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Stories from the continent

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STORIES
COMING UP



Sowing Seeds of Change in Kenyan Schools



When Tradition Meets Transformation: Chief Nalubamba Champions Agroecology in Zambia

FROM THE EDITOR

At a time when our African food systems are under growing pressure from industrialization, climate change, and cultural erosion, this story from Wa Municipality offers a refreshing and deeply inspiring counter-narrative.

What began as a simple school policy of designating one day a week for indigenous foods has developed into a journey of pride, learning, and cultural revival. It reminds us that food is not just about nutrition; it is about identity, sovereignty, and connection.

As you read this piece, I invite you to reflect on the power of young people to drive change, the wisdom embedded in our traditional food systems, and the critical role of the community in shaping Africa's food future.

Send your comment(s) to: abbot.ntwali@afsafrica.org

Warmly,

Abbot

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How a Ghanaian Girls' School is Leading a Local Food Revolution



Members of the School Food Ambassadors Club showcasing a variety of Ghanaian dishes during the school's Food Fair

By Daniel Banuoku,
Abbot Ntwali

In a modest corner of Wa Municipality, Ghana, a quiet revolution is taking place. Every Wednesday at Dan-Ibu International school, students and teachers gather for a shared ritual that's slowly transforming the school, their homes, and possibly, the future of Ghana's food culture. This is not your typical academic initiative; it's a culinary revolution rooted in tradition, pride, and sustainability.

At the heart of this change lies a powerful yet simple policy: on Wednesdays, only indigenous foods are permitted on the school premises. Whether it's the food sold in the canteen, meals brought from home, or snacks traded between friends, all must be local, traditional dishes prepared from ingredients cultivated in Ghana's diverse ecosystems and passed down through generations.

THE ORIGINS OF THE POLICY

The decision, officially introduced in October 2024 by the school's headteacher, was not born in isolation. It was the result of months of intentional advocacy and education spearheaded by the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) as part of the My Food is African Campaign, a continent-wide initiative coordinated by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and supported by SIDA.



CIKOD, with its deep expertise in reviving traditional knowledge systems, worked directly with students, teachers, and administrative staff at Dan-Ibu International school. Through a series of workshops, food exhibitions, and open dialogues, they introduced the school community to the cultural, nutritional, and environmental value of indigenous foods.

"We weren't just telling them what to eat; we were asking them to remember who they are," explains a CIKOD project officer. "When you understand the story behind your food, your relationship with it changes."

The campaign provided

educational materials that explained the health benefits of traditional foods like fnte, gari, abnkwan (palm nut soup), nkwan (groundnut soup), koose, and apapransa. These dishes are rich in nutrients, require fewer imported ingredients, and are deeply rooted in Ghanaian identity. The school's kitchen staff, canteen vendors, and even parents were engaged to support the change.

THE POWER OF ONE DAY

The Wednesday local food policy may seem like a small adjustment, but its impact has been monumental. Dedicating just one day a week to consuming only indigenous meals, the school created a platform for students and teachers alike to reconnect with their heritage.

"We saw students begin to share recipes from home, bring in dishes with pride, and even ask their grandmothers about traditional meals they hadn't tried before," recalls the head teacher. "It was beautiful to witness."

Students became curious not only about the flavors and preparation of these dishes, but also about the stories behind them. Some began to keep journals documenting their Wednesday meals, interviewing elders in their families about how

certain dishes were traditionally prepared or why they were eaten during specific seasons or ceremonies.

In an unexpected twist, the campaign also sparked competition among students over who could bring the most authentic, well-prepared indigenous meal. "It became cool to carry tuo zaafi or banku to school," says Amina, a 16-year-old student. "We used to hide our local foods before, thinking they weren't good enough. Now, everyone wants to show off what their family cooks at home."



From classroom to kitchen: a cooking demonstration during one of the sensitization sessions

Stylish, desirable and culturally significant

SHIFTING TASTES, STRENGTHENING IDENTITY

One of the most profound impacts of the policy has been on student perceptions. Prior to the intervention, many students, like teenagers across urban and peri-urban Ghana, preferred instant noodles, fried rice, and sugary snacks, foods often seen as modern, convenient, and aspirational. These imported and ultra-processed items, however, contribute to rising rates of malnutrition, obesity, and non-communicable diseases across the continent.

Through reintroducing indigenous meals as something to be proud of not just healthful, but stylish, desirable, and culturally significant, the campaign has begun to shift this narrative.

"It's about decolonizing our diet," says the headteacher. "Our food is not a relic of the past, it's a living expression of who we are."

Beyond health and identity, the local food policy has had economic ripple effects. Vendors who previously stocked their shelves with instant snacks are now preparing fresh wakye, boiled yam with palava sauce, or boiled plantain and kontomire. Parents, too, have had to reengage with traditional food preparation at home, often involving children in cooking an intergenerational activity that strengthens family bonds and cultural transmission.

A MODEL FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

CIKOD's work at Dan-Ibu has not gone unnoticed. Officials from the Wa Municipal Education Directorate have visited the school to observe its implementation, and neighboring schools are expressing interest in piloting

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We used to hide our local foods before, thinking they weren't good enough. Now, everyone wants to show off what their family cooks at home.



A student proudly displaying her meal of wakye and palava sauce.

similar policies. There is growing conversation about establishing a Municipal "Local Food Day" across all schools, backed by regional education authorities.

"This initiative is more than a food campaign it's a change in mindset," says a CIKOD Head of Programmes. "And when young people lead that change, it lasts."

In fact, students at Dan-Ibu have taken ownership of the initiative, forming a "Local Food Ambassadors Club." The group meets weekly to share recipes, plan awareness events, and mentor younger students. On one memorable Wednesday in November 2024, the club organized a school-wide "Food Fair," inviting parents and local chefs to showcase indigenous dishes and cooking techniques.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The transition hasn't been entirely seamless. At first, some students were hesitant to participate, fearing ridicule or discomfort from eating unfamiliar traditional meals. CIKOD responded with empathy, creating safe spaces for dialogue and encouraging gradual shifts. The emphasis was not on enforcing rules, but on cultivating pride and understanding.

Another barrier was affordability and accessibility. Some

indigenous ingredients are seasonal or less available in local markets due to the dominance of cash crops and imported foods. CIKOD has since partnered with local farmers and women's groups to supply traditional ingredients and even support home gardening among parents and students.

Budget constraints also limited the ability to scale the campaign across more schools. However, the documented success at Dan-Ibu International has attracted the attention of local NGOs and potential donors interested in supporting replication efforts.

BEYOND THE SCHOOL WALLS

The ripple effects of the Wednesday policy have extended far beyond the school. Parents have reported changes in household meals, while some local eateries have begun adding traditional items to their menus in response to rising demand. Radio shows in Wa have picked up the conversation, hosting segments on indigenous recipes, food and identity, and youth engagement in food systems.

For CIKOD, this success story is part of a broader mission: reclaiming Africa's food systems from the ground up. The My Food is African campaign doesn't stop at Dan-Ibu International; it aims to build a continent where food is not just sustenance, but sovereignty.

LOOKING AHEAD

CIKOD now plans to document the lessons from Wa Municipality and share a toolkit with other schools interested in replicating the initiative. They're also exploring partnerships with the Ministry of Education to consider formalizing "Indigenous Food Days" within national policy frameworks.

For the students of Dan-Ibu International school, however, the change is already permanent.

"When I grow up," says 15-year-old Halimah, "I want to be a chef who cooks only local foods. Because I've learned that our food isn't just healthy it tells our story."

And that story is only just beginning.



A traditional food stall set up during the school Food Fair, featuring dishes like apapransa, koose, and boiled yam.

