

**Statement: Robert Jenkins**

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**Headquarters**

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**Investing in the future of the most vulnerable girls and boys is critical.**

More children and adolescents today are enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary education than ever before. Yet, for many of them schooling does not lead to learning. At the current rate, by 2030, of the 1.4 billion school-age children in low- and middle-income countries, 420 million will not learn the most basic skills in childhood, and 825 million will not acquire basic secondary-level skills.

**Why are children in school without learning basic skills?**

One of the reasons is that hungry children cannot learn, and sick children are enrolled but cannot attend school.

Food, water, and health are essential for a child's growth. From conception, through infancy, into childhood, these are the foundation of every child's physical and mental development.

Yet, far too many children and young people are missing out on these rights and go to school hungry which undermines their ability to learn.

**It is clear that better nutrition and health of school children is linked to learning** and that we need to do more to ensure attention and investment in multisectoral programmes to address the learning crisis and to allow children to strive.

**Therefore, UNICEF and WFP are engaging in a partnership** to scale up nutrition, health and WASH interventions in schools. In this partnership, UNICEF will address school-based nutrition, WASH, and health services gaps. Our interventions will include micro nutrient supplementation, sanitation and hygiene services, construction of latrines, deworming, school-based malaria prevention as well as support to national policies and education sector plans to improve the health and nutrition of school-age children.

**The return on investment is clear – especially for girls.**

Evidence shows that effective school health, nutrition and WASH interventions contribute to increase enrolment and retention children in school – particularly for the most vulnerable- including the disabled, girls, and children from low income families – and contribute to enhancing their learning opportunities. This is especially important for girls as they enter adolescence and face increased barriers to continuing education and increased risks including to early marriage and early pregnancy. The effects will be multiplied in conflict or crises countries, where it is estimated today that girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school and more vulnerable to early marriage and other forms of exploitation than their peers in stable contexts. Improving WASH services and supplies in school, as well as knowledge and skills on menstrual hygiene, equips girls with the necessities to maintain body hygiene and health conditions with dignity and privacy, during menstruation.

**Currently, UNICEF has initiated programs to support governments in 38 countries to improve nutrition and health amongst school-age children.**

These countries use schools to deliver these critical interventions. In all countries, UNICEF will, in collaboration with WFP, seek to improve national policies for the nutrition of school-age children, including school feeding. As one key interventions among school-age children and adolescents, UNICEF supports the supplementation programs with iron and folic acid to tackle anemia in girls and boys globally. In the 13 programs supported by UNICEF globally, **58 million girls and boys were reached with iron and folic acid supplements.** In several countries, UNICEF is working to further expand the intervention package and to ensure better links with interventions such as deworming.

**Working together in the spirit of ONE UN,** UNICEF and WFP will leverage their respective comparative advantages and their operational capacity on the ground to ensure a meaningful increase in scale and coverage of school health and nutrition programmes. This will allow for a game-changing contribution to reposition school health and nutrition for better education outcomes for girls and boys, and the societies in which they live.

**UNICEF is fully committed to the partnership with WFP. Thank You!**