

CASE FOR SUPPORT: SCHOOL MEALS

Transforming Communities through Sustainable Nourishment



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Right now, 66 million primary school-age children across the developing world go to school hungry.

For nearly 50 years, WFP has provided school meals to children in the world's poorest countries.

Currently, WFP provides nutritious school meals to between 20 and 25 million children across 63 countries, in the most vulnerable classrooms around the globe. Often, these school meals serve as the only reliable source of nutrition for children in impoverished communities. Poor rural households who earn their living through agriculture represent the largest group of people affected by chronic hunger. To address this enormous challenge, an integrated solution can connect schools and local farmers with one another, forming a sustainable relationship between the two—taking the farmers from being recipients of food assistance to participants in the marketplace, while fulfilling the urgent need of school feeding.

CONNECTING FARMERS AND SCHOOLS



While WFP calculates that \$3.2 billion per year is needed to reach all hungry school-age children around the world, they are focusing their efforts on the most vulnerable of these groups. WFP programs build the capacity of local smallholder farmers to source classroom meals where possible, creating a powerful long-term base from which real headway can be made against hunger and poverty. These programs have the potential to be rapidly scaled-up as resources become available.

WFP has not only the capacity, but the unique means to promote this game-changing integration between school feeding and smallholder farmer support. The agency leverages its substantial purchasing power by helping local farmers expand their marketing options. This provides farmers with a living—collectively selling to large-scale buyers (like WFP) that are interested in bulk volumes of basic commodities. To take advantage of this opportunity, and earn better prices, farmers generally work together through forming cooperatives—aggregating, cleaning and marketing their crops collectively to meet buyers' quantity and quality requirements.

Opposite: School children help prepare a hot lunch in Dalaweye village, Niger (©WFP/Rein Skullerud).



SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS CAN DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE COMMUNITIES

Few other programs offer such an impactful and diverse return on investment. School meals' unique crosscutting nature supports education and nutrition while promoting a means for people to lift themselves—and their communities—out of poverty.

Quantitative data shows that school enrollment and class attendance increase when a meal is provided, drawing more children into school. It also aids the most vulnerable pupils in securing their minimum nutrition requirements, providing them with the sustenance they need to learn, so they are able to focus on the lessons being taught, rather than worry about an empty stomach.

Education is also key to individual and community development, promoting gender equity and increasing engagement of girls in society. Where girls' schooling lags significantly behind boys, take-home rations of staple food items are issued to students' families as enrollment incentives, spurring a significant boost in girls' attendance. Studies show that with each additional year of schooling, the age at which women are married increases and the health of their children improves.



ACCESS TO TRAINING, RESOURCES AND MARKETS

Smallholder farmers are often impoverished, not making enough money to cover their own costs, locked in a cycle of poverty. When these farmers participate in WFP's farmer support programs, they go from beneficiaries of assistance to making a living and feeding their families.

To forge an integrated and sustainable approach for supplying food to school meals programs, credit and savings accounts are made available to farmers, in addition to technical assistance and capacity building. Local partner organizations also play a central role, offering indispensable expertise and field services, such as guidance on crop calendars, fertilizers and irrigation. As a result, farmers' organizations give their members the ability to improve productivity and the quality of their crops through capacity development training and the use of improved equipment and upgraded storage facilities.

With this resulting higher level of crop quality and larger output capability, farmers can access institutional markets previously unavailable to them, such as school feeding, among others. WFP serves as the primer for these farmers before they move on to other wholesale opportunities such as national food banks and commercial sales.



Syrian children eat fortified date bars in their classroom in Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan (©WFP/Jonathan Dumont).



Above: A classroom in a school supported by WFP's school meals program in Sohag, Egypt (©WFP/ Marco Frattini).

Right: Students wait for fortified hot lunches at the Joy Springs Educational Center in Nairobi's Kibera slum, Kenya (©WFP/ Challiss McDonough).





PROMOTING STABILITY IN AN INCREASINGLY UNSTABLE WORLD

According to the World Bank, by 2030 almost half of the world's poor are expected to live in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence. Schools serve as a stabilizing force providing a central social service through which an infrastructure exists to serve not only children but communities as a whole. Additional activities are more easily implemented in schools via partner organizations, such as AIDS prevention education, deworming programs, and sanitation awareness.

The sustainability of this intervention guarantees WFP can eventually hand over the reins to local authorities, simultaneously enhancing community access to food and education, breaking the poverty cycle. During this transition, WFP's role continually changes throughout a process tailored to each country; bolstering local social services and helping authorities govern effectively.



LIVES CHANGED IN MALAWI

WFP has supported education in Malawi with daily school meals for the past 15 years. Under this program, WFP partnered with schools to procure food from farmers in the community so that schoolchildren could have a balanced diet of locally-produced, nutritious food.

These daily hot meals now reach more than 800,000 students in some 800 pre-primary and primary schools. Two years ago, WFP launched a pilot initiative in 10 schools called Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) that links school meals with local agricultural markets, providing a local and reliable market for smallholder farmers—and, of course, vital nutrition for students. HGSF has helped to sustain a cycle of development by empowering communities through inclusive economic and education models.

A POWERFUL AND TRANSFORMATIVE INTERVENTION

WFP, with its presence of 14,000 staff in 80 countries, has a truly global reach. Sustainable school feeding programs supported by WFP bridge the divide between humanitarian food assistance and long-term development. They produce immediate positive effects in terms of the food consumption, nutrition and educational achievement of the hungry children they serve. Further, they have the potential to transform food systems—helping smallholder farmers increase their income and national governments build effective safety nets—reducing hunger and poverty for years to come.

Children outside of a WFP school meals center in Cambodia (©WFP/Citranti Perwitasari).



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A young boy sits at his desk in a school outside of Damascus, Syria, supported by WFP's school meals program in collaboration with UNICEF (©WFP/Dina El Kassaby).

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