

MAKING THE CASE

Kenya

Case Studies on Inclusive Economic Development



Benjamin Bizzari, Yunjii Hwang, Shamshir Malik,
Elyssa Pullella, Grace Wang

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1.0

Background



1.1 Context: Feeding Kenya's Future through Innovation & Sustainable Partnerships

Kenya's economy has shown steady growth, with GDP expanding from 4.8% in 2022 to 5.4% in 2023 despite global challenges.¹ A key driver of this progress is Kenya's leadership in digital innovation, particularly through M-Pesa, a mobile money platform that has transformed financial inclusion and allowed millions to access secure, efficient banking.² This digital finance advancement has boosted business efficiency and expanded financial access across the nation. Meanwhile, agriculture remains the backbone of Kenya's economy, directly accounting for 33% of GDP and engaging 40% of the workforce.³ The sector also indirectly supports an additional 27% of GDP through its connections to other industries, making it essential for employment, livelihoods, and food security.⁴

However, poverty and food insecurity persist, posing significant barriers to inclusive growth and profoundly impacting children, with 26% of Kenyan children experiencing stunted growth due to malnutrition, especially in rural areas.⁵ Inadequate nutrition undermines educational outcomes, future productivity, and economic mobility. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the Human Capital Index (HCI) is only 0.40, children are projected to achieve just 40% of their productivity potential, underscoring the critical need for improved education and nutrition.⁶ Research suggests that enhancing access to basic education and reducing hunger could double the HCI and significantly raise GDP per capita, fostering long-term economic growth. Additionally, malnutrition disproportionately affects girls, leading to higher dropout rates and, in some cases, forcing them into early marriages or child labour to support their families, making this both a productivity and gender equity issue.⁷

Recognizing these challenges, the Kenyan government has prioritized addressing child malnutrition, understanding its essential role in building human capital. Initiatives like school meal programs⁸ are aimed at fostering equitable growth by improving nutrition, which enhances school attendance, learning outcomes, and ultimately breaks the cycle of poverty.

1.2 Food4Education (F4E)

Founded by Wawira Njiru, F4E has grown from feeding just 25 children to providing daily nutritious meals to 170,000 Kenyan schoolchildren by early 2023.⁹ This rapidly expanding organization enhances food security and educational outcomes across

Kenya by combining innovative meal distribution with cutting-edge technology, aiming to reach 1 million students nationwide by 2027.¹⁰

A key pillar of F4E's model is **Tap2Eat**, a digital payment system launched in 2019 that utilizes Kenya's widely adopted M-Pesa fintech infrastructure to provide students with tap-to-pay wristbands. Parents can easily top up these accounts via mobile, ensuring meal accessibility for families across diverse income levels and locations.¹¹ This technology enhances accessibility and supports efficient reporting, making F4E's impact both measurable and scalable in nature.

In 2022, F4E boosted operational efficiency by implementing modular *Central Kitchens* that utilize a hub-and-spoke model, supplying meals to multiple schools from one central location. Constructed from repurposed shipping containers and warehouses, these kitchens reduce both time and costs, while sustainable fuels like eco-briquettes and steam gas further enhance sustainable productivity.¹²

F4E links proper nutrition to student productivity, offering meals rich in essential nutrients to enhance cognitive development and educational outcomes. Sourcing 80% of ingredients locally and employing a mostly female workforce, F4E emphasizes digital literacy, zero waste, and operational transparency to set a high standard for impact in the region.¹³



2.0

Built For All: Applied



2.1 Pillar One: Equitable Access to Resources & Opportunities

By addressing the food insecurity issue in schools, F4E not only improves children's well-being but also bolsters public resource investment, strengthens family engagement, and demonstrates the impact of effective public-private partnerships.

Feeding Children for Better Educational Outcomes

The core of F4E's mission is to combat hunger by feeding schoolchildren who would otherwise lack access to nutritious food. Through its daily meal program, thousands of children receive lunches that not only curb hunger but also enhance their capacity to learn and engage.¹⁴ F4E allows more students to remain in school, increasing their chances of gaining the education needed to contribute productively to their communities later in life.¹⁵ This commitment to educational equity enables long-term community growth.

Empowering Families and Creating Employment Opportunities

F4E extends its impact by employing skilled local workers to prepare and distribute meals. Many staff members are parents of children who benefit from the program,¹⁶ creating a community of families who are both invested in and supported by the initiative. Supporting children's nutritional needs and providing parents with reliable employment enhances household stability, uplifts families, and fosters a strong community network.

Investment in Public Resources

Aside from operating kitchens and lunch delivery programs in Kenya, F4E also partners with local governments and communities to enhance public resources. F4E hosts conferences and learning visits, uniting government officials and business leaders to promote operational best practices and financial sustainability.¹⁷ Additionally, through frameworks like the National Kenya School Feeding Coalition, F4E advances school meal access across Africa, offering adaptable blueprints and tailored support for broad, impactful implementation outside of Kenya.¹⁸

Lessons for Action: Public-Private Partnerships

F4E's model demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in scaling impactful social initiatives. Collaborations with government bodies like the Governor of Nairobi and foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation¹⁹ provide essential resources and funding that support the program's expansion. These partnerships highlight how multi-sector collaboration can address systemic challenges and drive sustainable and long-term impact.

2.2 Pillar Two: A Level Playing Field for Work and Competition

F4E is levelling the playing field in Kenya by improving educational outcomes, creating jobs, and supporting local supply chains.

Creating an Equitable Foundation for Future Competition in the Job Market

F4E is tackling the malnutrition crisis in Kenya while ensuring that all students have the same opportunity to perform well in school, regardless of their economic background.²⁰ Access to nutritious meals has helped increase school attendance by 8-10%, increase school enrollment by 27%, and increase performance on national examinations by 20%.²¹ As a result, by creating equal opportunities for children to access nutritious meals, F4E is improving educational performance and fostering future economic prospects for children in Kenya.

Supporting Local Economies and Creating Greater Opportunities for Economic Security

F4E strengthens local supply chains and promotes a circular economy by sourcing ingredients from smallholder farmers, 75% of whom are women, and employing local community members in meal preparation and distribution.²² This approach boosts demand for locally grown produce, providing balanced nutrition and a reliable market for farmers. By purchasing large quantities of produce in bulk and securing prices months in advance, the organization ensures stable demand and consistent profits for farmers.²³ Additionally, the organization is fostering a more

equitable economic landscape in Kenya by employing 70-80% women.²⁴ Employees often start as trainees and move into leadership roles, enhancing individual economic prospects as well as the local talent pool.²⁵

Opportunities for Enhancing Inclusion

By creating pathways for its staff to transition into leadership roles, F4E is fostering a more competitive, skilled workforce that benefits both individuals and the broader community. However, in 2022, only 29.8% of managerial positions in Africa were held by women, reflecting a significant gender gap in African leadership and slow progress towards the UN SDG 5, Gender Equality.²⁶ Therefore, to enhance the initiative's alignment with both Pillar Two and SDG 5, F4E could consider creating training and leadership pathways tailored explicitly for women, enabling more female staff to transition from entry-level roles to managerial positions, and helping address the current gender gap in African leadership.

2.3 Pillar Three: Collective Stewardship of Shared Resources for Future Generations

F4E commits to creating positive environmental impacts by integrating sustainable practices into its operations. The organization has adopted clean cooking technologies in its central kitchens to reduce emissions and uses Tap2Eat technology, along with storage practices, to minimize food waste.

Clean Cooking Reduces Emissions and Contributes to a Greener Economy

F4E has adopted a “green school feeding” program. Traditionally, school feeding programs relied on cooking methods such as firewood and charcoal, resulting in high carbon emissions. F4E has invested in climate-friendly cooking methods in its central kitchens. The kitchens use eco-briquettes, an organic fuel, and steam energy to power their appliances and incorporate solar energy into their cooking facilities.²⁷ These methods have reduced the organization’s carbon outputs while simultaneously halving cooking times.

Reducing Waste Through Data and Storage Innovation

To reduce waste, F4E leverages data analytics and specialized storage techniques. The data collected by Tap2Eat is sent to the company's central dashboard and is used for predictive analytics to improve kitchen meal planning.²⁸ This data-driven approach enables accurate predictions of supply needs, optimizing inventory sent to each kitchen from the central warehouse. The central warehouse uses best practices to prevent spoilage, such as controlling moisture levels, fumigating spaces, and performing frequent lab analyses on dry goods. Together, these measures bring the firm's food wastage down to nearly 0%, compared to the industry average of 5%.²⁹

Opportunities for Enhancing Inclusion

To further align with Pillar 3, F4E can integrate electric vehicles (EVs) into its fleet of over 40 trucks. As the organization expands, switching to EVs can significantly reduce the organization's carbon footprint. The Kenyan landscape is also conducive to this transition, given that Kenya is a continental leader in renewable energy and has made significant recent investments into electric mobility. For instance, state-owned Kenya Power recently announced a \$2 million initiative to support electric mobility solutions.³⁰ Moreover, Kenya's draft of the Green Fiscal Incentives Policy Framework highlights the potential for tax incentives and subsidies for low-carbon practices for businesses, which could make the transition to EVs both environmentally and economically advantageous.³¹

3.0

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