



Image source: Welthungerhilfe

# PROJECT IMPACT: MORE THAN MEALS

## How School Meals and Agricultural Cooperatives in Northern Burundi Strengthen Education, Nutrition, and Communities

### EVALUATION CONTEXT

**In northern Burundi, poverty, hunger, and the impacts of climate change shape the daily lives of many families. Recurrent droughts, declining yields, and limited access to markets severely restrict household incomes. Children are particularly affected: many go to school hungry, struggle to concentrate, and frequently drop out.**

School meals play a crucial role. They improve learning outcomes and attendance, ease the burden on families, and bring parents, teachers, and students together—through school gardens, cooking activities, and school committees. In this way, a sense of community emerges that extends far beyond the provision of food.

**Together with the World Food Programme (WFP), Welthungerhilfe (WHH) is implementing two closely inter-linked projects in Kirundo in the Butanyerera Province, a region with around one million inhabitants on the border with Rwanda:**

- **School Meals:** In 161 schools, more than 150,000 children receive a warm meal on a regular basis. In addition, WHH has established the distribution of staple foods, school gardens, fruit tree plantings, and rainwater harvesting systems. School canteens have been upgraded, hygiene programs implemented, and “opportunity crops” such as amaranth and sweet potatoes introduced in school gardens. These nutritious crops grow well in less fertile soils and difficult climate conditions and help diversify children’s diets.

- **Strengthening Smallholder Cooperatives:** Ten cooperatives of local small-scale farmers have been established and registered with the national cooperative agency ANACOOOP. With support from Welthungerhilfe, the cooperatives have benefited from capacity-building initiatives, access to quality seeds, essential farming equipment, and facilitated linkages to microfinance institutions, enabling access to agricultural loans. This improved access to credit, markets, and modern, climate-adapted farming techniques have enabled the cooperatives to increase their yields. Alongside strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change and sustainably improving smallholder livelihoods, their long-term goal is to supply school canteens and also local markets with locally produced food.

### PROJECT IMPACT

An independent external evaluation conducted by Universalia Management Group analyzed the impact of the two projects between 2023 and 2025. The evaluation team applied a specific methodology—Outcome Harvesting—based on interviews with key project stakeholders (including staff from Welthungerhilfe and WFP, representatives of the provincial government, and other nongovernmental organizations), as well as focus group discussions with project participants.

In 2025, the team conducted twelve school visits and visited all ten cooperatives. In addition, a survey was carried out in 48 additional schools, and 45 documents (e.g., reports, strategies, and studies) were reviewed.

## KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

WHH projects supported  
**10** co-ops



**all co-ops** applied new farming techniques and on average increased production **4x**

all co-ops increased income **50%** supplied food to school canteens

### IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION

In all schools assessed, children received a warm meal for most of the school year. This contributed to higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, and improved learning outcomes. However, due to transport constraints, fuel shortages, and limited delivery volumes, it was not always possible to provide meals on a daily basis.

### HEALTHIER DIETS

Seventy-five percent of schools established vegetable gardens whose produce supplemented school meals. This resulted in more varied and healthier diets for children—greater diversity on their plates. At the same time, the gardens increased the resilience of school canteens during supply shortages, such as delivery disruptions or resource constraints. An additional important effect was that many children and parents transferred the knowledge gained from school gardens to their homes and established household gardens, thereby improving family diets as well.



WHH projects reached women, girls and individuals from diverse ethnic groups

### NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR COOPERATIVES

Through the introduction of new farming methods, the ten agricultural cooperatives quadrupled their yields on average. Members' incomes increased by around 50 percent, and half of the cooperatives supplied school canteens with food.

### REDUCED BURDEN ON FAMILIES

As children attended school more regularly thanks to school meals, parents had more time for income-generating and household activities, enabling them to increase their earnings. At the same time, households saved on food expenditures—school meals covered about 20 percent of household food costs on average.

### SOCIAL COHESION

Shared meals in school canteens brought children together and fostered social interaction regardless of background.

Improved nutrition for  
**150,000 +** students

**75%** of schools created vegetable gardens, and used these to supplement **SCHOOL MEALS**

School enrolment and attendance **increased**



Through school entry points (including school gardens, WASH facilities, school clubs), WHH contributed to bringing about changes not only in access to education, but also in the adoption of a variety of new practices in food cultivation, meal preparation, nutrition and hygiene.

Universalis, Cluster Evaluation Report  
June 2025

## ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM THE EVALUATION

Regular meals are essential for children’s health and learning ability, but their impact depends on reliable infrastructure: access to water and electricity, suitable facilities, functional kitchen equipment—and, above all, a continuous food supply.

On average, schools experienced food shortages for around 91 days per year, caused by transport challenges, fuel shortages, and insufficient delivery volumes. Improved storage, logistics, and local procurement are therefore key to ensuring uninterrupted supply. Encouragingly, since the 2023/24 school year, 18 of 60 schools have been able to partially bridge shortages by providing meals from their school gardens established by WHH. This demonstrates that, even though local production is limited by small land areas and challenging climatic conditions, it contributes to food security and should be further strengthened.

The lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities further reduces the effectiveness of school meals programs. It complicates food preparation, poses health risks, and leads to higher absenteeism among girls during menstruation. WHH initiatives such as hygiene kits and school hygiene clubs highlight that investments in WASH structures (water, sanitation, and hygiene) significantly strengthen both education and health outcomes.

In agriculture, improved farming practices and better storage facilities have enabled smallholder farmers to significantly increase yields and secure their incomes. Cooperatives support this process by facilitating knowledge sharing, improving market access, and helping to open up new markets. Contracts with school canteens generate additional income, while sales in local markets remain uncertain due to low demand and limited purchasing power.

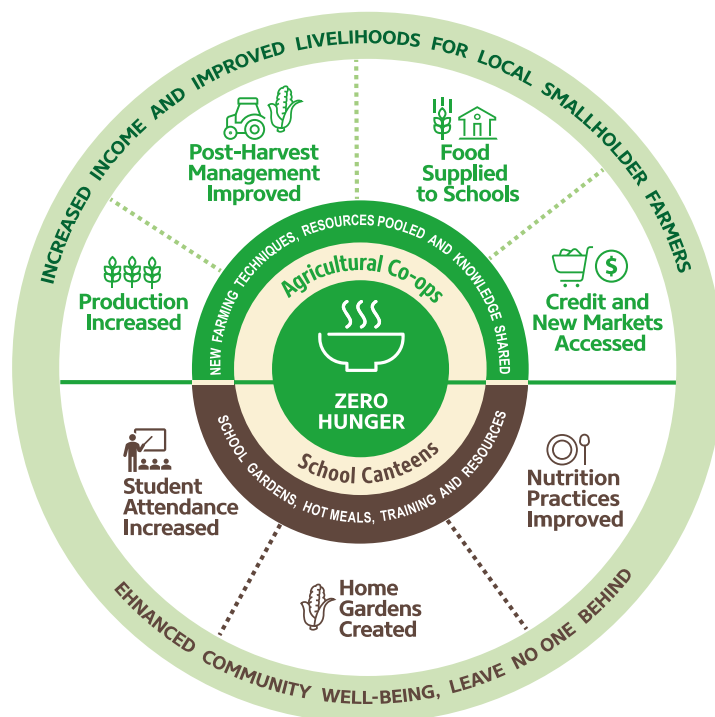
Despite ongoing challenges, school meals programs and agricultural cooperatives demonstrate substantial impact. They strengthen not only children, but also families and entire communities by improving nutrition, generating income, promoting gender equality, and supporting climate change adaptation. In this way, they contribute to sustainable structural change and hold the potential to transform food systems in the long term—from production to consumption.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK (EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS)

Future programs should fully harness the potential of school canteens and use them more strategically as levers for holistic development and to drive systematic change. A key step is closer cooperation with local cooperatives, which should increasingly contribute directly to supplying canteens. This would not only stabilize supply chains but also open up new income opportunities for parents and community members involved in production, processing, and distribution. While elements of this approach can be observed in current Welthungerhilfe interventions in Burundi, their effectiveness and scalability should be critically examined to inform future programming.

At the same time, infrastructure must be prioritized. Reliable water and electricity supply, well-equipped kitchens, and adequate dining and storage facilities are essential for the smooth and sustainable operation of school canteens. In parallel, climate-resilient approaches—such as drought-tolerant crops or water storage solutions—should be integrated to make schools and school gardens more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

The overarching goal remains to strengthen the long-term link between schools, agricultural production, and market system development to make safe and healthy diets more widely available. Linked with local cooperatives, schools can serve as reliable anchors of local food systems securing better educational opportunities and healthy nutrition for children while also strengthening the economic and social fabric of communities. This creates a virtuous cycle that sustainably connects education, food security, and local development.



PUBLISHED: 03/2026

**Francis Djomeda**  
Country Director  
Francis.Djomeda@welthungerhilfe.de

**Welthungerhilfe Country Office, Burundi**  
Rue du coton N°9 | Gatoke – Bujumbura | BP: 2417  
Bujumbura – Burundi | Phone +257 79 94 49 57