



Scaling up School Feeding: Keeping Children in School While Improving Their Learning and Health

SYNOPSIS

School feeding programs are targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism, and improving food security at the household level. In response to increasing food and fuel prices in 2008, funds from the World Bank's Global Food Crisis Response Program and the subsequent pilot Crisis Response Window provided rapid assistance by supporting existing school feeding programs and essentially linking access to both food and education for poor and vulnerable children living in highly food-insecure areas. With a global turnover in excess of US\$100 billion and reaching hundreds of millions of schoolchildren, school feeding is clearly evident as a major social program in most countries, including low-, middle-, and high-income countries.

Challenge

Every day more than 66 million children go to school hungry and, in many countries, fewer girls attend school than boys. Research shows that providing in-school meals, mid-morning snacks, and take-home rations through school feeding programs can alleviate short-term hunger, increase children's abilities to concentrate, learn, perform specific tasks, and has been linked to an increase in the enrolment of girls. These effects seem to be greater among children who are also chronically undernourished, usually the poorest children.

Low-income countries are expanding school feeding, because these programs help push them closer to reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by drawing more children, especially young girls, into the classroom. If these programs provide micronutrients such as iron, iodine, vitamin A, B-vitamins, and zinc through fortified foods and are combined with other school health interventions such as deworming, there may be additional benefits

for children's cognitive abilities and educational achievement.

Additionally, school feeding programs are increasingly being viewed as a potential safety net and as a social support measure that helps keep children in school. In response to the shocks of the global food, fuel, and financial crises, countries looked to implement school feeding as a rapidly scalable social protection mechanism, able to provide more than 10 percent of household expenditures.

Challenges for school feeding programs can range from their high operational costs to the need to build the capacity to procure food locally. In order for a country to have an effective school feeding program that focuses their resources on the neediest children, countries must: (a) determine if school feeding is the most effective social safety net option; (b) set program objectives and predicted outcomes, and determine administrative costs; (c) establish a system of effective targeting; (d) select the type of food to be provided in school, explore opportunities for local procurement and the feasibility of of-

fering take-home rations through the program; (e) plan for school-level management, implementation, and monitoring of the ongoing school feeding activities; and (f) determine if complementary health and nutrition activities such as de-worming, supplementation, or fortification can be incorporated into the program to achieve additional benefits.

Approach

A joint review by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank Group in 2009, entitled *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector*, focuses on the key components to implementing successful programs and the need to mainstream school feeding into national policies and plans. This publication led to the WFP/World Bank Partnership on school feeding that benefits from the design, policy dialogue, and logistical expertise of both organizations. Joint action for assisting countries in planning sustainable school feeding programs and using cost and impact studies has occurred in seven pilot countries including Bangladesh and Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

In Bangladesh, the WFP distributes micronutrient-fortified biscuits as a mid-morning snack to more than a million children each day. As Bangladesh plans for a national school feeding program, the partnership has supported analyses on the program coverage, costs, and the investment case. As Lao PDR prepares for a smooth transition towards a National School Meals program in the coming years, the World Bank is acting as a supervising entity for the Global Partnership for Education (formally the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative) funds needed to continue the program in 2010, while WFP is providing operational capacity-building support in terms of monitoring and exploring the feasibility of providing fortified rice noodles in the school feeding program.

Sandra Bodowa, an 11-year-old pupil at Ashongman D. A. Primary School in Ghana, noted that many pupils from very poor homes went to school because of the food served, and said, "What would have become of those great people if food had not been served in their schools?"

Results

In addition to the examples above, the World Bank, through the implementation of the Global Food Crisis Response Program and the Crisis Response Window, and by partnering with WFP and the Global Partnership for Education, has contributed to the following results:

- Targeting more than 61,000 pre-primary and primary school children (including more than 25,000 girls) through school feeding programs in five counties in South East Liberia in 2010.
- Extending school feeding as part of the response to the recent earthquake in Haiti through additional financing for the Global Partnership for Education project, helping increase the number of school feeding beneficiaries from 75,000 to more than 210,000 a year.
- Supporting the launch of the Home Grown School Meals program in Kenya, where the Ministry of Education is now feeding approximately 550,000 school children in 2012. This program also aims to support local farmers by providing stable and dependable local demand for their produce.
- Responding to the food crisis, supporting the Togo Community-Based School Feeding Program in primary schools located in food-deprived rural areas, benefiting 92 schools and 21,000 children in 2010.
- Providing school lunches to more than 250,000 pre-school and primary school children in Nicaragua in 2010.
- Distributing 88,000 hot meals to children in Burundi, which then saw the government deciding to use its own resources for the program and doubling its contribution in the 2009 budget.
- Providing school meals to 14,000 students in 118 schools in Guinea-Bissau in 2011.

Bank Contribution

In response to the financial crisis, increasing numbers of countries are using the trust funds at the Global Food Crisis Response Program and the Crisis Response Window (part of the International Development Association [IDA]) to develop school feeding programs as social safety nets. Countries using the support in this way include:

- Burundi (US \$10 million, Food Price Crisis Response Trust Fund [FPCR TF])
- Central African Republic (\$7 million, FPCR TF)
- Guinea-Bissau (\$5 million FPCR TF; \$4 million European Union Food Crisis Rapid Response Facility Trust Fund)
- Haiti (\$12 million, IDA)
- Liberia (\$10 million, FPCR TF)
- Nicaragua (\$7 million, FPCR TF)
- Senegal (\$10 million, IDA)
- Togo (\$7 million, FPCR TF)

The WFP/World Bank joint action has also provided technical assistance to the governments of Cambodia, Kenya, Malawi, Togo, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, and Haiti in developing their school feeding programs. Through the Global Partnership for Education, multi-donor trust funds can provide school feeding and school health programs with transitional financial assistance once the education sector plans have been reviewed and the Global Partnership for Education process completed for that particular country. In the case of Mauritania, a contract of US\$1.9 million was awarded to WFP for implementation of the school feeding program since it is a component of the Education Sector Development Program. Other Global Partnership for Education donors in Mauritania include Canada, the European Commission, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations Development Programme.

Partners

Effective school feeding programs are executed as part of the national development policies of the implementing countries. In many cases partners also play a strong role, which may include implementation.

- World Food Programme
- The Partnership for Child Development of Imperial College London
- Global Child Nutrition Foundation
- Global Partnership for Education

- International Food Policy Research Institute
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- New Partnership for Africa's Development/Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
- Boston Consulting Group

Moving Forward

Besides being a social protection tool, school feeding is a continuing investment that nourishes children and decreases food insecurity while also contributing to the achievement of the first five MDGs. Bringing both girls and boys into schools and ensuring that they are free of hunger so that they can concentrate and focus on learning are critical steps in the education process. The WFP assists by reaching more than 22 million children in more than 60 countries. The global food crisis and the resulting Global Food Crisis Response Program and the Crisis Response Window are reminders that school feeding programs can be adapted and scaled up to reach the most vulnerable children in some of the most food insecure places in the world. In eligible countries, Global Partnership for Education and IDA funds can also be instrumental in the expansion of school feeding programs.

The successful transition of school feeding programs to sustainable country-owned programs depends on the integration of school feeding into national policies, especially education sector plans, national financing, and national implementation capacity. Local procurement of food is a possible means to achieve sustainable programs, often known as "Home Grown School Feeding." It is critical that long-term sustainability is incorporated into programs from their inception, and that programs are continuously revisited as they evolve. As more and more governments seek to expand these programs in their countries, it is important to have more opportunities for knowledge sharing among developing countries that focus on ways to improve the procurement of locally available nutritious foods and compare best practices.

LEARN MORE**Links**

- School Health and Nutrition
- Report: Rethinking School Feeding
- World Bank and Education
- World Bank and Nutrition
- World Bank and Social Protection
- WFP and School Feeding
- Linking Local Smallholder Farmers to Market through School Feeding
- Tools for System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results for School Feeding
- More: School Feeding and School Health and Nutrition Programs
- Toolkits: School Health and Nutrition Interventions
- Global Child Nutrition Foundation

Multimedia

- Health, Education, and Equity for All