



Matchmaking Events Connect Farmers with the School Feeding Market in Mali

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The Centre National des Cantines Scolaires (CNCS), or National Centre for School Canteens, manages the provision of regular, healthy meals for pupils in Mali, coordinating school feeding initiatives funded by the Government of Mali, as well as other donors. The commune (local government) mayors, in practice, often procure food on behalf of all school management committees—the Comité de Gestion Scolaire (CGS)—in his/her commune once per quarter. Mayors typically procure all foodstuffs from a single supplier with the capacity to provide all items needed, a combination of cereals, pulses, and oil, in one order.

Founded in the Netherlands 50 years ago, we have built a long-term, local presence in 38 of the poorest countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our global team of local and international advisors works with local partners to equip communities, businesses and organisations with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to increase their incomes and gain access to basic services – empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and guide their own development.

The Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is a five-year programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by SNV USA in Ghana, Kenya and Mali. In Mali, PG-HGSF is implemented in 51 municipalities with the goal of involving 6,000 smallholder farmers in local school feeding programmes, including at least 30% women. This document is part of a series of PG-HGSF learning cases that capture lessons from pilot interventions linking smallholder farmers to school feeding programmes. To find out more about PG-HGSF, contact Katherine Casey, Learning Manager, at kcasey@snvworld.org or visit www.snvworld.org/en/procurement-for-hgsf

According to legislation,¹ the commune administration is responsible for distributing school feeding funds to the CGS for members to procure foodstuffs through an open public procurement process. The national school feeding policy states that food procurement is intended to support smallholder farmer employment by creating a local market for their products. With a budget of \$3.6 million allocated by Mali's government per year for food purchases, school feeding has the potential to be a large and fruitful local market for these area farmers. However, concentrating this activity in the hands of the commune mayors makes it difficult for the smallholder farmer to compete within the procurement system, especially in the amount of goods that mayors obtain on behalf of their CSGs.

By the Numbers

In 2015, 2,222 schools with a total of 412,000 pupils participate in a school feeding programme, with 20% of the schools funded by the government and the remaining funded by partners including the World Food Programme, Catholic Relief Services, and the Emergency Project for Education For All (PUEPT).

A Challenging System for Smallholder Farmers

The aggregated procurement process in many communes poses a challenge to smallholder farmers, who can find it difficult to meet the quantity and regulatory requirements of a commune-level school feeding tender. Likewise, the widespread disregard for school feeding legislation prevents many CGSs from managing their allotted finances, which limits their effectiveness as management committees. In addition to inconsistent procurement processes, farmers are further stymied from selling to the school feeding market by informal or weak farmer cooperatives and unreliable production.

The Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is designed to pilot interventions that break down barriers that prevent smallholder farmers from selling to the school feeding market. When PG-HGSF started in 2012, farmers and their cooperatives either had not considered the school meal programme as a potential market or—if they knew it existed—had not sold any food directly to this market.² Commune mayors and CGSs were also not purchasing from smallholder farmers; they were either unaware of local producers with the requisite commercial registrations, or preferred products from outside the immediate community, such as rice, which is easier to prepare than local grains. To create a space for CGS members and, when applicable, commune mayors to connect with farmer cooperatives in their area, PG-HGSF started piloting matchmaking events in 2013. This case study presents SNV Mali's approach to matching school feeding buyers and suppliers, and describes the business relationships that developed as the result of one matchmaking event in Siadougou.



CGSs, like the one pictured here, are elected by the community and serve on a volunteer basis.

Linking Farmers to Stakeholders through Matchmaking Events

SNV Mali's matchmaking events have four goals:

1 Articles 6 and 7, Interministerial Decree n2012/0367/MEALN-MATCL-MEF-SG, 2 February 2012.

2 Commandeur, Dick. *Challenges and Opportunities: Smallholders and School Feeding Initial Baseline Report*, SNV, 2012.



1. Develop business relationships between producers/traders and communes/CGSs in accordance with the national policy on school feeding.
2. Ascertain school feeding demand based on needs per school term, the number of students, and the number of canteens in participating communes, as well as the school use by product type, including quantity of each and estimated purchase period.
3. Inventory potential supplies, including the types of agricultural products and tonnage that each cooperative could provide.
4. Discuss previous experiences and consider partnering scenarios among farmers, traders, communes and/or CGSs.

Mali School Feeding Ingredients

The Mali government allocates 100 francs (CFA, equivalent to about \$0.20 USD) per pupil per school day meal. The meals should include cereals (carbohydrates), legumes (protein), and oil (fat). Oil and condiments to cook the foodstuff are typically provided by parents, either through cash or product contributions. The community is also responsible for paying the cook and supplying cooking wood.

The project specifically targets communes with a high number of schools supported by the government's feeding programme. SNV works with the mayors and local office of the Ministry of Agriculture to identify local, active farmer cooperatives and to set up initial meetings with their representatives to initiate interest in the matchmaking events.

Matchmaking event participants range from national to local stakeholders and typically include CGS members, commune mayors, decentralised government ministry officers, grain traders, farmer cooperative representatives, and CNCS officers. In practice, both CGS members and commune mayors assume the role of school feeding procurers, therefore, SNV Mali invites both to participate and learn about the capacities of local cooperatives and traders. Cooperatives and traders participate as a way to find out more about school feeding programmes as potential markets, the procedures followed in tendering notices, and how to bid on school feeding tenders.

Matchmaking events typically take place in a government building meeting room and last one to two days. The events kick off with an overview of the national policy on school feeding, emphasising the policy's commitment to purchasing local food products and creating jobs for small agricultural producers.³ Attendees receive an overview of the licensing and eligibility requirements for suppliers, as well as the official procurement process according to government legislation. CNCS or local government representatives explain how school feeding is funded and decisions and allocations are made. Mayors explain the role of local governments in overseeing school feeding programmes, as well as the annual budget allocated for school feeding per commune, of which they are entitled to spend 25% each quarter. CGS members explain their role in managing the day-to-day operations of school feeding at the school level. Based on the budget information, the mayor or CGS representatives present the products and



³ Article 8a, National School Feeding Policy, Republic of Mali.



quantities they expect to buy each procurement cycle.

During the event, cooperative managers explain the structure of their organisations and detail what grain storage facilities they may own or rent. They present the types and amounts of products grown by their farmer-members, and what products the cooperative could provide, by season, to school feeding buyers as well as prices.

Traders share their experience playing an intermediary role in buying from individual farmers and cooperatives and selling that food to CGSs and mayors. They explain that to be

competitive, they keep track of what foodstuffs are required by the canteens and what products are available locally, as well the quantity requirements and quality expectations of school feeding buyers, which can have an impact on product prices. Because sourcing non-local products typically incurs greater transportation costs, traders who raise this as a challenge have the opportunity to connect with local cooperatives and potentially find a mutually agreeable solution.

Participants are given an opportunity to consider partnering scenarios. Based on the cooperatives' presentations, the CGSs and mayors know what products are available, and where, and agree on some preliminary commitments (or principles) for doing business with the cooperatives and/or traders when their school feeding funding is available. A typical commitment reached between school feeding buyers and sellers is the quantity that will be ordered, the decision to give good value for money. For example, cooperatives may agree to provide a discount of five or ten CFA, a cent or two, less per kilo than local market prices at the moment the purchase will take place. Business principles, like adhering to quality standards and proper weighing of goods, are also openly discussed and agreed to.

The Siadougou Matchmaking Event

SNV organised a matchmaking event on March 20, 2014, in Siadougou, a commune located in the Cercle of San in the Ségou Region. The event was held in the San Educational Activity Centre meeting room with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture; CGSs from nine schools in Fani, Koulandougou, San and Siadougou communes; and farmer cooperatives including the Association of the Rice Growers of the Managed Plain of San Ouest (ARPASO), Fani Marka, Fani Gninèso and Soro Yiriwaton Talo Bamanan. Despite issuing invitations to the offices of all commune mayors, no commune administrations were involved in the meeting, nor were any traders present.

SNV Mali opened with an overview of PG-HGSF and led a discussion on how stakeholders could collaborate through the school feeding programme. The CGS members present represented nine government-funded canteens at nine schools with a total population of 4,569 pupils. Of the participants, the CGSs from Fani and Koulandougou were in charge of their schools' feeding budget and procurement processes, while the school feeding budget and procurement cycle in San and Siadougou was controlled by their commune mayors. The CGSs reported using nearly 185 tons of food—rice, millet, cow peas, and fonio (a millet species whose grains yield good nutritional value)—to feed all pupils for one year, a total of 65.8 million CFA, or \$131,600 USD, in food purchases.⁴ Based on this data, participants developed an indicative data summary of school



Matchmaking events expose farmers to school feeding as a market opportunity.



feeding demand for all 17 schools with school feeding programmes in their communes, including those funded by PUEPT (see text box).

The event provided CGSs with a forum for discussing their needs, as well as their experiences with food procurement to date. For example, in Siadougou, the mayor started procuring food for the commune's only CGS covered by the national school feeding programme in 2013. The commune regularly posted tender announcements, but the response rate was poor and respondents rarely met the eligibility criteria—such as being licensed for commercial activities—nor could they document their purchases from smallholder farmers. For example, the mayor's first contract with a trader (Koulandougou Services) did not require the supplier to source goods from local farmers. In fact, none of CGSs present had purchased foodstuffs from local cooperatives, or received foodstuffs from the mayor that were sourced locally.

School Feeding Needs

- ✎ 17 schools in 4 communes
 - 9 funded by the government
 - 8 funded by PUEPT
- ✎ 6,051 pupils
- ✎ Main foods: cowpeas, maize, millet, rice, sorghum
- ✎ 180 school feeding days per school year
- ✎ Ration per child, per meal: 100 CFA, \$0.20 USD
- ✎ Total annual budget for food: 87.1 million CFA or \$174,300 USD
- ✎ Estimated food needs:
 - 147 tons rice
 - 73 tons millet
 - 24 tons cowpea

Sharing Capabilities and Objectives

The farmer cooperatives then presented their capabilities to meet the demands of the school feeding market. Cooperative representatives described the products they farm, including the rice, millet, cow peas and fonio used in school feeding programmes, as well as most of the other crops available in local markets. The cooperatives assured the CGS members that they could supply the crop quantities required at the quality levels specified by the canteens. For example, ARPASO alone can bulk several thousands of tons of rice from their 5,000 members, which indicates a strong ability for the cooperative to meet the needs of CGSs and/or commune mayors.

By the conclusion of the event, school feeding buyers and sellers better understood the national school feeding programme's agricultural objective. CGS members gained an appreciation for communicating public procurement processes with potential suppliers. The CGSs that procure food for their canteens directly established connections with several new potential suppliers, while the others gained awareness of how they could take on this responsibility if it is delegated by



Cowpeas are a common source of protein in school meals.

4 Figure based on the number of pupils, number of school feeding days per year, ration per meal per child, minus 10% for oil and salt.



the mayor. Cooperative representatives understood the potential for CGSs or their mayors to purchase their crops on a regular basis. The CGSs present resolved to work with SNV to review their procurement process in advance of the next school feeding disbursement.

Return to Siadougou: Results and Impact

One year after the Siadougou matchmaking event, SNV returned to the commune to assess the impact that the matchmaking event had on the way food for school feeding is procured.

Siadougou's CGS members left the matchmaking event in great anticipation of including local farmers in their school feeding supply chain. However, since their mayor retained control of food procurement for their school, the decision to procure food locally was left to him. Several members of the CGS joined SNV to debrief Mayor M Baba Traore on what they learned during the event. They encouraged the mayor to circulate the next school feeding tender among local cooperatives in addition to the traders Siadougou typically relied on.

The first school feeding procurement cycle following the matchmaking event had uneven results. The first hurdle was a late funding disbursement: the first instalment of the 2013-14 school year wasn't released until July 2014, considerably delaying when Mayor Traore could procure goods. Second, after selecting ARPASO to fulfil the July 2014 order—representing the commune's first contract with a local farmer cooperative—the contract was rejected by the local office of the Ministry of Finance. The office argued that ARPASO was not a commercially registered organization, so was unqualified to sell to school feeding. SNV suggested that the mayor and ARPASO use an intermediary—a licensed trader—until the issue could be resolved. After difficult negotiations, ARPASO paid a penalty to the Ministry of Finance and the contract was accepted. The resulting order was for 1,460 kg of rice; 500 kg of millet; 400 kg of cow peas and 200 kg of fonio, a total value of 768,000 CFA (\$1,536 USD). This included unanticipated deductions for Commercial Profit Tax and the Value Added Tax, totaling 15.25% of the school feeding funding and reducing the instalment by \$277 USD. The purchase covered Siadougou's feeding programme for one school quarter, but ARPASO was not required to provide certification stipulating from whom it acquired the products used to fulfill the contract.

Following the commune's challenging first contract with a farmer cooperative, Mayor Traore added a clause that requires suppliers to provide documentation on the origin of their crops to create additional ways for farmers to participate in school feeding. The mayor went a step further and placed local advertisements to generate a short list of cooperatives that could be included in the contract. With the newly strengthened language in place, the mayor signed a contract with TOMI Service, a licensed trader in October 2014 after the second installment of school feeding funding was received. The contract stipulated that TOMI had to source the rice, millet, cowpeas and fonio from at least one of four local cooperatives identified by the mayor—ARPASO,



Students at Diéna Primary School.




Tiesiri, Djiguifa, or Yelekoura—the latter two being village-level, women’s cooperatives. TOMI executed the contract, certifying its purchases as follows: 1,500 kg of rice from ARPASO, 500 kg of millet from Djiguifa, 400 kg cowpeas from Yelekoura, and 200 kg of fonio from Tiesiri. The total contract value was 906,500 CFA (\$1,813 USD).


The third and fourth funding instalments were disbursed at the same time and resulted in the mayor and TOMI signing a second contract in November. This contract and its quantities covered two school quarters in Siadougou. The total contract value was 1,813,500 CFA (\$3,627 USD) and sourced, by quantity, from the following: ARPASO with 3,000 kg of rice; Djiguifa with 1,000 kg of millet; Yelekoura with 800 kg of cow peas; and Tiesiri with 400 kg of fonio.

Learning from Siadougou’s Experiences


The stakeholders involved in the Siadougou matchmaking event—CGS members (including canteen managers) and cooperative managers—willingly shared their opinions and perspectives on the matchmaking experience. Their feedback, combined with evaluations from stakeholders and SNV Mali, generate the following lessons learned.

 ***Small, creative alterations can create a space for smallholder farmer participation.***

Prior to the matchmaking event, Mayor Traore regularly posted school feeding tender announcements in Siadougou, but had never actually procured from a cooperative and had difficulties contracting with suppliers that met all eligibility criteria. By procuring from a licensed trader and contractually requiring them to source from local cooperatives, Siadougou ensured compliance with the transparent procedures and upheld the national school feeding policy’s goal of employing smallholder farmers. Working through a trader enabled cooperatives and others who would be otherwise shut out of the marketplace to enter. For example, Yelekoura and Djiguifa, both village-level, women’s cooperatives, were able to sell to a new market.

 ***The slow administration of government-funded school feeding has a vital impact on the lives of children as well as the livelihoods of local farmers.***

When Siadougou’s first school feeding instalment was not released until July 2014, the commune mayor was not able to buy foodstuff to feed children until late into the school year. Unfortunately, Siadougou’s experience is typical for government-funded school feeding in Mali. The rate of pupil enrollment is connected to the availability of school feeding for the targeted communes, so the lack of reliability in the government funding threatens student retention and performance. Furthermore, with communes like Siadougou striving to meet the programme’s agricultural objective, late installments will have a larger and more immediate impact on the community’s economy. Programme stakeholders speculate that the fund delays could seriously limit the participation of some smallholder farmers—especially subsistence farmers who do not have all products available at all times—and may opt to sell their surplus crops before school feeding procurers are ready to purchase.

 ***Clarity in applying government tax regulations is needed.***

Siadougou’s initial contract with ARPASO exposed the need for more clarity on the tax regulations that effect school feeding funds. With Commercial Profit Tax and the Value Added Tax totaling 15.25%, mayors end up purchasing less food, reducing the benefits to pupils as well as the earning potential for local farmers. Representatives from the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Finance are joining commune administrations, donors, and CSOs including SNV in discussing how to use this example to advocate for Malian relaxation of taxes on school food supplies. If applied nation-wide, eliminating these taxes would free up approximately \$2.3 million for addition food purchases from smallholder farmers.





CGS participation in matchmaking events is key for smallholder farmer inclusion, even if they are not the procurers.

There is an entrenched divide between the national policy on school feeding procurement, which requires each CGS to procure food for their school’s canteen, and how procurement most often takes place,



Grain storage facilities on the outskirts of Molobala Village.

by commune mayors procuring all foodstuffs for all canteens in their jurisdictions. While matchmaking events were not designed to reconcile this divide, they did aim to support procurement processes that are inclusive of smallholder farmers, regardless of which entity is actually conducting the procurement. As such, the events help build the capacity of the CGSs to hold transparent and inclusive procurement processes when and if the task is delegated to them. The case also showed that even if the CGSs don’t procure, they still gained awareness to advocate to the mayor to buy from local farmers. Likewise, the events connect mayors with new potential school feeding suppliers and reinforce the national programme’s agricultural emphasis. Involving both commune administrations and CGSs in matchmaking events is a realistic way to establish new business relationships between farmer cooperatives and the school feeding market, regardless of the actual procuring entity.

Conclusions

Since the 2014 Siadougou matchmaking event, a total of 25.5 tons of locally grown crops were procured from smallholder farmers to feed pupils at the nine participating schools. The total value of these contracts was \$16,750 USD. In addition, 475 local farmers and their families—21% of the farmers being women—from the four cooperatives were able to tap into the school feeding supply chain. As Mayor Traore put it, “From now on, no supplier will be approved by the city if he does not buy locally.” Siadougou is one of 38 communes that started procuring foodstuff locally. As of June 2015, 39 PG-HGSF matchmaking events across Mali established a total of 84 new business relationships and generated a total of 151.4 million CFA (\$260,100 USD) for farmer cooperatives.

While building new types of relationships takes time, the matchmaking event in Siadougou illustrates that such efforts are worth it. Matchmaking events provide a forum for convening potential school feeding suppliers and procurers for an open discussion of market needs and constraints. Farmers better understand the procurement process and learn how they can collaborate with traders to access the market. CGS members and mayors also learn that many of the foodstuffs they were importing from other regions are available right in their own backyards. Emphasising the programme’s agricultural component motivates CGSs and mayors to source locally to support an economically stronger community.

“The matchmaking activities organized by SNV enable us to understand that it is very advantageous to supply the communes...from the [local] cereal markets.”
—Seyba Doucoure, trader

