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Strengthening School Feeding Programmes:

FAO And WFP joint work

in Latin America and the Caribbean

Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are facing serious food and nutrition problems to meet the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition by 2030. According to the *Panorama of Food and Nutritional Security 2018*, about 39.3 million of Latin American and Caribbean citizens are undernourished, a figure that increased 2% between 2014-2017. Likewise, overweight and obesity are today one of the greatest and growing challenges in the region. According to national data, overweight affects 7.3% of preschool children and, between 20 to 40% of school-age children and adolescents.

The SFPs have become an opportunity to prevent and mitigate the aforementioned problems. These programmes can play an important role in the fight against hunger and malnutrition in all its forms and to realize the human right to adequate food of all the schoolchildren. They also have the potential to leverage the socio-economic development at the national level and in the territories, as well as being a strategy to fight poverty and food insecurity.

Almost all LAC countries have implemented a SFP. At present, more than 85 million children are given breakfast, a snack or lunch at school, with an annual investment of approximately US\$ 4.3 billion, mainly from national budgets. Many countries are developing more nutrition-sensitive, promising and innovative approaches to improve the quality, sustainability and nutritional impact of their SFPs.

***SFPs and SDGs:** the SFPs have the potential to contribute significantly to zero hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5). SFPs can also contribute to no poverty (SDG 1), economic growth (SDG 8) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). In addition, through intersectoral, inter-institutional and inter-agency coordination, the SFPs align with SDG 17 – partnerships for the goals.*

FAO-WFP joint work in LAC

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) support governments in the region to achieve more sustainable, nutritionally sensitive and quality SFPs. Both FAO and WFP have become strategic allies of governments, joining efforts and providing technical assistance to SFPs in the region. In particular, efforts to link SFPs with local agricultural production are intended to increase dietary diversity and its nutritional value, as well as increase opportunities for small farmers to access new markets and improve their socio-economic status.

With more than 70 years of experience in the region, FAO supports the SFPs through technical assistance and capacity building, mainly through the Brazil-FAO international technical cooperation to strengthen SFPs in LAC. The Brazil-FAO project began in 2009 in five countries and over the years has reached 17 countries. One of FAO's main core strategy is the "Sustainable Schools" approach, a comprehensive methodology that aims to promote better inter-institutional coordination of SFPs, more social participation, food and nutrition education, better school infrastructure and correlation between programmes and local agriculture. Between 2012 and 2017, 12 countries implemented Sustainable Schools, benefiting more than 283,300 children. FAO also supports the countries to leverage their national school feeding frameworks and regulatory systems.

The WFP has been working for nearly 60 years on school feeding, implementing large-scale programmes, promoting innovative models and providing countries with technical support and capacity building. At present, the WFP provides school feeding to more than 2 million girls and boys in 27,000 schools and 7 LAC countries, and provides 9 countries with technical assistance and capacity building. Since 2009, the WFP has been working steadily to promote, develop, and expand school feeding programmes related to local agriculture, with the objective of supporting governments to

develop nutrition-sensitive and quality programmes. At present, different models related to local agriculture are being supported in 9 countries in the region. Finally, the WFP supports regional cooperation on school feeding, mainly through high-level regional seminars, generation of evidence and fostering South-South cooperation.

In March 2017, FAO and WFP signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** emphasizing a common approach towards food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. The paper aims to improve global collaboration, coordination and synergies between FAO, WFP and countries, to have a more strategic role in supporting member countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Working together: main core strategy of FAO - WFP joint work

The specialized support of FAO and WFP has contributed to strengthening the strategic and technical capacities of countries at both central and local levels. This cooperation has resulted in the institution-building and governance of SFPs, and the recognition of the contribution of these programmes to the commitments made by governments regarding food, nutrition and health. FAO and WFP have promoted and continue to promote the exchange of experiences, knowledge and lessons learned regarding the implementation of SFPs in almost all countries of the region.

In the spirit of the new Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2018 and, based on the experiences consolidated in recent years, the Latin American and Caribbean countries, FAO and WFP intend to work in a more coordinated manner to promote national sustainable and quality nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes. This translates into strengthening synergies and the joint work of the two agencies at the local, central, strategic and regulatory levels in the implementation of technical capacities.

In particular, FAO and WFP identify the following four main core areas of work:

- Strengthen synergies to *create local institutional markets for SAPs* through strengthening technical capacities of family farmers to plan healthy SFPs menus;
- Support public agencies in charge of social policies to *promote healthy eating habits and lifestyles* both inside and outside schools, through joint food and nutrition education interventions;

- Join efforts and experiences to *develop and strengthening regulatory frameworks* and national systems, and propose models adapted and agreed to the reality of each of the countries;
- Encourage and support *regional and subregional dialogue* on school feeding, through South-South cooperation initiatives, organization of events and through a joint visibility strategy.

Three case histories of cooperation between FAO and WFP in LAC

The document addresses three case studies of FAO and WFP joint work:

- *Support the development of the new National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Education within the SFP framework in the Dominican Republic*
- *Support the Colombian Ministry of Education in revisiting the national school feeding guidelines;*
- *Support the Government of Honduras to pilot, consolidate and extend innovative school feeding models linked to local agriculture.*

