

Building a favourable environment for institutional food procurement programmes: contributions from Mozambique

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The efficiency of institutional food procurement programmes (IFPPs) depends on a series of interconnected conditions to reach their stated goal of linking smallholders with institutional markets and demand (e.g. school meals). These programmes rely on governmental will and the availability of public demand. Furthermore, they require institutional changes and the close coordination of policies and legal frameworks.

Two pilot initiatives in Mozambique—the pilot project of the national school meal programme (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar—PRONAE*) and the Purchase from Africans for Africa programme (PAA Africa)—provide good evidence regarding the effects of a lack of coherence among policy, legal and institutional frameworks on the implementation of IFPPs. They have tested and implemented different decentralised procurement models for school meals from smallholders.

Despite important achievements made by these pilots, significant limitations regarding policy, institutional and legal frameworks, combined with operational issues, still hinder the prospects of implementing and scaling up food purchases from smallholders. Some of these issues include gaps between the policy texts and their practical implementation; the lack of an effective multisectoral approach; misaligned public procurement legislation; low human and institutional capacities at a decentralised level (hindering the implementation of more decentralised procurement modalities); gaps in the existing food quality and safety control systems; and different operational barriers intrinsically related to those frameworks.

For example, although one of PRONAE's key stated objectives is to support local smallholders, the existing regulations for public procurement do not provide the proper instruments to support that goal.

Due to its complexity, costs and steep requirements, the standard procurement procedure, as determined by the existing legal framework, is incompatible with the characteristics and capabilities of smallholder suppliers (Swensson and Klug 2017). Coupled with contract-awarding criteria that reward the lowest prices, this procedure favours the largest and most specialised suppliers. Consequently, because of these misalignments, the PRONAE pilot was purchasing almost exclusively from local traders instead of smallholders.

Therefore, the assumption that a single focus on policy reform or the creation of new policy objectives is enough to lay the foundations for a comprehensive school meal programme that sources food directly from smallholders is being challenged in Mozambique, as institutions and several legal frameworks are not yet aligned with these new policy objectives. It is clear that policy reforms need to be accompanied by changes in institutions and administrative and legal frameworks to be effective.

Multisectoral coordination groups can be a good way to support that process, assessing bottlenecks under different mandates and enhancing advocacy for change and realignments. Nevertheless, the success of this new policy depends on effective implementation, with the participation and commitment of different stakeholders. This was not fully accomplished by the pilot initiatives in Mozambique, in particular regarding the active participation of sectoral ministries in charge of public procurement, agriculture, food safety and rural development.

If, on the one hand, policy, institutional and legal frameworks had a direct impact on the implementation of the pilot initiatives, on the other, these pilots played a key role in revealing the necessary adjustments to those same frameworks.

The possibility of testing different procurement models is a good opportunity that allows governments to promote realistic policy debates based on their country's specific contexts, as well as to envision crucial implementation challenges that these different models may pose for the development and scale-up of a national programme.

These different models can be characterised in terms of centralisation or decentralisation of procurement and other activities, contractual modalities, and whether these activities can be performed in-house or by a third party. Each model presents specific advantages and challenges, which are directly connected with the implementation context, and there is no single best solution (Gelli et al. 2012).

The pilot initiatives tested in Mozambique provided good inputs for policy debate, including the need to adjust public procurement legislation, as well as the possibility of adopting different levels of decentralisation, according to the products to be purchased and the programme's area of implementation. For instance, based on the results of these pilots, the combination of a more centralised model (such as the one adopted by PAA Africa) for the procurement of cereals with a more decentralised one (at district or school level) for the procurement of fresh produce has been assessed as a good option, even if it was not initially contemplated.

References:

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