



AfriFOODlinks

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From school canteens to sustainable food systems

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INNTA's SIRAT Project

The National Institute of Nutrition and Food Technology (INNTA) is the lead institution of the SIRAT project “Innovative Supply Systems for Quality School Catering and Resilient Local Agriculture”, with members of the AfriFOODlinks project team involved in its implementation. Funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the project aims to transform school food systems in Tunisia.

SIRAT aims to transform school food systems in Tunisia by developing local and sustainable supply chains that connect farmers with school canteens. By prioritising locally produced foods and improving procurement and distribution channels, the project seeks to enhance the quality and nutritional value of school meals, while strengthening local economies and the resilience of agricultural communities.

Running from 2024 to 2028, the 42 months project are being implemented in three pilot governorates; Nabeul, Kairouan and Siliana, selected to reflect the diversity of Tunisia’s agricultural, socio-economic and geographical contexts.

Building on the principles of food-system transformation promoted through AfriFOODlinks, SIRAT focuses specifically on school food and catering as an entry point for improving the food environment. It explores how school canteens can become practical spaces for promoting healthier diets, supporting local agriculture and strengthening sustainable local food systems.

From diagnosis to pilot action

Following an initial diagnostic phase, SIRAT has moved into its pilot phase, involving 10 schools across the three governorates. The selected schools reflect different models of school catering: three are equipped with kitchens and prepare hot meals on site, while seven provide cold meals.

The pilot is testing improved school menus and innovative food procurement mechanisms, while assessing their nutritional quality, acceptability, sustainability and economic viability. The ambition goes beyond improving the meals served to children. SIRAT also seeks to understand how school food procurement can create stronger connections between schools, local suppliers, farmers and the wider local food system.

Hanchir Lebna school: connecting the school kitchen with the local food system

One of the pilot schools is Hanchir Lebna, located in Nabeul Governorate in a rural setting. The school welcomes 229 students; 137 boys and 92 girls and provides hot meals prepared on site.

With its own kitchen and refectory, the school has the infrastructure needed to prepare and serve meals directly to students. As part of the pilot, the school also received kitchen utensils and other equipment identified as missing during the diagnostic phase, helping to address the gaps identified and improve meal preparation and service. The school sources its food

supplies from local vendors, creating an opportunity to rely more on resources available within the surrounding community and to strengthen local food supply chains.



This local connection is at the heart of the SIRAT approach. The school canteen is not simply a place where meals are prepared and served; it can also act as a link between local food suppliers, agricultural production and children's diets. By bringing these different components together, SIRAT explores how school catering can contribute to healthier diets while supporting local agriculture and strengthening the resilience of local food systems.

The SIRAT project is still ongoing, and the school canteen pilot represents only one component of a broader initiative. Beyond school meals and procurement, the project addresses several interconnected dimensions of the food system, exploring how local production, supply chains, food environments, nutrition and local stakeholders can be better connected. The ongoing work will generate further evidence and lessons on how these different components can contribute to healthier, more sustainable and resilient food systems in Tunisia