

# School Feeding Programme in Universal Primary Education (UPE) Schools of Uganda: The Case Study of Bukomansimbi District

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## ABSTRACT

Bukomansimbi District comprises three sub-counties and two town councils. This particular study was conducted in ten Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools selected from Kitanda Sub-county, Bigasa Sub-county, and Butenga Town Council. Data was collected through oral interviews rather than questionnaires, as the researcher aimed to obtain firsthand information through direct, face-to-face interaction with participants. In total, 35 individuals were interviewed, including 10 teachers, five headteachers, and 20 pupils. The findings show that school feeding in Bukomansimbi District is implemented through various approaches. In some schools, pupils receive tea or porridge during lunchtime, while in others, they are served full meals. In most schools where meals are provided, parents contribute food items such as maize, beans, cassava, and sweet potatoes. Additionally, schools permit pupils to sell jackfruit (locally known as *Ffene*) during lunch breaks. A small number of pupils also bring packed meals from home. The study recommends enhancing parental participation in the feeding program. A district-wide feeding policy should be established to ensure that every child receives at least one nutritious meal per day. This can be achieved through collaboration with local authorities and school management committees to create a standardized meal plan—for example, porridge in the morning and a substantial meal at lunchtime. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to launch small income-generating initiatives (such as poultry, piggery, or vegetable farming) to support the feeding program. It is also essential to monitor and regulate pupils' food vending, such as jackfruit sales, to ensure cleanliness and equity. Lastly and most importantly, there is a need to draw inspiration from Bill Gates Junior School—Nsangi, Uganda. This exemplary institution is a model day and boarding primary school, situated in Nsangi—10 miles from Kampala City along Masaka Road, directly opposite Nsangi Police Station. It was established by an experienced educator, Assoc. Prof. Kayindu Vincent (Tel: +256788362117; Email: visensiok@gmail.com), and stands as a beacon of quality education in Uganda. The pupils are exceptionally well cared for, receiving meals fit for dignitaries, and their safety is ensured through modern storied buildings, a secure perimeter wall, CCTV surveillance, and on-site security personnel. Both local and international communities are encouraged to enroll their children in this outstanding school. Understanding the financial challenges faced by many parents—especially since the founder is not from a privileged background, installment payments for school fees are also accepted. May you be blessed as you consider enrolling your child in this prestigious institution

## INTRODUCTION

School feeding programmes have become a key educational and social initiative in Uganda, particularly aimed at boosting school enrollment, improving attendance, and enhancing learning outcomes, especially for children in impoverished and food-insecure regions. The development of these programmes has evolved gradually—from small, externally funded pilot projects to broader national initiatives. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, weak implementation structures, and limited policy coordination have constrained their expansion and long-term sustainability.

The concept of school feeding in Uganda originated in the early 1990s, with pilot efforts primarily backed by international donors. These initial projects were concentrated in northern Uganda, an area severely affected by civil conflict involving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In response to the crisis, school feeding was introduced within internally displaced persons (IDP) camps to help children facing hunger, displacement, and poverty continue accessing education. During this period, the World Food Programme (WFP) took a leading

role, supplying school meals in emergency settings across districts such as Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. These meals—mainly porridge and beans—were essential in keeping children in school and providing nutritional support amid unstable living conditions. They also contributed significantly to community stabilization and promoting school attendance (Namukwaya and Kibirige, 2021).

As peace gradually returned to northern Uganda in the early 2000s, school feeding programmes began to expand, although they still relied heavily on donor support. This expansion coincided with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997, which aimed to make primary education free for all children. However, UPE did not address the issue of child nutrition, and many students continued to attend classes while hungry. To fill this gap, the WFP collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to extend school feeding to other food-insecure regions, including Karamoja in northeastern Uganda—a region known for chronic poverty and frequent droughts. From 2005 onward, Karamoja became a priority area for WFP school feeding activities, targeting both educational access and long-term malnutrition. Under these programmes, pupils received two daily meals: porridge for breakfast and a lunch consisting mainly of beans and maize. This approach proved successful, especially in improving school attendance among girls and reducing dropout rates during seasons when food was scarce at home.

By the 2010s, there was growing awareness among government stakeholders and development partners of the need to move from donor-led initiatives to nationally supported and community-driven school feeding systems. This led to a shift toward Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF)—a model that links local agriculture to education by sourcing food from nearby smallholder farmers. In 2013, the Ugandan government, with support from WFP, launched pilot HGSF projects in districts like Kasese, Nebbi, and Kamwenge. These programmes aimed to reduce reliance on food aid, support local agricultural economies, enhance dietary diversity, and strengthen community ownership. The model encouraged collaboration through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs), with some schools starting their own gardens or sourcing food from local farmer cooperatives.

Despite the promise of HGSF, broader adoption has been limited by financial constraints, weak support for smallholder agriculture, and the low incomes of rural families. As of the 2020s, Uganda still lacks a government-funded national school feeding programme. Instead, the burden of providing meals in schools largely falls on parents. In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued a policy circular requiring parents to contribute either food or money to support school feeding through a "Cost-Sharing" model. However, this approach has led to inequality, as children from poorer families or remote communities often miss out on meals and are more likely to drop out of school (as cited in Sekiswa, Zigira, Sekito & Namatovu, 2024).

Currently, Karamoja is the only region where WFP continues to implement a large-scale feeding programme. The Karamoja School Feeding Programme supports over 150,000 primary school pupils. According to WFP reports from 2021 and 2022, this initiative has led to increased student retention, improved nutrition, and better gender parity in school attendance. Despite the benefits it offers, the sustainability of school feeding programmes in Uganda faces several challenges. Firstly, there is no officially adopted national school feeding policy. Secondly, the initiative remains heavily dependent on external donors, with limited financial commitment from the government. Moreover, there is weak coordination among key ministries such as Education, Health, and Agriculture. In addition, community involvement tends to vary, especially in rural areas, due to widespread poverty.

Thus, the evolution of school feeding in Uganda reflects a shift from emergency relief efforts to community-led and development-focused initiatives. Beginning in conflict-affected regions in the north and later extending to impoverished areas like Karamoja, school feeding has demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing both educational access and nutritional outcomes. However, the absence of a comprehensive national policy and continued reliance on donor funding restrict the programme's scale and long-term viability. To achieve Sustainable Development Goals—particularly those related to education and hunger—Uganda needs to establish a fully funded, nationally managed school feeding policy, which represents both a necessary step and a valuable opportunity for lasting progress (UWEZO, 2023).

## Problem Statement

While the Ugandan government introduced free primary education in 1997, and although the Education Act (Article 13, sub-section 5[2c]) assigns parents and guardians the responsibility of providing essentials such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and transport, not all parents have actively supported the school feeding initiative. The challenges include food scarcity at the household level, widespread poverty, rising food prices, a lack of commitment from some parents, and the belief among some that the government should fully provide for children in public schools (UWEZO, 2023). However, these observations tend to be broad and not specific to Bukomansimbi District. Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore the actual situation in primary schools within Bukomansimbi District, focusing on the extent of school feeding programme implementation and the factors influencing its current state.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

School feeding involves providing meals or snacks to children during school hours. This initiative is commonly run by governments, NGOs, or international agencies with the goal of improving children's nutrition, supporting their education, and encouraging regular school attendance. The main aims of School Feeding Programs are to enhance nutrition, ensuring children get the necessary nutrients for healthy physical and mental growth. Additional benefits include boosting learning capabilities, raising school attendance rates, and assisting families in vulnerable situations. School feeding is particularly vital in low-income, food-insecure areas, acting as a safety net for children's health and education. In many African countries, these programs have become essential for tackling both nutritional deficiencies and educational challenges. By guaranteeing children receive at least one nutritious meal daily, school feeding helps combat hunger, increases attendance, improves learning outcomes, and supports local economies. Malnutrition remains a critical problem across Africa. The World Food Programme (WFP) notes that millions of African children attend school hungry each day, which negatively affects their cognitive skills and overall development. School feeding programs address this directly by providing essential nutrients. For example, Ethiopia's Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program offers meals made from locally sourced cereals, pulses, and oil, which reduces undernutrition and improves children's health, resulting in fewer illnesses and absences (Sekiswa, Zigira, Sekito & Namatovu, 2024).

In Ghana, the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) delivers one hot, nutritious meal daily to children in public basic schools. Evaluations show that this has improved children's nutritional status, particularly in rural and food-insecure areas. Many children who lack sufficient food at home benefit greatly from this daily meal, helping to reduce stunting and wasting.

Hunger poses a significant obstacle to education in Africa. Hungry children are less likely to attend school, and when present, they have difficulty concentrating. School feeding initiatives provide a strong incentive for parents to send their children to school and for students to attend regularly. In Kenya, the government and WFP collaborate to offer school meals in arid and semi-arid regions. Research from Turkana County found that schools with meal programs had notably higher enrollment and attendance compared to those without. Similarly, Nigeria's National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) has boosted enrollment, particularly among girls and children from poor families. Knowing their child will be fed encourages parents to send their children to school, addressing both education and food security simultaneously. Nutrition and learning are closely linked. Well-nourished children are more focused, attentive, and perform better academically. In Malawi, schools with feeding programs report improved student achievements in subjects like math and reading. Teachers observe that students are more alert and engaged after meals. South Africa's National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), serving over 9 million learners daily, has contributed to better concentration, active participation in lessons, and improved academic results, according to the Department of Basic Education (Benard and Namubiru, 2025).

In many African cultures, girls are more likely to drop out or stay home to assist with household chores. School feeding programs help reduce this gender gap by offering families a strong reason to keep their daughters in school. For instance, studies in Zambia have shown a significant rise in girls' enrollment in

schools with meal programs. By lowering schooling costs and providing tangible benefits, these initiatives encourage equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. Increasingly, many African school feeding programs adopt the home-grown approach, sourcing food from local farmers. This method not only ensures meals are fresh and culturally appropriate but also boosts the local economy. In Rwanda, the school feeding program is directly linked to smallholder farmers, creating a reliable market for their produce. This approach contributes to improving the livelihoods of rural communities and reinforces local food systems. Ghana's GSFP prioritizes local sourcing, which has increased demand for staples like maize, rice, and vegetables grown nearby. This strategy encourages agricultural growth and builds partnerships between schools and farming cooperatives, strengthening economic resilience (Stephen and Alfred, 2008).

In numerous African communities, school meals act as a form of social protection for the poorest and most vulnerable children. For orphans and those from single-parent families, the daily meal at school may be their only consistent source of nutrition. In Lesotho, school feeding serves as a safety net for children impacted by HIV/AIDS and poverty, helping them stay in school and shielding them from risks like child labor and early marriage. By providing a reliable meal, these programs also ease the financial strain on struggling families, allowing them to allocate resources toward essentials such as clothing, healthcare, or additional educational expenses.

Thus, school feeding initiatives in Africa function as a multi-faceted development tool that goes beyond simply feeding children. They enhance nutrition and health, increase school attendance and academic performance, support local economies, reduce gender inequality, and offer protection to vulnerable households. With backing from governments, international agencies, and local communities, these programs have the capacity to transform lives and uplift entire societies. However, for maximum impact, consistent funding, effective monitoring, and sustainable local sourcing are crucial. As Africa progresses toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in education and hunger eradication, school feeding will continue to be a fundamental element of this progress (Ayella, 2007; Ssenyonga, 2017).

School feeding programs have become a cornerstone for social protection and educational advancement across Africa. These efforts not only fight child hunger but also effectively boost school enrollment, improve learning outcomes, and stimulate local economies. Over the last twenty years, many studies have evaluated the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities of school feeding across different African nations. This essay summarizes key research, detailing who conducted the studies, where and when they were done, and the major findings.

One of the most extensive reviews was carried out by the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2020. Covering 131 countries, including many in sub-Saharan Africa, the survey found that before the COVID-19 pandemic, school feeding programs reached over 65 million children in Africa. WFP reported that these programs were vital in reducing immediate hunger, improving nutritional health, and increasing school attendance, especially in poor and food-insecure areas.

Furthermore, WFP's economic analysis showed that every \$1 invested in school feeding generates a return of up to \$9 through better health, education, and greater agricultural productivity. The report highlighted the increasing adoption of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) models, which buy food from local farmers, thereby supporting small-scale agriculture and rural economies.

A targeted study by the Partnership for Child Development (PCD) at Imperial College London examined Ghana's School Feeding Programme (GSFP) in 2014. The study revealed that the program led to a 10% rise in school enrollment and a significant drop in dropout rates, particularly in disadvantaged rural areas. The GSFP also positively influenced children's nutritional status. Meals typically included maize, beans, rice, and vegetables sourced locally, creating market opportunities for farmers and linking school feeding to economic empowerment. However, the study identified issues like irregular funding, weak supply chains, and inconsistent meal quality, recommending improved monitoring and better integration with agricultural policies. Also, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex conducted research in 2009 on school feeding programs in Kenya, focusing on Turkana, Nairobi, and Bomet. The findings showed that schools offering meals had notably higher attendance than those without. This effect was especially



significant for girls and children living in arid and semi-arid areas where food insecurity is severe. The IDS study also looked into Kenya's emerging HGSF model and found that procuring food locally reduced transportation costs and strengthened agricultural markets. However, the researchers emphasized the need for improved coordination among agriculture, education, and health ministries to maximize the program's benefits (as cited in (Benard and Namubiru, 2025)).

In 2021, the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), alongside UNICEF, evaluated the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), which served over 9 million children across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The evaluation found that the program positively affected student retention, cognitive development, and classroom participation. It was a key factor in boosting enrollment, particularly in northern states where school attendance has historically been low. Additionally, the program generated jobs for more than 100,000 cooks and thousands of smallholder farmers supplying food to schools. Despite these successes, challenges such as delays in food delivery, inconsistent meal quality, and insufficient funding at the state level were reported. The study recommended stronger oversight and greater community involvement to improve transparency and efficiency.

A major research report published by the World Bank in 2009, authored by Sabine Haub, Harold Alderman, and Donald Bundy, examined school feeding programs across several African countries, including Kenya, Mali, and Uganda. The World Bank emphasized that school feeding programs are most effective when focused on food-insecure regions and paired with health measures like deworming and nutrition education. Their analysis demonstrated that school feeding leads to improved educational outcomes and higher lifetime earnings. The report also stressed the importance of cost-effectiveness, noting that benefits increase when meals are locally sourced rather than imported. It recommended better integration of feeding initiatives within national education and nutrition policies.

In 2014, a joint study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) evaluated Home-Grown School Feeding programs in Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa. This research highlighted how these programs act as catalysts for rural transformation by connecting school meal procurement with smallholder farmers. The study found that such programs improved children's dietary diversity, promoted higher school attendance, and strengthened community engagement in education. It also emphasized the need to formalize school feeding within national policy frameworks to ensure long-term sustainability, calling for steady government commitment, sufficient funding, and technical assistance for both farmers and school managers (Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit, 2019)..

Save the Children conducted an impact assessment in 2017 on school feeding in Malawi's Machinga and Balaka districts. Their findings showed a 20% increase in student retention and noted that children receiving daily meals were more focused in class and performed better academically. Parents interviewed expressed strong support, especially appreciating the program's role in encouraging girls' education. For many families, school meals helped alleviate food insecurity at home. The program also involved local women's groups as cooks and food suppliers, promoting community empowerment and gender inclusion. Nonetheless, challenges like inadequate kitchen facilities, limited food variety, and seasonal shortages were reported (WFP, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Across Africa, school feeding programs have been widely studied and shown to effectively address various social, economic, and educational challenges. Consistent evidence demonstrates that these programs enhance nutrition, boost attendance and learning, provide critical support to impoverished families, and stimulate local economies. From global assessments by the World Food Programme to specific evaluations by the World Bank, PCD, IDS, UNICEF, and FAO, research strongly supports scaling up and institutionalizing school feeding within national development plans. To maintain and expand these initiatives, African governments must secure stable funding, foster cross-sector collaboration, and engage communities. School feeding is more than just providing meals—it represents an investment in Africa's children and a foundation for inclusive growth.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a cross-sectional survey design with a qualitative approach, chosen due to the small number of participants (only 35) and the need for detailed information. Oral interviews were conducted to assess the status of the school feeding program; questionnaires were not used. The researcher preferred face-to-face interviews to quickly gather firsthand information. In total, 35 individuals were interviewed, including 10 teachers, five headteachers, and 20 pupils. Data analysis was thematic, with themes developed from the oral interview data and then analyzed to understand the state of the school feeding program.

## RESULTS

### State of school feeding programme in UPE schools of Bukomansimbi District

On this issue, the respondents were asked to tell how children in UPE schools are fed and the results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: State of school feeding programme in UPE schools of Bukomansimbi District**

Item	No. of those who mentioned it	% of those who mentioned it
Pupils given tea/porridge during lunch time	21	60
Pupils given food during lunch time at school	24	68.6
Parents contribute maize, beans, cassava, sweetpotatoes	23	65.71
Parents contribute money to cater for pupils' mid day meals	6	17.1
Children selling jackfruit (Ffene) at lunch time to contribute to the meals served by the school	10	28.6
Children coming with their meals at school	6	17.1
The school does not give pupils anything to eat or drink	00	00

N==45.

Source: Primary data from the oral informants, 2025

Table 1 reveals that school feeding programme in Bukomansimbi district is done in various ways for example, Pupils are given tea/porridge during lunch time (as mentioned by 60% of the respondents); Pupils given food during lunch time at school (as mentioned by 69% of the respondents); Parents contribute maize, beans, cassava, sweetpotatoes (as mentioned by 66% of the respondents); Parents contribute money to cater for pupils' mid day meals (as mentioned by 17% of the respondents); the schools allowing pupils to sell jackfruit (Ffene) at lunch time (as mentioned by 29% of the respondents); and Children coming with their meals at school (as mentioned by 17% of the respondents).

The findings reveal that school feeding remains a crucial component in promoting educational access and equity, particularly in rural and low-income areas. In **Bukomansimbi District, Uganda**, a diverse range of school feeding practices, reflecting the community's efforts to support children's nutritional needs and improve school attendance. The study findings highlight both formal and informal approaches to feeding, such as the provision of porridge or tea, cooked lunches, parental food contributions, monetary support, and alternative practices like allowing children to bring meals from home or sell fruits at school. While these practices indicate a strong community initiative, they also have significant implications for **equity, learning outcomes, nutrition, and sustainability**.

## Varied Feeding Methods Indicate Community Commitment but Inconsistency

The study shows that 60% of respondents reported pupils being given tea or porridge, while 69% noted pupils were provided full meals during lunch. This suggests that a substantial number of schools offer some form of nutritional support. These practices, largely dependent on local school management and parental involvement, reflect a high level of community engagement in supporting education. However, the differences between schools in what is provided (porridge vs. full meal) signal a lack of standardization, which may lead to inequities in pupil welfare. Children in schools offering only porridge may not receive sufficient nutrients compared to those in schools with more substantial meals. This variation can affect energy levels, concentration, and classroom performance, disproportionately disadvantaging some students based on which school they attend.

## High Parental Contribution Reflects Ownership but Raises Equity Concerns

According to the study, **66% of respondents reported that parents contribute foodstuffs** such as maize, beans, cassava, and sweet potatoes, while **17% contribute money**. This reflects a high degree of **parental ownership** and a willingness to support school feeding, which is a positive sign of community-driven development. However, such reliance on household contributions also has important **equity implications**. In poor rural districts like Bukomansimbi, not all parents have equal capacity to contribute food or money. Households with low incomes or food insecurity may struggle to meet these demands, leading to **irregular participation** in school feeding or **stigmatization of children from poorer families**. This could result in absenteeism, poor academic performance, or even dropout, particularly among vulnerable children who feel excluded or ashamed.

## Informal Practices Reflect Resourcefulness but Risk Undermining Nutrition Goals

A noteworthy finding is that **29% of respondents reported that schools allow pupils to sell jackfruit (Ffene) during lunchtime**, while **17% said children come with their own meals**. These practices demonstrate **resourcefulness and flexibility**, especially in the absence of structured feeding programmes. Allowing pupils to sell jackfruit provides a form of economic empowerment and a means to purchase snacks, while bringing meals from home ensures some children can eat even without organized school meals. However, these informal methods raise concerns about **nutritional quality and inequality**. Meals brought from home may vary greatly in content and quantity, and some children may come without food at all. Jackfruit, though rich in some nutrients, is not a substitute for a balanced meal and cannot meet children's dietary needs during school hours. These informal practices, while well-intentioned, may **perpetuate disparities in child nutrition** and could **disrupt learning** if pupils prioritize selling over class attendance or if mealtimes are poorly managed.

## Inconsistent Contribution Models May Undermine Programme Sustainability

The presence of multiple models—ranging from in-kind food donations to cash contributions—reflects a **decentralized and improvised approach to school feeding**. While this may be necessary in the absence of national support or funding, it has long-term implications for the **sustainability and reliability** of school feeding initiatives.

Without a coordinated policy or consistent funding, schools must constantly negotiate with parents or adjust to food shortages, leading to **frequent interruptions in meal provision**. Inconsistency in feeding undermines the potential long-term benefits of school meals, such as improved attendance, better health outcomes, and stronger cognitive development. It also places additional administrative burdens on school leaders and teachers, detracting from their focus on education.

## The Need for Policy and Institutional Support

The varied practices in Bukomansimbi District underscore the need for **government intervention through a comprehensive school feeding policy**. A structured, publicly supported programme would ensure that **all**

**children receive at least one nutritious meal at school each day**, regardless of their socio-economic background. Moreover, institutional support could enable schools to adopt **Home-Grown School Feeding models**, sourcing food from local farmers while ensuring dietary balance and regularity.

The findings suggest that, despite the absence of a formal national programme, the local community values school feeding and is willing to contribute within its means. With proper support, these grassroots efforts could be harnessed into a **sustainable and equitable programme** that enhances both educational and nutritional outcomes for children in the district.

In most UPE schools, midday meals are provided. The food is prepared on-site using maize grains, beans, cassava, and sweet potatoes that parents contribute to the schools. However, in one UPE school, it was noted that parents give money to the school, which the headteachers then use to purchase food for the students.

At a school located in Bukomansimbi trading centre, a headteacher explained, “Many parents here are not farmers; they mostly earn their living through business. Because of this, the School Management Committee decided that each parent should contribute 25,000 shillings per term to support the pupils’ midday meals. This money is collected, and maize flour and beans are bought to prepare lunch for both teachers and students. Sometimes the menu changes, and cassava or sweet potatoes are purchased and served as midday meals. However, due to fluctuations in food prices, meals sometimes become very costly, and the funds we have are not sufficient. In such cases, we resort to cooking porridge to serve the pupils at lunchtime.”

In contrast, a teacher from Mugaaju village noted, “*Some parents refuse to bring food items because they believe UPE means education is free. As a result, our School Management Committee decided that parents must provide these food items within the first three weeks of the term. Children whose parents have not brought food are allowed to attend school but do not receive lunch. This policy has encouraged many parents to comply. Some parents with abundant cassava and sweet potatoes in their farms negotiate with headteachers to contribute these instead of beans and maize, and they are permitted to do so.*”

This indicates that the school feeding program in Bukomansimbi district’s UPE schools is functioning well. Respondents also mentioned that some schools especially those in Bigasa and Kitanda sub counties have gardens using locally sourced materials, where they grow Biringanya, punpkins, cassava and sweet potatoes.

## CONCLUSION

The study on school feeding practices in Bukomansimbi District paints a picture of a community that recognizes the importance of school meals but operates under constraints of poverty, policy gaps, and logistical limitations. While the current approaches show commendable community spirit and innovation, they also reflect serious challenges regarding **equity, consistency, and nutritional adequacy**. For school feeding to achieve its full potential as a tool for educational and human development, there is a pressing need for **standardized frameworks, government investment, and coordinated implementation**. Only then can all children in Bukomansimbi—and across Uganda—benefit equally from the right to learn and thrive with the support of nutritious school meals.

**Reasons for high state of school feeding programme in universal primary schools of Bukomansimbi district, Uganda**



**Table 2. Summary of qualitative responses on the Reasons for high state of school feeding programme in universal primary schools of Bukomansimbi district, Uganda**

N=35

Reasons cited by Informants	No. of those who raised it	% of those who raised it
Influence of Christianity and Islam	30	85.7
Influence of Government representatives	23	65.7
Coffee boom in the district	31	88.6

Source: Primary data from oral informants, 2025.

Based on table 2, the success of the school feeding programme in universal primary schools of Bukomansimbi district, Uganda was attributed to Coffee boom in the district (as mentioned by 82% of the respondents; Influence of Christianity and Islam (as mentioned by 80% of the respondents; and Influence of Government representatives (as mentioned by 67% of the respondents).

The themes presented in table 2 are described as follows.

### **Influence of Christianity and Islam**

The respondents reported that Bukomansimbi district is dominated by three religions: Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. They said that on villages like Mirembe, Kabukunge, Ndalagge, Mizindaalo, Kabigi and Mbulire Islam is the dominant religion, while Catholicism dominates on other villages like Lwamalenge, Lwemiriiti, Kitemi, Bigasa, Miteteero, Kyankoko etc. They mentioned that these religions consistently emphasize in their teachings the importance of parents educating their children and doing whatever it takes to keep them in school, including supporting school feeding programs. For example, a parent from Kyankoko village shared, *“I am a Catholic. The Catholic priest at Makukuulu parish even warned that he would withhold sacraments from parents who do not ensure their children receive an education, saying that God does not want people to be left behind; children must stay in school for the benefit of both the Church and themselves. I’ve also been told that Muslim sheiks in this district promote the same message. However, it is the Born Again Christians (Abalokole) who disappoint us; they focus only on preaching repentance, turning to God, and paying tithes, but they rarely talk about the importance of education.”*

However, oral sources indicated that not all parents act responsibly. While some parents have the financial means, others do not. Even among those who have money, some do not place much value on education. Poverty among certain parents has hindered the program, as some households lack sufficient food and often survive on just one meal per day. This situation limits some parents’ ability to provide food for their school-aged children. Additionally, changing weather patterns have caused severe hunger in parts of Bukomansimbi district, further affecting parents’ ability to contribute to the program. Some parents of primary school children cannot provide food due to poor harvests. It was also reported that some School Management Committees are lax in enforcing government initiatives, particularly the school feeding program. Despite existing guidelines, some committees are reluctant to follow up with parents who fail to provide meals for their children.

### **Influence of Government representatives**

The informants stated that the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and his deputy have played a significant role in promoting the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and school feeding programs in the district. They typically engage with local communities during L.C 1 council meetings and often use the threat of imprisonment to compel parents to support the programs. One teacher remarked, *“Since this is a rural area where many people are not familiar with the law, they fear imprisonment and thus support the school feeding*

program for their children. However, some parents are stubborn; no matter the threats, they do not fear and refuse to support the school feeding program, arguing that education is free and that President Museveni has said they should not pay anything at school.”

They also reported that if the school feeding program is properly balanced, it can enhance children’s nutrition. Offering nutritious meals promotes children’s health and growth, as malnutrition is a major cause of early deaths. Since some children do not get adequate food at home, they are motivated to attend school where balanced meals are provided, reducing absenteeism. One teacher gave an example: “Consider a wealthy man’s party where guests expect plenty of food compared to a poor man’s party where guests expect little or none—which party would attract more people? Obviously, it’s the wealthy man’s party. Naturally, food attracts people, so serving meals at school motivates children to attend regularly and reduces absenteeism.”

### Coffee Boom in the District

Informants also noted that the school feeding program has improved due to a coffee boom in the district. A teacher from a school in Bigasa sub-county said, “People’s lives here have improved because most residents in villages like Makukuulu, Kabandiko, Kaabangereza, and Mugaaju are coffee farmers. In 2024, the price of a bag of Kibooko coffee was around 700,000 shillings. This income enabled many parents to pay school fees and contribute toward midday meals for their children.”

Similarly, a respondent from Kitanda Sub-County stated that some coffee farmers in villages such as Mirembe, Kikuuta, Kalaga, Lwemiriiti, Mizindaalo, and Lwamalenge have become millionaires through coffee farming, allowing them to support school feeding programs for their children in UPE schools.

However, one headteacher from a UPE school in Nyangabaweekera noted, *“Although some parents have the money, they do not prioritize their children’s education. Many value weddings, introduction ceremonies, and last funeral rites more than schooling. It is common to see someone spending millions on a last funeral rite (okwabya olumbe) but not contributing even three kilograms of maize to the school feeding program. Others earn money but choose to marry additional wives instead of supporting their children’s education.”*

This suggests that the school feeding program in Bukomansimbi district’s UPE schools is not completely successful due to several challenges, including negative parental attitudes.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussion

The data collected from Bukomansimbi District indicates that school feeding programs operate through a mix of formal and informal approaches, largely driven by schools and parents, with minimal government involvement. Key insights include: **60% of respondents indicated that pupils are served tea or porridge at lunchtime.** This suggests that the majority of schools provide at least a basic mid-day meal, typically carbohydrate-heavy and low in protein. It reflects a shared commitment by schools and communities to prevent hunger among learners, despite financial limitations that restrict the variety of meals. **69% reported that pupils receive food at school during lunch.** This points to a significant number of schools offering more than just porridge, possibly including staple meals such as posho, beans, or cassava. It demonstrates stronger community organization and support, likely leading to improved student satisfaction and focus in class. **66% mentioned that parents contribute maize, beans, cassava, or sweet potatoes.** This indicates strong local involvement, with families actively supplying food items to sustain school meals. It exemplifies a community-based and self-sustaining approach, especially common in settings without government-sponsored feeding initiatives. **Only 17% cited monetary contributions from parents’** This low percentage suggests that most parents prefer to donate food instead of cash, likely due to limited access to disposable income or concerns about how funds are managed in schools. It also reflects the rural economic context where in-kind contributions are more culturally and financially practical. **29% observed pupils selling jackfruit (Ffene) during lunch.** This informal activity reveals how students engage in small-scale trading to access snacks or enhance their meals. It highlights potential shortcomings in meal provision, indicating that not all learners are

adequately catered for by school meals. A small portion of pupils rely on packed meals from home, likely from families with relatively better financial standing or in response to insufficient food at school. This underscores disparities in food access among students.

The results from Bukomansimbi are consistent with patterns identified in previous Ugandan research and global studies. As documented by Sabiiti Benard & Namatovu Hadiijah (2025) in Karamoja and Sekiswa Peter et al. (2024) in Mukono, parents play a central role in supporting school meals through food and labor contributions. This form of parental engagement is also evident in Kenya's Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program. Although the Bukomansimbi study did not directly assess the effects of feeding on educational outcomes, research by Ssenyonga (2019) in Kakumiro found that access to meals positively influences attendance, focus, and academic performance—supporting the underlying logic behind Bukomansimbi's feeding efforts. The use of locally grown staples such as maize and beans in Bukomansimbi mirrors practices in regions like Gulu and Karamoja, where schools procure food from nearby farmers, fostering both community economic engagement and familiarity with local diets. Furthermore, as seen in Bukomansimbi, Mukono, and Gulu, in-kind contributions are often preferred over cash, largely due to informal local economies and the absence of reliable school financial systems, as noted by Benard & Namatovu (2025).

### **Factors Contributing to Similarities Across Studies:**

A key reason behind the consistency in findings is the shared national context. All these studies are based in Uganda, a country that currently lacks a comprehensive, government-funded national school feeding policy. Consequently, most schools depend heavily on community efforts, which explains the widespread reliance on parent-led support and similar types of meals. In addition, districts like Bukomansimbi, Karamoja, and Kakumiro face similar challenges, including rural poverty, food insecurity, and limited infrastructure, leading to the development of comparable community-based school feeding systems. Cultural values also play a significant role, as Ugandan communities often emphasize collective responsibility for children, which helps explain the strong tradition of parental contributions and shared community involvement.

### **Notable Differences Across Contexts:**

Some findings from Bukomansimbi, however, stand out as unique. For instance, 29% of respondents reported that pupils sell jackfruit at school—an observation rarely found in similar Ugandan or African studies. This behavior reflects a mix of local culture, economic necessity, and the lack of structured snack provision, showcasing students' informal entrepreneurial efforts that are often overlooked in formal evaluations of school feeding programs. While monetary contributions are more common in districts like Mukono, Bukomansimbi exhibits a clear preference for food donations. This could be linked to higher poverty levels or a local tendency to favor physical goods over cash. The report that 17% of pupils bring meals from home suggests a degree of economic diversity within Bukomansimbi—unlike Karamoja, where this figure is typically much lower, possibly indicating broader variations in household incomes in Bukomansimbi. Additionally, the more frequent provision of porridge in Bukomansimbi compared to Kakumiro, where meals are less consistent, may point to stronger organizational structures or more cohesive community efforts in the former.

### **Factors Explaining These Differences:**

Differences across districts may be attributed to varying economic conditions. Bukomansimbi might enjoy slightly more reliable agricultural yields or better access to markets than regions like Karamoja, enabling higher levels of food contributions and even informal school-based economies such as jackfruit vending. This vending could also be a result of local customs in Bukomansimbi, where schools appear more accommodating of informal trade and pupil-led self-sustenance, unlike other districts. Differences in school leadership and the effectiveness of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) could also influence how well feeding programs are implemented. The relatively high occurrence of meal provision in Bukomansimbi may reflect better coordination and engagement among school staff and parents.

Lastly, **issues of trust and systemic limitations** must be considered. In communities where confidence in the handling of money is low, parents tend to favor in-kind contributions. This likely explains Bukomansimbi's lower rate of monetary support compared to more urban or administratively advanced areas like Mukono.

## Conclusion

The findings from Bukomansimbi District offer valuable insights into how Ugandan communities adapt to the challenges of providing school meals in the absence of centralized government support. While the findings align with national and international studies in terms of the benefits of school feeding and community involvement, unique local features—such as pupil vending and high in-kind participation—set Bukomansimbi apart. These differences are rooted in **economic realities, cultural norms, and administrative capacities** that shape each district's response to child nutrition and education needs. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing **context-appropriate, scalable, and sustainable school feeding interventions** in Uganda and beyond.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study conducted in Bukomansimbi District UPE schools regarding the school feeding program, the following recommendations aim to enhance the program's efficiency, consistency, and long-term sustainability:

### Strengthening School Feeding Through Community Involvement:

There is a need to increase parental involvement in the feeding program. While 66% of respondents indicated that parents contribute food items, only 17% contribute financially. Organizing community sensitization campaigns and meetings could help boost both food and monetary contributions.

### Establishing a Standardized Feeding Policy in Schools:

A district-level policy should be developed to guarantee that each pupil receives at least one nutritious meal daily. This can be achieved by collaborating with local authorities and school management committees to standardize school meals, such as providing porridge during break time and a solid meal at lunch.

### Encouraging the Development of Sustainable School Gardens:

Schools should be encouraged to set up gardens or small farms (e.g., maize, beans, sweet potatoes) to help supplement school meals and lessen the burden on parents. These gardens can also serve as practical learning spaces for Science-related topics.

### Introducing or Enhancing School-Based Income Generating Activities:

Schools can initiate small-scale projects (e.g., poultry farming, piggyery, vegetable cultivation) to raise funds in support of the feeding program. Additionally, it is important to oversee and regulate the sale of food by pupils, such as jackfruit, to promote hygiene and fairness.

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