue in a disciplined manner for the food distribution, for which there is a fixed order for the individual classes.

No published figures were available for the current school year 2022/2023 at the time of the INEF study. However, the figure of around 4.9 million school and preschool children who are currently being reached by public programmes was mentioned in discussions with representatives of the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa, as well as a further 800,000 pupils who are included in SF measures through private funding (including ODA contributions, but without public funding). Of these, 400,000 are in WFP-supported schools alone.

Several authors draw a predominantly positive balance of SF, especially regarding the longer practice in Addis Ababa and the schools aided by the WFP and other supporting organisations, including in Sidama. A recent study from 2022 on the latter region states that it has helped to increase both school attendance and learning success among pupils. The programme has also helped parents save money and time. Weaknesses are seen in the lack of a guaranteed supply of clean water, delays in the delivery of food and its insufficient quality and quantity. There is also a lack of further training for cooks regarding sanitation and hygiene (see Desalegn et al. 2022).[25]

An evaluation of school meals in Addis Ababa comes to similar conclusions. In addition to the generally positive effects on school operations and pupils' learning success, community participation, understood in practice as the involvement of parents within the framework of the PTA that exists in all schools, is emphasised here. The limited management capacities of a number of stakeholders in particular are seen as weaknesses that need to be strengthened as part of the recommendations (see Genene 2021).

3.3 School Practice

Ten school meal contexts were surveyed in April 2023 as part of this INEF study and the relevant stakeholders were interviewed together in a group or in separate interviews. These included the headteachers (two to three in the larger schools), members of the teaching staff, parent representatives as members of the PTA, which is a mandatory body in all schools in Ethiopia, and separately, the male cooks (only active in one school) and the female cooks (in all ten schools), school children, and in three cases the representatives of the local administration involved (*kebele*). In addition, four to six children in each school were interviewed in the absence of teachers and members of the school committees in the form of a casual conversation.

Fig. 7: Interview with pupils

In all schools, two to three boys and three girls from the upper classes (in Oromia classes four, in Addis Ababa and Sidama classes seven and eight) were asked about the food on offer in their school. A Sidama-speaking translator was involved here in order not to overburden the children linguistically. In Oromia, the interviews were conducted in Oromifa, their mother tongue.

[25] Regarding Sidama, the authors state that 48 % of the population there (albeit based on a source from 2012) suffered from severe food insecurity. The current support of 21 primary schools in the *Boricha woreda* through the Global Partnership for Education programme implemented by Save the Children is also currently justified by very severe food insecurity in the district due to several years of drought-related crop failures.

Box 1: How the food is served and what is on the table

After the introduction of regular school meals, all primary schools, at least in Oromia and Sidama, must ensure themselves that the necessary infrastructure is provided, i.e. a storage room for the food, a "kitchen", and an opportunity to wash hands. In Oromia and the school in the Addis Ababa area, these conditions must be met independently through the initiatives of the school management, the PTA, and the responsible representatives of the *kebele* or *woreda,* whereby direct financial and logistical support is provided in the capital. Here, for example, the cooking utensils, plates, spoons, and water containers, at least, are supplied as initial equipment by the city administration. At least one comprehensive set of kitchen utensils was initially provided as part of the programme implemented by Save the Children in Sidama. To this day, soap is also supplied for washing dishes and washing hands.

If there are no suitable rooms for the kitchen and canteen (an existing classroom with a lockable door can be used as a storage room), these should be built by the PTA with the help of volunteers from the parent community. There is support from the *woreda*, the *kebele*, and the semi-governmental self-help organisation *Busa Gonofaa* in Oromia.

In Sidama, where the schools included in this study are all located in the *Boricha woreda*, the programme has already been organised for the 2020/2021 school year by the I-NGO Save the Children (StC), with relatively generous funding provided by the Global Partnership for Education.[1] This enabled all 21 participating schools in the *woreda* to receive their own new kitchen building (corrugated, iron palm rib hut, see Fig. 8), a simple open dining hall with a corrugated iron roof and planks as tables and benches (Fig. 9), a connection to a local drinking water network (16 schools) with associated 10,000-litre storage tanks (Fig. 10). Eight schools also received separate ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines for pupils (Fig. 11), as well as hygiene products for girls. Similar to Addis Ababa, crockery, the necessary cooking equipment (100-, 60- and approx. ten-litre cooking pots) and between three and five "energy-saving modern stoves" (see Fig. 12), depending on the number of pupils, were also supplied. The school also received free water and even firewood from the project in the first year. To this day, the deliveries include not only food but also washing-up liquid and hand soap.

The schools, PTAs, and food committees in Oromia have to provide their own firewood and pay for the important water. Some schools are able to draw on their own small stocks of trees, but none of the ten schools visited has its own water source, so a relatively large amount of money has to be raised for tap water or water supplied in canisters by water vendors.

At the same time as setting up kitchens, canteens, and storage rooms, two cooks were recruited in Oromia and Sidama (all women except for the school near Addis Ababa) and prepared for their work at the *woreda* level. The focus was on the hygienic handling of food and personal behaviour, rather than the preparation of the food itself. The cooks are paid by the schools themselves (Oromia) or the project (Sidama) (see chapter 3.3.5).

The most important part of the school meals is, of course, the food that is delivered to Sidama and the surrounding area of Addis Ababa every month. In Oromia, it is bought directly by the school, donated or procured via the self-help organisation *Busa Gonofaa* and also delivered monthly while the school is in session.

What are the children served? The children at the school, which is just a few kilometres from the centre of Addis Ababa, were served almost the same food as most of them are used to at home, at least on the day of our visit. The basic ingredient of SF here is injera, a flat dough made from teff that is particularly popular in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. It is served with a sauce made from beans and vegetables. Compared to the other schools, this must be seen as a "luxury", as the research team found that the range of food was rather modest or even meagre.

In Oromia, for example, there was some rice and a lot of wheat groats (*kinche*, grained, roughly between bulgur and pearl barley), served as porridge or still grainy, with only a modest amount of cooking oil (10 g p.c.) and iodised salt (3 g p.c.). In two schools, onions were also used from donations from the local population; in Sidama, due to the lack of supplies in two schools, only soya beans were available, which were served

cooked with a little oil and salt (Fig. 13). However, the menu planned by StC is also not very varied (Fig. 14) and contains neither vegetables nor culinary herbs, and after eggs were initially supplied for a short time, these were no longer served either.

Before the children are allowed to go into a classroom or (in Sidama) the canteen hut, they must line up in front of the taps (Sidama) or other hand-washing facilities (possibly scooped out of a container by older children). After washing their hands, they line up in front of the kitchen hut where food is served (Fig. 6) or, in some schools, they can take a seat in the classroom that has been converted into a canteen, where the plates of food are served by the cooks or teachers. It is not always the case that each child is given drinking water in a separate cup. Where this is not the case, they can fetch their own cups if necessary and are served water by the cooks.

After the meal, the plates (and possibly cups) are handed in or the "staff" collects them and washes them up immediately after the shift, as there is usually a second or even third shift of children in the canteen rooms in the usually very large schools. In several cases, the cooks even have to fire up all the cookers again and organise a second serving of food, which takes them up to eight hours a day.

The preparation and serving of food is carried out by the children in a very disciplined manner and under the direction of the friendly and helpful staff and supervising teachers. In several cases, we observed older pupils helping their younger siblings from preschool.

Fig. 8: Cooking hut in a primary school on the outskirts of Addis Ababa.

The cooks are standing next to a typical local three-stone stove with wood firing. Here, as elsewhere in Oromia, improved energy-saving stoves (also based on wood fuel) have not yet been introduced.

Fig. 9: Corrugated iron hangar built by the StC project in Boricha woreda for use as a canteen for school meals in Sidama.

Fig. 10: Older 5,000 litre water storage tank from previous support and 10,000 litre tank connected to the local network (provided by the StC project in Sidama).

Fig. 11: Double VIP latrine blocks separated by gender were built in 17 of the 20 schools of the StC project in Sidama.

Fig. 12: Four improved energy-saving stoves are currently being used in a very large school in Sidama and, in view of the high demand, an additional three-stone stove.

Fig. 13: In view of the lack of food supplies at the time of the investigation, the last reserves, soya beans with a little cooking oil and salt, are served here.

3.3.1 The Sponsorship of School Meals

The state or the respective Ethiopian federal state is responsible for providing school meals in all of the schools visited. It is the city government, i.e. the mayor's office, which is considered to be particularly committed to the issue in Addis Ababa. Significantly more state funds will be invested here (US$ 75.4 million in the 2022/2023 school year alone) than in the rest of the country combined. At the time of our visit, the budget comprised 20 ETB per pupil per day (approx. EUR 0.33 at the official ETB exchange rate), whereby the individual school and its PTA as well as the school management can increase the funds in cash or kind if there is a school garden or even a school farm, as well as through donations from parents[26] or the general public: This explains the by far most generous food quality in the school visited compared to the other nine schools in Oromia and Sidama.

It is the federal state that is responsible for school meals in Oromia, but only makes a small contribution to their financing with the US$ 4.9 million that is currently allocated. It is, therefore, important to emphasise the school's own responsibility, which has to procure all the food it needs from its own resources – in rural areas primarily from the yield of the school farm.[27] However, it receives massive support from *Busa Gonofaa*, which redistributes donations from wealthier districts to poor *woredas* and can also draw on additional funds from the government if necessary. In special cases, the organisation is also commissioned by the government to provide emergency aid that goes beyond supplying schools.

The regional government in Sidama has initially only allocated US$ 188,000 to the budget for the current school year. Although the government is also the official sponsor of SF here, individual projects, such as the programme in Boricha already mentioned several times and implemented by StC, are ultimately implemented in co-ordination with the regional school administration as a measure of the central government and, if necessary, by international donors, such as the Global Partnership for Education, which, in turn, also receives funding

[26] Financial participation by parents, as is (not strictly enforced) mandatory in Benin in West Africa, for example, is not provided for in Ethiopia (cf. Gaesing et al. 2023).

[27] Almost all of the 10 schools visited had a school farm of between one and around eight hectares. Only two schools also had a school garden, from which, according to the PTA, a small amount of food could be grown. The farms are almost always leased under conditions of yield sharing, whereby the tenant has to contribute labour, seeds and, if necessary, fertilisers within their half of the yield.

from the BMZ. Accordingly, StC is only responsible to the central government, even if the *woreda* and the regional government carry out a certain amount of monitoring.

Box 2: The Busa Gonofaa Oromiyaa

Formerly known as the Disaster Risk Management Office and responsible for supporting the population in the event of disasters, *Busa Gonofaa* has been expanded into a general co-ordination centre for self-help measures in the state since 2022. Its purpose is to support the mobilisation of self-help among the population, which includes the provision of food for SF in the primary schools of Oromia. In doing so, the organisation is building on the long tradition of collective solidarity among the population. "Self-help, but also the support of people who cannot help themselves through contributions from those who can give something, is part of the tradition of our society", says the director of the Arsi Zone in an interview with the INEF team.

Among other things, *Busa Gonofaa* operates an early warning system regarding weather conditions, especially the development of rainfall for agricultural production and pasture farming, and the possible consequences for food security in the 30 or so *woredas* of Arsi. In the area of SF, its objectives include promoting school attendance and reducing dropout. To this end, in the Arsi zone (similar to the other zones of Oromia), donations in cash and kind (*gumaata*) are initially solicited, especially from its own members, of whom there are three quarters of a million in Oromia, from business people and larger agricultural enterprises.

This has been very successful so far in 2023 (i.e. at the time of the INEF study in April 2023). Almost 37,000 tonnes of grain have been collected by *Busa Gonafaa* from wealthier farms, as well as cattle worth 7.4 million ETB (around EUR 123,300) and 142 million ETB in cash (EUR 2.37 million). The donations are collected in a decentralised manner via *Busa Gonofaa* committees at the *kebele* and *woreda* level and booked under broad control. In this way, *Busa Gonofaa* is able to support 1,360 primary schools with around 438,000 children in the Arsi zone alone.

What exactly is redistributed to the schools from *Busa Gonofaa* inputs can vary greatly and depends on the income in the *woredas*, on the one hand, and the poverty and drought situation of the *woredas* concerned, on the other hand, for reasons of fairness. A school in Wondo *woreda*, for example, has received a quota of 300 kg of rice, 10 litres of vegetable oil, and 10 kg of salt six times since December 2022, albeit with 1,856 pupils.

3.3.2 The School Community and Its (Joint) Responsibility

According to the above, in Oromia especially, the school itself, represented by several stakeholders (groups), bears a large part of the responsibility for the implementation of SF. Here, according to the national guidelines of the Ministry of Education, but also in the other federal states, a PTA should be active at every school. From the different information provided by the schools visited, it emerged that this PTA should generally consist of five parent representatives and two teachers, but not the headteacher. The association has a considerable say in the day-to-day running of the school, and many PTAs, for their part, take on considerable voluntary commitments in the school and, accordingly, for the SF. In this respect, the PTA is the most important decision-making body at the school. Together with the headteacher, it manages the budget in the context of the SF as well as the funds provided by the state for the upkeep of the school and all donated and self-generated funds.

A School Feeding Committee is almost always elected as the executive body of the PTA for the practical implementation of the SF. This committee is responsible for the running of the SF, from the management of food and the organisation of water and firewood to the daily

preparation of food in the kitchen and its distribution. However, financial matters do not fall within the remit of the committee.

Finally, the school management (in large schools, there are three principals) fulfils something of a supervisory role. Together with the PTA, they are responsible for the school's allocated budget, which is so small that not even the most basic necessities (such as repairing a hand pump or the school roof, tariffs for water, electricity if necessary) can be paid from it and the SF can, therefore, hardly be supported financially:[28] However, the school management – together with the PTA – is responsible for the management of the school field, which can be found at almost every school, at least in rural Ethiopia, and the income from which may and almost always must flow into the SF. In our small sample, the lease fee or the share of the harvest to be delivered to the school largely secures the financing of the SF.

Some schools also have a small vegetable and herb garden. Only three of the ten schools visited, however, were actually able to make substantial contributions to the menu. This is due to the fact that the availability of water for garden irrigation in parts of Oromia and especially in the Boricha *woreda* which was visited in Sidama, is almost non-existent or the water is too expensive.

The "kitchen-" or "school lunch committee"

The task of the kitchen committees is to organise the daily practical work, i.e. to ensure that the cooks have firewood, water, and, of course, the food they need in the morning. The member of the committee who manages the key to the storeroom is important here. The secretary of the committee or the PTA is also involved in keeping a daily record of the food to ensure control.

Fig. 14: Pupils washing hands.

Washing hands in the simplest and most effective way: An older pupil scoops the water out of a container and pours it over the hands of his classmates.

Together with the teaching staff, the kitchen committee also organises the mandatory ***handwashing*** before serving food, which is carried out more or less consistently depending on the school and the strictness of the school management (Fig. 14):[29] Where there is a water

[28] An eight-grade school with around 640 children, for example, was allocated 50,000 ETB for the current school year, which is around 833 EUR, or 78 ETB (1.30 EUR) per child – for the whole year.

[29] Washing hands is important because *injera is* always eaten with your hands, while other foods are eaten more or less also with your hands, depending on the availability of spoons.

connection, one or two washing points with two to four taps each are usually provided. In other places, water containers provided by UNICEF can be used. If these are broken or none are available, water is simply drawn from a container and poured over the children's hands with a cup. This can be done by older pupils. During our visit, liquid soap was also available for washing hands, especially in Sidama, which is also provided free of charge every month via StC.

Fig. 15: Piped water connection.

Where there is a connection to a local network or, at least, a filled water tank is available, children can wash their hands with running water.

One of the committee's most important tasks is to procure the ***firewood*** that is essential for the kitchen. On the one hand, the income generated by the schools themselves is available for this purpose, on the other hand, all schools are forced to charge the parents – i.e. the children's mothers, as they are normally responsible for providing firewood for their families. This means that if no financial resources are available, each child has to bring two or three logs of wood. This is not only an additional time burden for the women, but also a financial burden in areas with sparse natural forest cover, as they are dependent on buying firewood even for their own cooking. The headteacher may be able to make an additional contribution from the budget in a small number of schools; so far, only three of the schools visited have planted their own firewood. However, those responsible in two of these schools were not aware that acacias are particularly suitable for this purpose due to their fast growth and good properties as firewood (unlike the eucalyptus frequently planted). In one school, however, a small area was reforested with acacia trees (Fig. 16).

There are extremely large regional differences in Ethiopia regarding the provision of ***water*** (at least some of which is required as hygienically safe drinking water). Only the school in the area surrounding Addis Ababa has a largely secure piped supply. In Oromia, depending on the zone, many schools have to buy water, which is brought to the school in 20 litre canisters by mostly male water traders (Fig. 17). The price can be up to 20 ETB per canister.

In Sidama, where the water supply in many zones is even worse than the average in Oromia due to deep, sandy, and, therefore, permeable soils, the GpfE-financed project was generally intended to co-finance the connection of schools to a local pipe network. So far, 17 out of 21 schools have actually been connected to such a network, although the security of supply is not always guaranteed. The schools have each been given water reservoirs with a capacity of 10,000 litres each as a buffer, but even these are empty after four to five days in the

larger schools, whereupon the water has to be bought for 10 to 20 ETB per 20-l-canister, as in other schools.

A storekeeper works with the PTA and School Feeding Committee in every school. This requires daily presence, as often only this person and the headteacher have a key to the storeroom, whereby the latter often has to go to the *woreda* on school matters. The storeroom manager is accountable to the PTA and headteacher and is also subject to supervision by the *kebele* (see below)

Fig. 16: Firewood from the school ground.

A proper afforestation with acacia trees on the grounds of a school, intended for the medium-term production of firewood. After three years, the wood can already be harvested.

Fig. 17: Water transport with donkeys.

A school in Oromia has to buy the water needed for the SF at the very high price of 10 ETB/20 litres. At least 600 litres are needed per day, which costs the PTA 300 ETB (about 5 EUR). The price in Sidama is often twice as much at 20 ETB/20 litres.

Kebele Education and Training Committee and the woreda

The fourth group of actors at the school level and beyond in the *kebele* (which can have between a single and about five primary schools) in the context of SF is a monitoring and technical support committee, which is also responsible for auditing the income and expenditure of the schools in the rural community. The Kebele Education and Training Committee always

includes the head of the *kebele administration*, the headteacher(s), a *kebele* health assistant[30], the representative of the *kebele* women's organisation, a teacher and a pupil from the final year of primary school(s). All PTA receipts and expenditures for school meals are regularly inspected by this committee in order to prevent the misappropriation of funds. Stock management is also subject to its control. According to some, the committee is also responsible for selecting the cooks. Others pointed out that the *woreda education administration*, where all candidates receive their initial training, would always decide on the selection of cooks in the end. Ultimately, the responsibility for the Ethiopian SF programme lies with the Ministry of Education.

The cooks

Apart from the school on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, where three men and six women take it in turns to prepare meals for 641 pupils and kindergarten children, we only met female cooks at the schools in Oromia and Sidama. What all the cooks have in common, however, is that they come from the neighbourhood of the respective schools and have volunteered for this task. Many also have children of their own in the schools. When the regional governments introduced the SF (mostly in 2021), the need and importance of supporting the project was emphasised at parents' meetings and through notices at the *kebele* office. As a rule, there were more candidates than the number of cooks needed. After a health check, the volunteers received training, which primarily covered the two topics of hygiene in the school kitchen environment and social behaviour towards the children.

The work is extremely demanding, heavy with moving the 50 to 100 litre cooking containers and very time-consuming overall. It leaves the cooks hardly any time for their own income-generating activities, at least on school days. The work often starts at 6.00 a.m. and hardly ends before 5.00 p.m. in the larger schools (see Appendix 1), in some schools only at 6.00 p.m. or even later due to the washing-up. As is so often the case with national SF programmes, this work is also very poorly paid in Ethiopia and apparently in all federal states without exception.

In the slightly better-off school on the outskirts of the capital, the nine cooks receive 1,500 to 2,000 ETB per month (25 to 33 EUR), depending on their financial situation. This corresponds roughly to the income that women in rural areas of Ethiopia can earn and is a positive example. The situation is very different at a school in Oromia. Here, the wage is only 400 ETB (around 6.60 EUR) per month and the working hours for 815 pupils cover almost the whole day, from 7.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. The cooks in a third school receive even less: 2,000 ETB for the whole school year of ten months, i.e. around 200 ETB or 3.35 EUR per month. At a fourth school, the cooks should receive 2,000 ETB per month, but unfortunately there is no money to pay this salary. At another school, the 2,000 ETB is actually paid out, but only minus a tax of 160 ETB, and at yet another, there is no monetary compensation at all. At least, the cooks are allowed to eat where they work in all places, but this is not officially regulated. In

[30] In Ethiopia, following initial selective measures at the end of the 1970s, since 2004, young, trained women and men have been systematically sent to villages for two years as community health workers before being employed in the public sector, for example, to build simple latrines, provide preventative medical care and help with uncomplicated illnesses. These programmes have also enabled the country to develop its healthcare system to an above-average level compared to other African countries (see CHWCentral 2018).

addition, it was pointed out everywhere that there would be no allowances for rice or semolina, no matter how small.[31]

Several of the interviewees – all of them cooks – explained that they only wanted to do their job because they could be sure that their own children would get a good meal at school. Others only want to stay on until successors are found for them, which is likely to be a long time coming given the poor working conditions and the resulting decline in volunteers. In the two schools with halfway decent wages, the workload was lamented, but we were told that there was no better paid work in the villages.[32]

Fig. 18: Food distribution at a school in Sidama. The cooks have received professional clothing as well as short training.

3.3.3 Procurement of Foodstuffs

While the schools in Oromia receive different quantities of rice, maize, or wheat meal, depending on the support provided by *Busa Gonofaa*, a similar basic package is provided by StC in the 21 schools in at least the *Boricha woreda*. Here, it is mainly wheat meal and maize, plus soya beans and a precisely measured 10 g of vegetable oil and 3 g of iodised salt per child and meal.

It is the PTA board that buys all the things needed in Oromia itself, such as the cooking pots, the crockery and the basic foodstuffs not provided by the Addis Ababa city council, *Busa Gonofaa* or StC (see Fig. 19). This includes everything that provides the actual "flavour" (i.e. the sauce) when eating: *berberé* (a hot spice mixture consisting of chilli powder and other ingredients), other local spices, especially green or dried herbs, ginger, turmeric, tomatoes,

[31] There were various reports in Cambodia in 2017 that although there was not enough money for a decent salary at the school, the cooks occasionally received a bag of rice (worth around EUR 30 for 50 kg of rice).

[32] The minimum wage in Ethiopia is only set for specific sectors. The average wage for low-skilled workers in 2023 was 4,200 ETB (approx. EUR 70). This means that female cooks receive a maximum of 50 % of this payment, even though SF is a state programme. In Benin, too, as our current study from June 2023 showed, the school meal programme, which is also state-run, does not pay anywhere near the minimum wage of around EUR 78, at best, just under half. With a few exceptions, something similar is likely to be the rule, at least in sub-Saharan Africa.

onions, garlic, etc., or, if resources are sufficient, some vegetables (which also include potatoes and sweet potatoes) and, in exceptional cases, eggs.

Fig. 19: The (at times, theoretical) menu for a week in the project in Sidama.

Monday: porridge made from a flour mixture (60 % maize, 20 % wheat, 20 % soya beans) and a boiled potato (probably only occasionally available), served with 6 g enriched oil and 3 g iodised salt; Tuesday: wheat meal (*kinche*) made from 130 g wheat and 20 g lentils as well as oil and salt; Wednesday: porridge as on Monday, plus oil and salt, but without potato; Thursday: *kinche* as on Tuesday, here again with a boiled potato along with oil and salt; Friday: as on Monday and Wednesday, porridge with oil and salt, but without potato.

If there are precise guidelines on possible expenditure, members of the School Feeding Committee or even teachers or any other members of the school who have transport and can get to the market can also make purchases. In the case of remote schools, third parties from the village who have their own transport are also asked to help with the purchases. There is a broad control over expenditure as the market prices are generally known. The school representatives make sure to compare prices and buy as cheaply as possible, even if the difference is only a few ETB.

The search for the cheapest products harbours the risk of "local procurement", as less is purchased in the villages at the school locations themselves if they do not have their own market. However, the required quantities of "voluntary" ingredients are still so small that they would have no economic significance if they were sourced consistently in the school villages. Only if local procurement were to include staple foods would there be a recognisable impact on local producers and trade. It would be even better if the schools also had the means to procure local vegetables, fruit, and perhaps even fish and/or eggs locally.

Box 3: The financing of school meals: case studies

The SF is best funded in a school in the Addis Ababa region, where not only the city administration provides 20 ETB/day per pupil, but wealthy villagers and former pupils also donate generously. In 2022/2023, around 200,000 ETB (about EUR 3,335) was raised in this way for the SF alone. In addition, one man donated 100 chairs for the canteen.

A second school in Oromia owns five hectares of farmland, which is leased out. At the end of 2022, after deducting all expenses, 300,000 ETB (= EUR 5,000) was received in income. A further 38,250 ETB (637.50 EUR) was added through cash donations and 30,000 ETB (500 EUR) in kind.

Another school in Oromia with a total of eight hectares of land was able to generate a net profit of 390,000 ETB or EUR 6,500 at the end of 2022, which is the highest income item in our small sample. In addition, there are – albeit only planned – levies of 300 ETB per household, which can also be paid in kind, i.e. around 10 kg of maize or wheat. By contrast, the school's budget of 33,000 ETB in the current school year is more than meagre, i.e. 46 ETB or around EUR 0.75 per pupil per year.

Another school does not have its own farmland. It will only be possible to add a sauce to the basic food supplied by StC if all the parents really do pay the 100 ETB per child this school year as planned by the PTA. Otherwise, there is only boiled wheat meal alternating with maize porridge, soya beans, rarely a few lentils, and the 10 g of oil per child and meal for flavour, as well as some salt.

3.3.4 The Effects From the Perspective of Those Involved in the Schools

We spoke in each school to a small group of mostly six children (three girls and three boys) about school meals and also about meals at home. We not only wanted to know how the children liked the daily meals at school, but also what else was on the table at home and even compare the two from the children's point of view. In addition, the pupils were asked to state what they would like to see in the SF and the food at home.

On the one hand, it was stated that the portions were ample or, at least, sufficient. Some children referred to the possibility of getting a second helping, but we were unable to observe this when the food was served, especially as some cooks were absolutely perfect when distributing the portions, so that despite all fairness, there was virtually no leftover food. Only once was there a reference to the "bland preparation" of the food, i.e. the salt and/or oil had

Fig. 20: School lunch distribution.

The "ideal dish" for many Ethiopians: flat pancake-like bread made from *teff* (*injerra*) (right) with spinach leaves as vegetables (left) and bean or chickpea sauce (*shiro*) (centre pot). The PTA can afford this dish in everyday school life in only one school we visited.

possibly run out or no spices had been used. There was also one reference to beans that were not fully cooked.

With the exception of one school in the area around Addis Ababa, despite the general praise of the pupils interviewed regarding the fact that there was any food at all, the food generally served was characterised by all of them as even less varied than the already relatively monotonous meals at home. A much wider range of dishes provided by the mothers was mentioned for the past two or three days. While there was either *kinche* or maize porridge (sometimes with soya beans) at school and, last year, lentils were also served more often (which is no longer the case), the meals in the last two days at home also included: occasionally carrots, more often local cabbage (a type of chard), tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, avocado, depending on the season, but also occasionally white bread (!), less often eggs and chicken or (exceptionally) beef, also banana, sugar cane, pineapple, and guava.

However, this long list conceals the fact that very often only one staple food was served repeatedly with a rather symbolic amount of sauce – and for days on end, because there was no money in the house, only "false banana" (*Ensete ventricosum*, Fig. 21) from the garden, whose carbohydrate-rich fibres of the leaf stems are processed into a kind of "bread" (*kocho*), which is very rich in nutrients. Still, it is very often without spicy ingredients, which are lacking, making it more of an emergency food (even though the *ensete* is widespread in Ethiopia).

An average of one or two boys and/or girls of the six children in each of the discussion groups had eaten meat in the week prior to the day of our visit, and, apart from exceptions such as a wedding party, these were probably very modest portions.

Fig. 21: Ensete plants in a garden behind the house.
It was only when the children pointed out the "false banana" that we "discovered" the plant in almost every garden in some villages, which emphasises its immense importance as a basic food for poor households.

In view of the meagre meals in everyday life – both at school and at home – the children's wishes regarding "what should be served at school" are very modest. "Two years ago we had eggs for dinner, it would be great if we could have them again", was a very specific suggestion, as the eggs in most families are sold by the women rather than used for their own meals. Equally modest is the request to use a little more oil in the food, which in schools is sometimes the only ingredient in maize porridge along with salt. The pupils in Sidama also thought that the lentils previously included in the school supply should be put back on the table. *Injera* was another suggestion in Sidama, as the *teff* pancake is still the national dish, at least in the areas

around Awassa (Fig. 20). Only two children dared to point out that *injera* with chicken would not be a bad idea, or that noodles with a bit of meat could also be served.

Those who can provide information on the ***effects of school meals*** on pupils and school attendance in general are the children's parents, teachers, school management, and, of course, the pupils themselves. From the parents' point of view, the interviews focused on the following effects (weighted in roughly the following order):

- Reduced parental concern about making food available to all members of the family;
- the children prefer to go to school and do not have to be "driven there" in the morning; and
- it is not necessary to come home to prepare meals if you work outside the home, which can mean travelling long distances and possibly also a loss of income.

From the perspective of school management and teachers, the teaching situation and pupils' performance are at the centre of the impact comments:

- The children are much more punctual at school than before and they do not just disappear during school hours;
- they are much more attentive during lessons and perform better, which is noticeable in the exams and when it comes to promotion; and
- in addition to the teachers, the headteachers particularly emphasise that the dropout rate has decreased significantly during the school year, which has been impressively confirmed in several cases by the figures presented:[33] In school no. 7 (on our list), 90 out of a total of 1,285 boys did not finish the 2020/2021 school year, and 111 out of 1,132 girls. In the current 2022/2023 school year, on the other hand, only two dropouts were recorded after six and a half months; school no. 3 recorded 57 dropouts out of 130 new entrants in all classes in 2021/2022. In 2022/2023, after 139 enrolments at the beginning of the school year, there have even been 135 additional enrolments in all classes at the same school. In school no. 4, after a very large dropout of 142 pupils in 2021/2022, the number has halved to 72 in the current school year. School no. 5 had 35 dropouts in 2021/2022 with 97 children enrolled, and zero dropouts (!) in 2022/2023 with 101 children enrolled. After "many dropouts in 2022/2022", school no. 6 has so far recorded a balance of zero dropouts for the current 2022/2023 school year).[34]

However, headteachers pointed out to us that this positive trend could only continue in the current school year for schools no. 6–10 if the supply of basic foodstuffs to the schools in Sidama, which had been suspended at the time of our visit, was resumed very soon. According to one headteacher, a quarter of the children in his school had already stayed at home within just over two weeks of the suspension of supplies in individual classes.[35] In the meantime, however, these children are allowed to go back to school, as supplies were resumed after around three weeks.

[33] The connection between the decline in dropouts in primary schools and school meals is also confirmed by a recent study by Mohammed et al. on Addis Ababa (2023).

[34] As with other schools, children leave after the start of school meals, mainly due to relocation and, in some cases, child marriage. In one case, however, the girl in question returned to school the following year.

[35] In school no. 10, for example, there were as many as 20 and 22 absences in two year eight classes, with around 75 pupils admitted to the classes for the 2022/2023 school year.

The repeated references to the "better health of the children", which came mainly from teachers but were also put forward by parents, can probably only be empirically proven by additional investigations into the effects of SF.

The problem of the interrupted supply to schools shows three phenomena very clearly: firstly, the immense importance of SF for children's school attendance becomes obvious. Secondly, however, it demonstrates how vulnerable the system is to and in the event of breakdowns. It is likely to be the poorest who withdraw their children from school if SF is not provided. Thirdly, it is clear that the capacity of the schools and the various stakeholders (albeit in only the third year of the SF) is still too low to be able to react quickly to such failures – in other words, to be able to buy the food they need themselves for a while using reserves from their own coffers.

Only a few specific comments were made by the pupils themselves, particularly that the food comes every day, on time and is good, which we interpret as general satisfaction. They come to school every day, which can be interpreted as an indication that the children also feel that they are sick less often.

3.3.5 Challenges for School Meals

Given that the SF programme is only in its third year in most schools in Ethiopia, our small sample, which was supplemented by additional interviews and the analysis of programme documents, indicates a very ***positive development*** overall. What used to be individual projects covering just a few schools is currently on its way to becoming a comprehensive national programme.

It will be important to ensure at least the basic supply of basic foodstuffs to schools, to the extent that all primary schools receive a minimum of supplies delivered on time. To achieve this, the ***budgets of the federal states*** beyond the capital Addis Ababa should at the minimum provide for a fixed special item that covers a minimum of requirements and ensures that there are no interruptions, even in special programmes. It is certainly important to weigh things up in this respect and not to penalise other social areas.[36]

Discussions with those responsible at national, regional, and local level revealed that there is currently a very high level of ***commitment to SF***, but still a lack of uniform rules and, above all, concrete recommendations for action for procurement, the role of the various stakeholders and the organisation at schools and the composition of meals. In view of the numerous questions asked by our interviewees at both regional and local level, the state's information policy on SF is also in need of improvement.

The biggest problem concerning SF that is not related to food acquisition is the precarious ***water supply*** situation, as even the few schools with a connection to a local network cannot count on a reliable supply.

The supply of ***energy*** to school kitchens must also be prioritised in the short term and much more prominently than before. If many thousands of primary schools continue to work with

[36] Evans et al. (2023) refer to this in their current article on the financing of social programmes in low-income countries. However, their argument that this group of countries and, thus, possibly also Ethiopia, have already utilised between 86 and 84 % of their tax potential – and could, therefore, hardly increase their social spending – cannot be accepted. In particular, the bases for income tax and corporate income tax in Ethiopia are seldom or not recorded at all in the tax administration due to governance shortcomings and are, therefore, largely excluded from the tax calculations.

traditional three-stone cookers for the foreseeable future, this will represent not only a considerable burden on the environment but also an (increasing) cost factor that competes directly with the expenditure on food for the children to be supplemented by the school committees. In this context, it is also important to mention the frequent health problems suffered by the cooks due to the smoke from the open fires.

After an initial, very positive phase of voluntary work among ***female cooks*** (and the rather small number of male cooks overall), the development shows that the women (and men) needed will soon scarcely be available, given the often token but in no case adequate wages. If women do become available under social pressure, the result would be considerable exploitation with negative consequences for the whole family. Instead of the intended improvement in gender equality through school meals, the opposite would occur, namely the economic disadvantage of tens of thousands of women.[37]

The ***gender policy*** around SF generally should not be forgotten, especially a significantly better inclusion of boys and men in work processes and of women and girls in the decisions of the stakeholder groups involved.

Another challenge in the medium term will be to overcome the ***monotony of the food served,*** which, according to the interviews with the school authorities, is generally the rule, both in Oromia and Sidama. Consideration should also be given to increasing the nutritional value.

[37] Here, the argument of employment promotion through SF, which is repeatedly put forward in DC, is turned on its head by the fact that, at least in Ethiopia, only exploitative, precarious working conditions are created. The women would probably get more out of it if, instead of cooking for the schools, they continued to pursue their other income-generating activities if they had done so before.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Important Findings and Conclusions

Considerable efforts have been made: The contributions of the Ethiopian central government, as well as the administration of the capital Addis Ababa and the governments of individual federal states (especially Oromia, but also Sidama) to the widespread introduction of SF in the first four primary school classes, as well as preschools, are impressive, even by international standards. The programmes previously implemented until the 2019/2020 school year, primarily in the capital and a small number of *woredas* expressly declared as emergency areas, have since been extended to the entire country, although very different approaches are being taken in view of the federalism.

Despite the funds provided, the budget is still inadequate: The figures for the budgets set aside for school meals, which, in some cases, do not even cover 2 % of the actual costs incurred, are not yet impressive in all federal states. The majority of the public funds nationally earmarked go to Addis Ababa, meaning that the costs outside the capital have to be covered almost entirely by ODA or regional and local self-help. The latter, however, is remarkable in Oromia, especially through *Busa Gonofaa*. Nevertheless, this very ambitious and largely participatory project, which relies on its own funds and is supported by civil society, was implemented at short notice and without any organisational lead time. During the research team's visits, the practice of providing food at the individual schools and what ended up on the children's plates varied accordingly.

There is still a lack of standards and tools for those involved in the schools: Federalism in Ethiopia means that there are currently very different financing and procurement models for SF. However, there is still a lack of standards and tools for the various models that are tailored to the different stakeholder groups. The representatives of the state governments (school departments) and the *woredas* (education offices) involved in the implementation and monitoring of the SF programme do not yet have the handouts and tools they need to be able to adequately advise the actors involved in the schools.

Addis Ababa is a pioneer in school meals: The city administration of Addis Ababa is the absolute pioneer in terms of the scope and quality of SF in Ethiopia, where all public primary schools at all grades, together with preschools, are included. The financial resources here allow for a wider choice of meals than in the rural areas, partly because the capital city has considerably more financial resources available than the federal states, which are still characterised by rural areas.

Supply of food has not yet been sustainably resolved: The schools in Oromia are supplied by the schools themselves and by the *woreda* administration as part of the *Busa Gonofaa* self-help organisation. A balance between wealthy *woredas* and poorer ones is planned, but the supply system still lacks a secure basic stock of food on which each school can safely build in relation to its number of pupils.

With the exception of the school in the neighbourhood of Addis Ababa, the schools are partially overwhelmed with the task of independently procuring the necessary food for the SF. Even in Sidama, where there is a relatively full supply thanks to the intermediary role of StC, the ingredients, without which the food would remain extremely modest, can only be financed with difficulty.

In the CHILD SFP programme for Sidama, which is implemented by StC, the NGO supplies all basic foodstuffs on which the 21 schools concerned rely heavily. As a result, these schools, which are actually particularly favoured by the project, were unable to provide school meals for three weeks during the time of our visit due to the loss of supplies, for which they were unable to compensate. This is also a consequence of the very different commitment of the PTA and especially the parents compared to the five Oromia schools we visited. The small sample, nevertheless, suggests that the local commitment of the school community is particularly important for the sustainability of SF, especially when it comes to supplementing the basic food with the ingredients that, according to the pupils, give the food the "flavour" that distinguishes it from a "bland" porridge, for example.

Interruptions to school meals have significant negative impacts: The impact of SF in Sidama state generally during our school visits was significantly affected by the suspension of SF in the 21 schools of the *Boricha woreda*. Even the short suspension of just two weeks led to more than 25 % dropouts in school operations, which, in turn, is likely to have a considerable impact on class and, thus, school success overall, especially in the eighth grade.[38] This circumstance is all the more deplorable because after the 2021/2022 school year, which was well organised in this respect, the enrolment rate had increased significantly in some schools at the beginning of the new year 2022/2023 precisely because of school meals. It should also be noted that the situation in the *woreda* was already unsatisfactory due to the overall delay in the resumption of school meals after the holidays from the end of September 2022 to mid-December 2022. However, this late start to school meals in Sidama in December 2022 after two months of no supply has not yet had any significant dropout effects.

Too little attention is paid to gender equality during implementation: The implementation of goals aimed at greater gender equity is not explicitly recognisable in the practice of SF. Girls benefit from school meals to the same extent as boys, but they are more involved than boys in auxiliary work, for example, when they replace the sick second cook in a school at short notice or carry the food to the preschool classes. Above all, however, it is the girls who, completely "in keeping with tradition", also have to help out with the school meals, at least significantly more than boys when it comes to fetching water, distribution of food and cleaning dishes.

With the exception of one school, only female cooks are employed in the sample and, almost without exception, they receive significantly less than the minimum wage for low-skilled employees. Furthermore, given the long working hours, they have hardly any opportunities to supplement their "wages" with income-generating activities or to earn a substantial income at all. Therefore, the question arises as to the gender effects on the women involved. As things stand today, these are clearly negative. In addition, mothers' representatives and women generally are much less likely to be found in management positions than men and are hardly involved in decision-making in the various stakeholder groups involved in school meals (especially the PTA and the kitchen committee).

[38] This is all the more the case as, according to the Ministry for Education, end-of-year examinations are to be conducted much more strictly throughout the country from the current 2022/2023 school year than in the past. The Ministry of Health's *School Health Programme Framework* from 2017 already stated that absenteeism and dropouts in schools that already provided school meals at the time were mainly due to deficiencies in the supply of food, access to (drinking) water and the lack of healthcare (FDRE 2017: 26).

Fig. 22: Female cooks.

The role of cooks – almost always women and massively underpaid – should be given much more focus in planning in order to promote gender equality and help ensure the sustainability of SF programmes.

Not all staple foods are available everywhere: Another problem of local procurement in a country such as Ethiopia with different ecozones and dominant economic systems is that the food required for SF is not produced everywhere. Where maize, rice, and *teff*, for example, cannot be produced locally, they are more expensive than in locations close to their production due to transport alone, or they are not available in larger quantities on the local market. Against this background, a single school can hardly buy large enough quantities to be able to negotiate favourable prices. This is another reason why a strong local partner, such as the *woreda* administration, would be important. Such a partner could, for example, invite tenders for joint food deliveries for a dozen schools and organise the purchasing.

Institutional problems still to be observed: The INEF studies on SF focus less on the institutional set-up of the respective national SF programme and more on the practical implementation of the measures in the schools and the effects observed there to date. However, the discussions with those responsible at a national, regional, and local level in Ethiopia clearly showed that the role and especially the precise tasks of the SF officers (usually located within the school administration) were not yet clear everywhere, at least, in the zones and *woredas.* The lack of work aids was particularly pointed out in interviews. A catalogue of regionally compiled meals with a high nutritional value was mentioned.

The interaction between the ministries involved and their representatives at the middle and lower administrative levels also did not yet appear to be working in view of the rapid, and possibly more than just in exceptional cases (e.g. in Oromia) hasty, introduction of SF. To date, only the structure of the Ministry of Education appears to be more or less informed and, therefore, more or less present in the monitoring of SF implementation, while the WASH sector (particularly regarding hygiene issues), represented by the Ministry of Health, plays no recognisable role.

4.2 Recommendations

→ The most important recommendation for the sustainability of school meals in Ethiopia (similar to other countries) is the successive allocation of ***budget funds*** at central government and/or state level, which will enable all schools, regardless of the region and its economic conditions, to have secure access to a minimum quantity of basic foodstuffs in the medium term. This minimum quantity and quality should be based on the requirements currently

presented by the WFP for a meal that is served five days a week and all year round during school hours to all children in the school (or the politically specified year groups).

→ In order to provide schools and the stakeholder groups involved in SF with the best possible support in carrying out their tasks, nationally ***applicable minimum standards for the implementation of SF*** (e.g. food composition, preparation rules, hygiene regulations, guidelines for the use of energy-saving cookers) as well as work aids and training materials should be developed and widely disseminated among all stakeholders. It is also recommended that those responsible in the departments of the state authorities as well as in the zone- and *woreda* administrations be more closely involved in the exchange of information and, if necessary, receive further training on important issues (especially M+E).

Irrespective of the various food acquisition models currently used in the Ethiopian federal states, schools should be given more support by the public administration, especially at the level of zones and *woredas.* The basic supply of schools in a *woreda*, for example, could be ensured through a joint tender (with regional limits) for all or individual staple foods within three to five years. Tenders could be invited nationwide in zones where no staple foods are available.

→ Two conclusions must be drawn from the only temporary loss of the supply of the usual basic foodstuffs and the immediate consequence of the considerable dropout in the affected schools: Firstly, the ***financial planning of*** all agencies involved as well as the tenders for the food required must always begin early enough to ensure ***punctual delivery.*** A time reserve should be planned for any difficulties that may arise during the process (e.g. lack of bids, contract and payment delays). Secondly, the schools should be able to bridge short-term cancellations that may occur, for example, due to weather events and associated transport problems, with their own resources, at least for individual days (at least five). Those involved in the schools (and also at the level of the *kebele* as the lowest management level of the SF programme) must also be made aware of the need to be able to close the gap immediately, i.e. without interrupting the school kitchen, using their own resources in the event of unpunctuality in the supply.

→ The considerable ***drinking water problems*** that continue to exist at many schools should be quickly addressed with a customised solution. In the case of existing piped systems or individual wells (usually with India Mark II hand pumps), the *woreda* should pay more attention to their maintenance. It is often sufficient to repair a pipe that has been damaged by rain erosion. Or all that is needed is a spare part for a hand pump, which the *woreda* can procure and install more easily as part of its obligations to maintain the drinking water supply than a completely inexperienced school management, especially as there are engineers at the *woreda* level throughout the country.[39] Schools that currently have no supply at all should be included in the water supply support programme as a matter of priority.

→ Another core problem of school catering that has been identified everywhere, the ***procurement of fuel*** for the kitchens, should at least be brought closer to a partial solution in two steps in order to save a lot of money and not further damage the environment. This would

[39] Numerous hand pump wells found in villages and possibly also near schools have predominantly been constructed as part of projects (often by NGOs). Frequently, however, the sustainable maintenance of the hand pumps has been neglected, so that an unprepared village community or school management is faced with considerable problems in the event of a breakdown. As a result, a system that cost eight to ten thousand euros to build remains out of operation for an unforeseeable period of time, even in the event of minor breakdowns that only require, for example, cheap seals.

consist primarily of the widespread introduction of energy-saving, improved wood-burning cookers to replace the three-stone stoves that are still commonly used. There are various models of these "energy-saving stoves". As we are talking about tens of thousands of cookers that would be needed virtually everywhere in Ethiopia, the most practical and effective types of stoves should be sought in a participatory manner and, above all, together with cooks (!!!) – possibly regionally in clusters. A partner from the donor community could perhaps be found to co-ordinate and co-finance this (e.g. the German GIZ, which has already developed various models of energy-saving cookers for use in households and institutions such as hotels, canteens, and schools in the country).

→ Even with the general introduction (and actual use) of ***improved cookers,*** many schools are faced with the cost problem of firewood. Accordingly, it is recommended to support reforestation on the almost always generous to extremely large plots of land attached to the school, at least in rural areas. This should primarily take place at schools where an existing water supply facilitates irrigation, at least in the first year. The schools also need support here, which could be provided as part of a project, but would be better implemented as a nationwide programme by the state via the *woredas* and *kebeles.* They can refer to the Green Legacy Initiative, which was launched by the Ethiopian Prime Minister in May 2019 to combat climate change and environmental degradation and comprises 20 billion trees.[40]

The *community development officers* stationed at the *kebele* level can make an important contribution here by helping to procure the seedlings (e.g. acacias) and providing advice and support during planting and care.

The ***gender impact*** of the project can be significantly improved regarding three stakeholder groups: Firstly, there should be significantly more women working on the various committees and, if possible, in leadership positions; secondly, the female cooks should be paid the minimum wage or the average wage for the relevant job group, so that they can compensate for their loss of income due to the time spent working full time in the school kitchens. Thirdly, care should be taken to ensure that all auxiliary tasks at school that can be carried out by pupils are divided equally between girls and boys, including those tasks that are usually carried out at home by girls alone.

A smaller but equally important improvement for the cooks at very large schools would be to have a second kitchen team for the second meal preparation and serving (shift), which has rarely existed up to now, and would reduce the work from often twelve to around seven hours.

[40] For the Green Legacy Initiative, see the initiative's own homepage at: https://greenlegacy.et/green-legacy/home [8/2023] and summarised by the United Nations at: https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/green-legacy-initiative [8/2023].

Fig. 23: A school garden.
School gardens (the planting of a relatively large vegetable garden after the end of the rainy season by the older pupils shown here) can make a small but important contribution to enriching the school diet.

→ The promotion of ***school gardens*** should definitely be stepped up so that meals can, at least occasionally, be supplemented with vegetables and herbs. It does not have to be enough for every day; it may be possible to rotate the additions to the basic catering on a class-by-class basis if there is not enough for everyone.

→ As the institutional problems are obvious in view of the very rapid implementation of SF programmes, it would be important, and it is also a recommendation of our study, to provide all those in positions of responsibility in the zones and *woredas* with (even) ***more intensive training*** on the objectives and instruments of SF. This also includes going through and explaining the job description regarding the practical work with the schools and the people involved in the *kebeles*. It should also be made clear in the training measures how those involved should fulfil their important M+E tasks particularly within the scope of their possibilities. It should also be noted that more operating resources (e.g. transport capacities) should be made available for this purpose.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Basic data on the schools included in the study: Pupil numbers with school meals

Abbreviations: m = male; f = female; SF = school feeding **bold** = reached by school feeding
Remarks: * Incl. Accelerated Learning Programme 18 m and 18 f

School No.	Preschool			Primary 1-4			Primary 5-8			Primary 1-8			Children in School	
	m	f	Total	m	f	Total	m	f	Total	m	f	Total	Total	SF Total
1	**30**	**43**	**73**	**153**	**129**	**282**	**178**	**108**	**286**	**331**	**237**	**568**	**641**	**641**
2	**40**	**32**	**72**	**437**	**309**	**746**	255	233	488	695	539	1234	1306	**818**
3	**135**	**139**	**274**	**683**	**577**	**1260**	152	136	288	835	713	1548	1822	**1534**
4	**95**	**80**	**175**	**381**	**339**	**720**	236	180	416	617	519	1136	1211	**895**
5	**53**	**48**	**101**	**156**	**125**	**281**	179	155	334	335	280	651*	752*	**382**
6	**142**	**134**	**276**							**837**	1261	**2098**	**2374**	**2374**
7	**116**	**138**	**254**							**906**	**960**	**1866**	**2120**	**2120**
8	**200**	**220**	**420**							**608**	**736**	**1344**	**1764**	**1764**
9	**30**	**26**	**56**							**307**	**414**	**721**	**777**	**777**
10	**104**	**92**	**196**							**987**	**1164**	**2153**	**2349**	**2349**
Total	945	952	1897	1810	1479	3289	1000	812	1812	6458	6823	13,319	15,116	13,654

School No.	Region	Financing model
1	Oromia	AA City Administration
2	Oromia	Community / Busa Gonofa
3	Oromia	Community / Busa Gonofa
4	Oromia	Community / Busa Gonofa
5	Oromia	Community / Busa Gonofa
6	Sidama	GPE/Save the Children
7	Sidama	GPE/Save the Children
8	Sidama	GPE/Save the Children
9	Sidama	GPE/Save the Children
10	Sidama	GPE/Save the Children

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