

Foreword

The year 2009 will be a dangerous one. Before the financial crisis hit last year, soaring food and fuel prices pushed 130 to 155 million people into extreme poverty. This year, because of the financial crisis, the World Bank Group estimates that there will be 53 million more people living in extreme poverty. As is always the case, the poorest are the most vulnerable, especially children. According to the UN World Food Programme, in developing countries almost 60 million children go to school hungry every day—about 40 percent of them are in Africa. The prospect of reaching the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015, already a cause for serious concern, now looks even more distant.

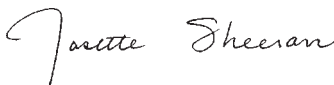
In the poorest countries, school feeding programs are emerging as a common social safety net response to crisis. In 2008, 20 governments looked to school feeding programs as a safety net response to protect the poorest. The UN World Food Programme assisted some 22 million children with school feeding in 70 countries, and the World Bank Group launched a Global Food Crisis Response Facility that mobilized \$1.2 billion to help countries respond to the food and fuel crises, including by scaling-up school feeding programs.

School feeding programs provide an important new opportunity to assist poor families and feed hungry children. These programs have the


potential to combat hunger and support nutrition through micronutrient-fortified food and deworming. They can provide an incentive for poor families to send their children to school—and keep them there—while improving their children’s education. And these programs can be targeted to benefit the most vulnerable, especially girls and children affected by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). These potential benefits come with potential costs, however, particularly in terms of opportunities foregone, an increased burden on the education sector, and the fiscal challenge of long-term commitment.

This joint publication of the World Food Programme and the World Bank Group, *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector*, provides a new analysis of school feeding programs. It benefits from combining the World Food Programme’s practical experience in running school feeding programs with the World Bank Group’s development policy dialogue and analysis. It explores how food procurement may help local economies and emphasizes the centrality of the education sector in the policy dialogue on school feeding. This study can help governments, policy makers, donors, nongovernmental organizations, and other partners to explore the costs and benefits of school feeding programs. It can also help them circumnavigate the pitfalls and trade-offs in designing effective programs that are capable of responding quickly to today’s crises, while maintaining fiscally sustainable investments in children’s education and general human potential in the long term.

A key message from this paper is that the transition to sustainable national programs depends on mainstreaming school feeding into national policies and plans, especially education sector plans. What is also clear from this report is that we are beyond the debate about whether school feeding makes sense as a way to reach the most vulnerable. It does. In the face of global crises, we must now focus on how school feeding programs can be designed and implemented in a cost-effective and sustainable way to benefit and protect those most in need of help today and in the future.



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