



Tropentag, September 10-12, 2025, hybrid conference

“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Is food promotion and marketing in the school food environment conducive to healthy choices for adolescents? Evidence from West Africa countries

SAM BODJRENOU¹, DÉO GRATHIAS KOSSA², MÉLINA HOUNDOLO³, WALIOU AMOUSSA HOUNKPATIN⁴, IRMGARD JORDAN⁵

¹*The Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT, Food Environment and Consumer Behaviour, Benin*

²*The Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT, Food Environment and Consumer Behaviour, Benin*

³*University of Abomey Calavi, Faculty of Agronomic Sciences, Benin*

⁴*University of Abomey-Calavi, Lab. of Food Science/Human Nutrition and Food Sciences, Benin*

⁵*The Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT, Food Environment and Consumer Behaviour, Kenya*

Abstract

The present comparative study aims at classifying and comparing public elementary or secondary schools food environments regarding food advertisement, nutritional claims, food groups available and nutritional strategies used in the context of sub Saharan Africa. The study was implemented in Benin and Ivory Coast, two countries where there is currently no specific legal framework to regulate food marketing. We considered Natitingou and Boukombé, both in northern Benin and representing semi-urban and rural areas respectively and Cotonou (southern Benin) representing urban area. To initiate comparison with the context of another West African country, we also considered Bouake representing urban area in Ivory Coast. All outdoor marketing elements including posters and billboards were mapped within a 1km radius around each school using a Geographic Information System (GIS). Food promotion signs used on the marketing elements were then classified according to different food categorisations, including the NOVA groups and the food groups from the Diet Quality Questionnaire. Claims and food promotion strategies were also analysed using predefined classifications from the literature.

There were significant variations in the density of food marketing elements across regions with higher concentration of marketing elements in urban areas such as Cotonou (Benin) and Bouaké (Ivory Coast) compared to rural and semi-urban areas. There was a predominance of ultra-processed foods representing more than 50 % of foods promoted irrespective to regions. As for the food groups promoted, alcoholic drinks, sweetened beverages and dairies dominated. The typology of claims showed that nutritional and health claims were the most common for both unprocessed and ultra-processed foods. Organoleptic claims were found mainly on processed and ultra-processed foods. Marketing strategies were dominated by brand strategies. Differentiation strategies, highlighting the unique characteristics of products, as well as segmentation strategies, targeting specific consumer segments with tailored offerings, were also observed. All these strategies focussed on ultra-processed foods.

Supply of foods in school's environment was dominated by the promotion of unhealthy food options with focus on ultra-processed foods. This could potentially have negative

influence on schoolchildren's feeding practices and highlights the need of regulation among food marketing around schools to promote healthier food choices for school children.

Keywords: Advertising claims, food advertising, foods, NOVA classification, Schoolchildren, Ultra-processed