

# The global and strategic role of WFP in school health and nutrition

Chapter 5 from the State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020



World Food Programme

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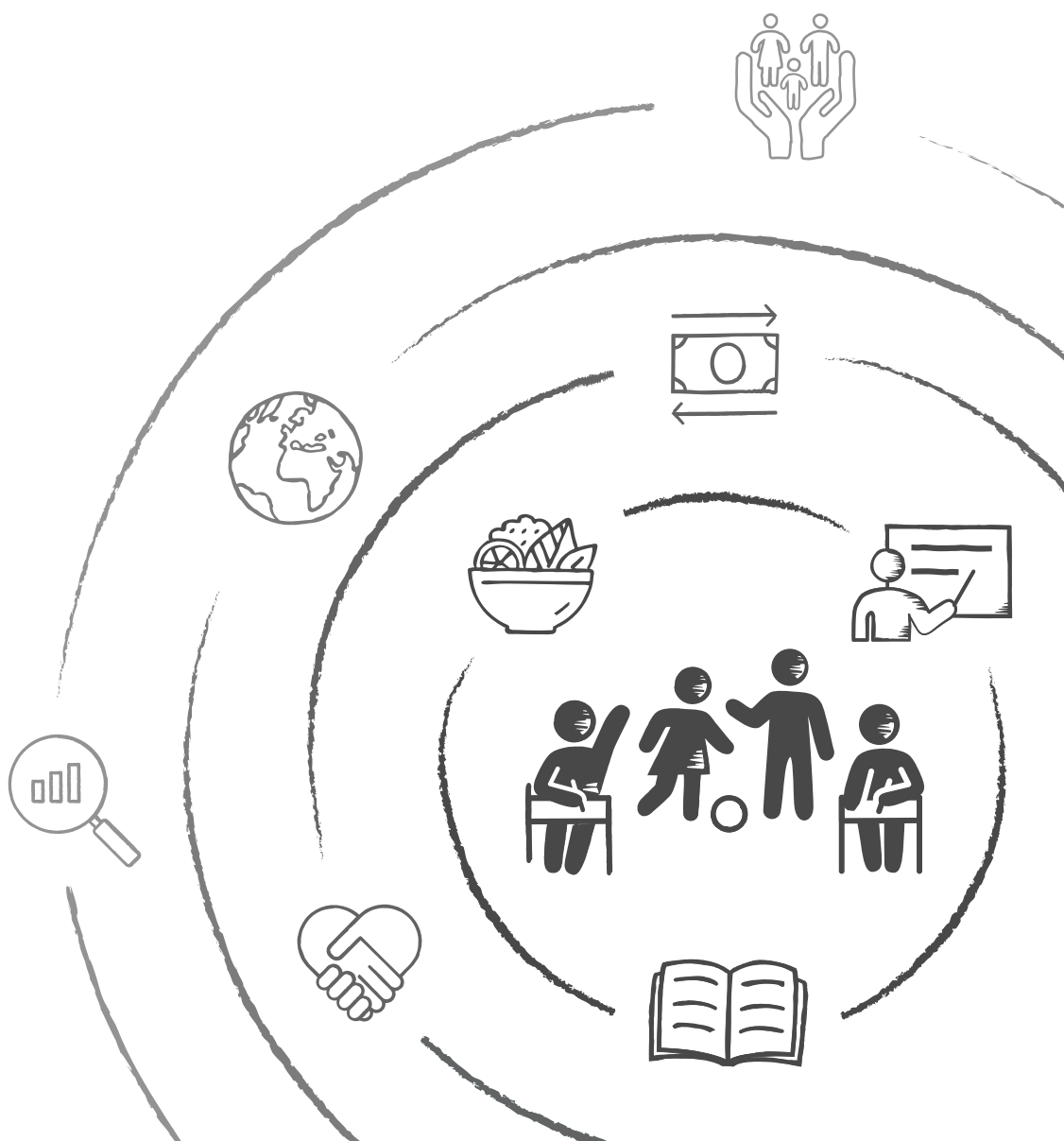
# The global and strategic role of WFP in school health and nutrition

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School feeding programmes have grown dramatically in quality and quantity over the last decade. It is countries and national governments which have driven this change: they invest most and make the biggest difference on the ground.

It is also clear that development partners can help strengthen and accelerate these government-led efforts, and that key changes to policy have played an important role in the growing sophistication of the programmes. WFP, as the United Nations lead on school feeding, has played important global roles both as a partner and as a catalyst for policy change; and is now taking more deliberate steps to strengthen and more clearly define these roles in the future.

This report describes WFP's new strategic outlook, its commitments and targets. It sets out what governments and partners can expect from WFP in the next ten years; what WFP's priorities and roles will be; and how WFP plans to change its way of working to provide more and better support to governments and children, using a new ten-year strategy to guide the process.

The new WFP 2020-2030 School Feeding Strategy was developed on the basis of evidence and policy analysis, and especially by listening to others. After 18 months of consultations with governments, development partners, NGOs and grass-roots organizations, the strategy was launched in January 2020. The strategy documents how WFP will advocate globally and work in partnership to help guarantee a proper school health and nutrition response for schoolchildren worldwide. In addition to continuing to implement programmes directly for those most in need, WFP will support governments to address their national goals and challenges, and in particular reach the 73 million vulnerable children in 60 developing countries that are currently not benefitting from school meals or other health interventions.

In many cases, WFP should not be the lead agency in tackling specific challenges, but instead will help find solutions by working with others and convening different actors. WFP will do this by leveraging its six decades of experience in supporting school feeding; its reach and knowledge of the poorest and hardest-to-reach populations; and its trajectory of working with more than 100 countries on sustainable national school feeding programmes.

WFP technical and policy support to national programmes could positively influence the quality of life of 155 million schoolchildren in 74 countries, while at the same time assisting countries' movement towards self-reliance.

Three major changes in WFP's approach are expected as the new strategy is rolled out:

1. WFP will change the way it works and acts in partnership; sharpen its advocacy, convening and influencing capacities; and will act as a catalyst and a facilitator of global, regional and country efforts on school health and nutrition.
2. WFP will change the way it works with governments, increasing the sustainability and institutionalization of its efforts through a better understanding of national priorities and challenges, better use of evidence and an enhanced focus on strengthening national systems and plans.
3. WFP will change the way it delivers school feeding, ensuring better integration, coherence and quality of programme delivery, including a stronger focus on the roles of diet and lifestyle on obesity, as well as undernutrition.

The new School Feeding Strategy also calls for more research to improve the quality of programmes, including creating designs which are more gender-sensitive and more responsive to climate change. The responsiveness of WFP's 2020-2030 strategy, and particularly its partnership approach, has already been proven to be more relevant in the COVID-19 era, while the closure of schools has already led WFP to redouble its efforts, working with partners to support countries provide school meal programmes for out-of-school children.

Tracking the roll-out of the strategy will be a deliberate feature of future editions of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide*, with the aim of monitoring progress and optimizing the strategic approach in response to this feedback.

## 1 The scale of WFP's efforts

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WFP is the leading humanitarian organization saving lives and changing lives; delivering food assistance in emergencies; and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. In emergencies, WFP is often first on the scene, providing food assistance to the victims of war, civil conflict and natural disasters. When the emergency subsides, WFP helps communities rebuild shattered lives and livelihoods. WFP works with its partners and governments to deliver long-term solutions that change people's lives by bridging the divide between humanitarian and development activities. This approach breaks the cycle of poverty and builds human capital by helping connect people – particularly schoolchildren, women and smallholder farmers who are furthest behind – with educational and economic opportunities. WFP is the largest humanitarian organization implementing school feeding programmes worldwide and has been doing so for over 50 years. In 2019, WFP provided school meals to more than 17.3 million children in 50 countries, often in the hardest-to-reach areas.

In addition to its humanitarian role, WFP also has the UN mandate to support school feeding programmes worldwide. For over 50 years, WFP has helped more than 100 countries to establish nationally owned and sustainable programmes. In all cases, WFP aims to work in partnership with UN agencies and a large network of NGOs.

WFP works with governments in two ways, often simultaneously:

1. The organization provides school meals to vulnerable children in support of national objectives. In 2019, WFP provided school meals to more than 17.3 million children in 59 countries, with about 71 percent of the coverage in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East (see map 1). In 2020, it has worked with these same countries to help them mitigate the effects of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. WFP provides policy support and technical assistance to help governments strengthen the sustainability of their school feeding programmes. As countries develop economically, WFP's direct operational support is no longer needed because governments take over the responsibility of managing and funding these programmes. Of the 100 countries which started programmes with WFP support, the transition to national ownership has already happened in 40 countries (see Kenya Case Study 3)

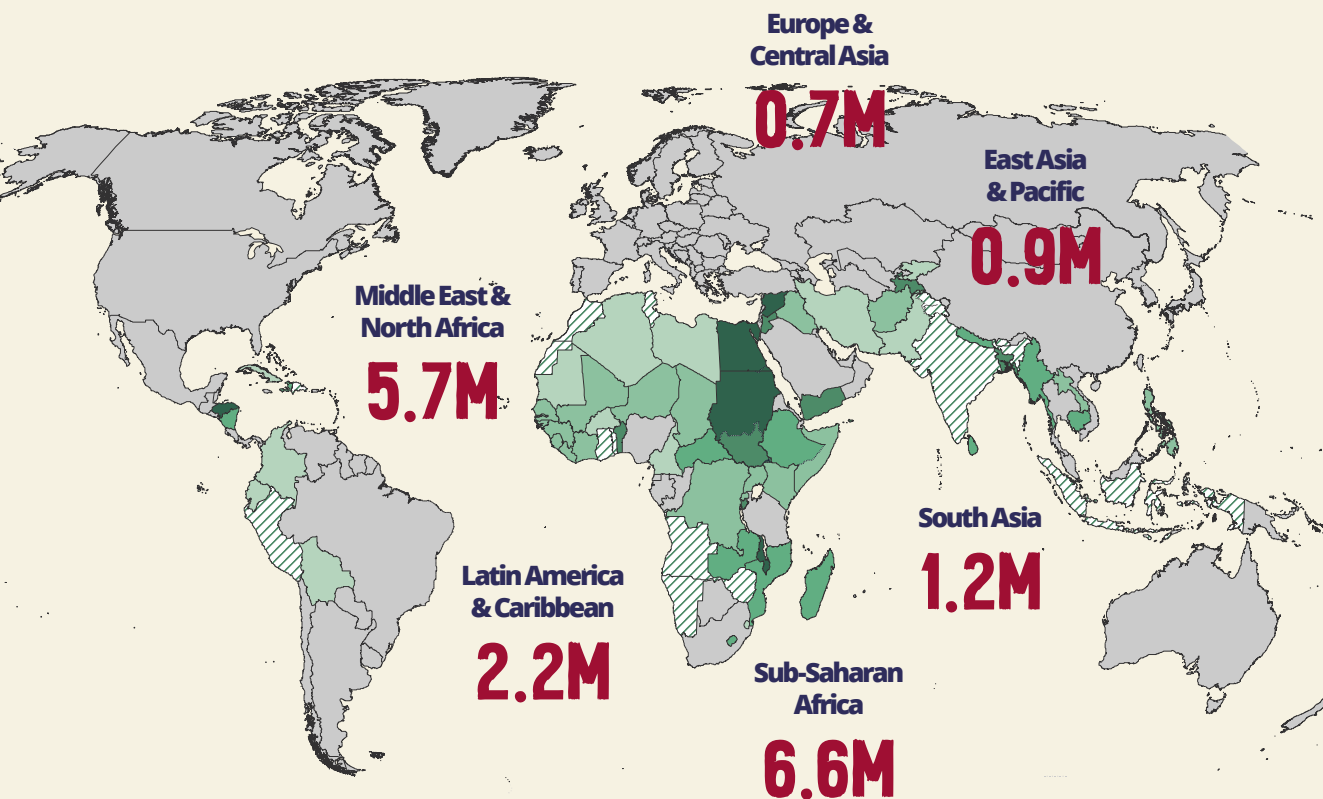




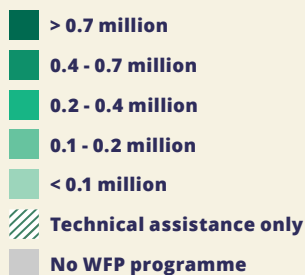
Map 1

# Overview of WFP school feeding programmes around the world in 2019

**Legend:** WFP school feeding programmes reached 17.3 million children in 2019, the largest share of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa.



### Number of affected school children



— International Boundary      - - - - - Armistice or International Administrative Line  
- - - - - Other Line of Separation      - - - - - Special boundary line

**TOTAL**  
**17.3 MILLION**  
**CHILDREN**



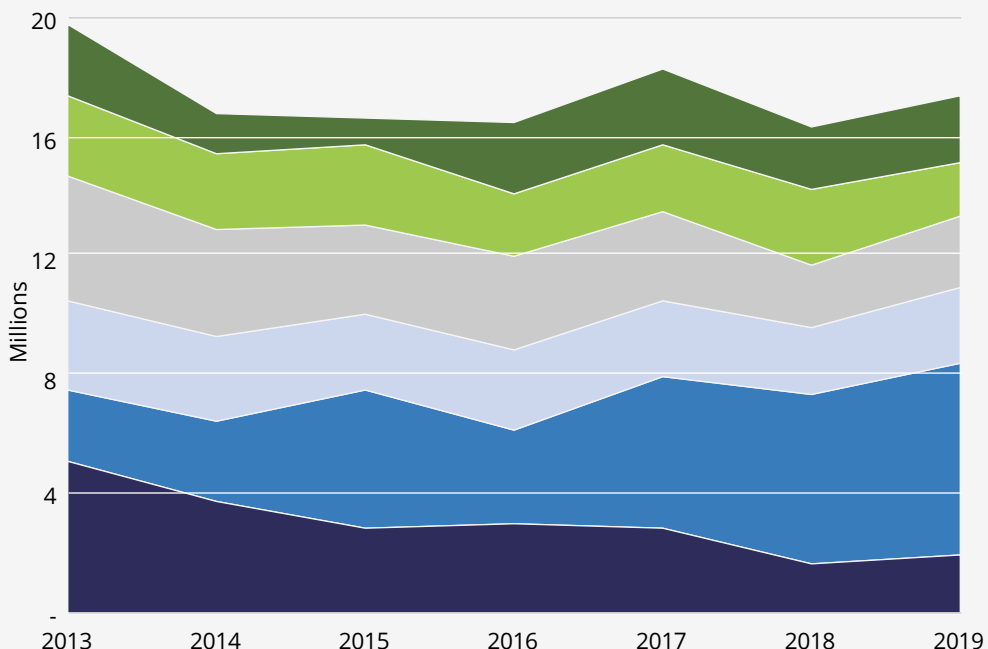
Since 2013, the number of children reached annually by WFP-managed programmes has been relatively stable at around 17 million children across the regions (see Figure 1). Transition to state-run programmes has occurred in several countries: in Cambodia, WFP’s programme has reduced from 528,000 to 281,000 children following a transition plan with the government; and in Kenya and Zambia, 1.1 million and 900,000 children are now being supported by their respective governments. During this period, WFP has completely handed over programmes in Bhutan, Ghana, Indonesia, Sao Tome and Principe, Kenya and Palestine. It has also increased its coverage in crisis-hit countries.

Since 2013, WFP has also scaled up several operations in response to emergencies and crises in the Middle East and North Africa region, including in Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

**Figure 1**  
**Evolution of WFP school feeding beneficiaries between 2013 and 2020**  
**(by WFP Regional Bureau)**

**Legend:** The total number of children supported by WFP with school meals remained stable between 2013 and 2020, at around 17 million globally. Disaggregating by region illustrates a decrease in Asia and the Pacific, mostly driven by gradual handover to governments, and a marked increase in the Middle East and North Africa region, mostly in response to crises.

■ Latin America and the Caribbean ■ East Africa ■ Southern Africa ■ West and Central Africa  
 ■ North Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe ■ Asia and the Pacific





WFP's planned budget in school feeding is about US\$740 million annually, making it one of the largest contributors to education and social protection efforts in low-income countries. In 2019, WFP had more than 160 subject experts working specifically on school feeding in 73 country offices, 6 regional bureaux, Centres of Excellence in Brazil and Côte d'Ivoire, and in WFP headquarters in Rome. WFP subject experts in nutrition, social protection, monitoring and evaluation also provide support to school feeding efforts.

### Summary of WFP's school feeding activities in 2019

- WFP provided school meals or snacks to **17.3 million children**, of which **50 percent were girls**, in **90,000 schools**.
- **Number of schoolchildren receiving assistance by WFP region:**
  - Asia and the Pacific: 2.1 million
  - North Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe: 6.4 million
  - West and Central Africa: 2.5 million
  - East Africa: 1.8 million
  - Southern Africa: 2.3 million
  - Latin America and the Caribbean: 2.2 million.
- In 2019, WFP implemented or supported school feeding programmes in **73 countries** (4 countries with direct implementation; 55 countries with direct implementation and technical assistance; and 14 countries with technical assistance only).
- Take-home rations in the form of food or cash-based transfers for **430,000 children**.
- **4.5 million children** received school feeding in **emergency contexts**.
- In **40 countries**, WFP provided support to smallholder farmers through home-grown school feeding programmes.

The number of children likely to benefit from WFP's technical assistance is difficult to estimate with precision. One common form of technical support is to help countries draft school feeding policies, laws and strategies. These are often multi-year efforts involving several stakeholders and lengthy processes, which ultimately benefit all the children in the national programme. In the case of Bangladesh, for example, the national school feeding policy is expected to benefit three million children (see Case Study 2).

WFP also helps governments strengthen national monitoring systems, define better targeting criteria and improve food quality. New national food fortification laws in India and Peru have benefitted millions of children who receive micronutrients such as iron and Vitamin A in their school meals.

Using this approach, WFP's technical and policy support could positively influence the quality of life of 155 million schoolchildren in 74 countries.

This estimate corresponds to the sum of all children that currently receive meals through government-run school feeding programmes in countries that will benefit from WFP's technical support as envisaged in the new WFP strategy. The majority of these children are in stable, middle-income countries, where WFP is increasingly transitioning from providing direct operational assistance to technical assistance and capacity strengthening.

This estimate does not include other types of indirect beneficiaries, including smallholder farmers and other actors along the supply chain, such as caterers, transporters and traders. This aspect could be further explored in future editions of the *State of School Feeding Worldwide*.

## 2 WFP's contribution to the sustainability and institutionalization of programmes

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In its 2009 School Feeding Policy, WFP committed to support the transition to nationally owned programmes. This commitment was further strengthened in the updated policy of 2013 and reiterated in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* publication of that same year. Over the last decade, an enormous effort has been made to ensure that school feeding programmes are properly embedded in national frameworks (see Figure 2 depicting the evolution of WFP policy and thinking on school feeding).

This section explores the changes between 2013 and 2019, by comparing the data from the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2013* (WFP, 2013a) and the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020*. However, this analysis focuses on countries with WFP support only.

The analysis indicates that government programmes have been successful, but also highlights that these types of results take time. In many cases, these are processes that take five or ten years to complete, requiring a long-term view, patience, consistency and sustained investment from WFP, partners and donors.

The number of children receiving school meals in WFP-supported countries has increased from 69 million (2013) to 107 million (2019) (see Figure 3). During this period, the WFP direct assistance caseload has remained relatively stable at around 17 million children (see Figure 1); while the growth has been in government-led programmes, where caseloads have nearly doubled. This illustrates the progressive investments that governments have made to expand national efforts. The biggest increase has been in lower middle-income countries, but the data illustrate that low-income countries have also stepped up their own investments.

As mentioned in the previous section, although WFP’s beneficiary caseload has remained stable overall, there have been significant variations in the size of programmes in specific countries and regions, which means that not all countries that received WFP support in 2013 continue to receive the same amount of support in 2020. WFP adapts to the country context, retargeting efforts to complement what governments are doing. For example, the government may expand its programme in urban and peri-urban areas, while WFP concentrates on supporting harder-to-reach areas of the country.



WFP/Rein Skullerud/Haiti

Figure 2  
The evolution of a policy priority

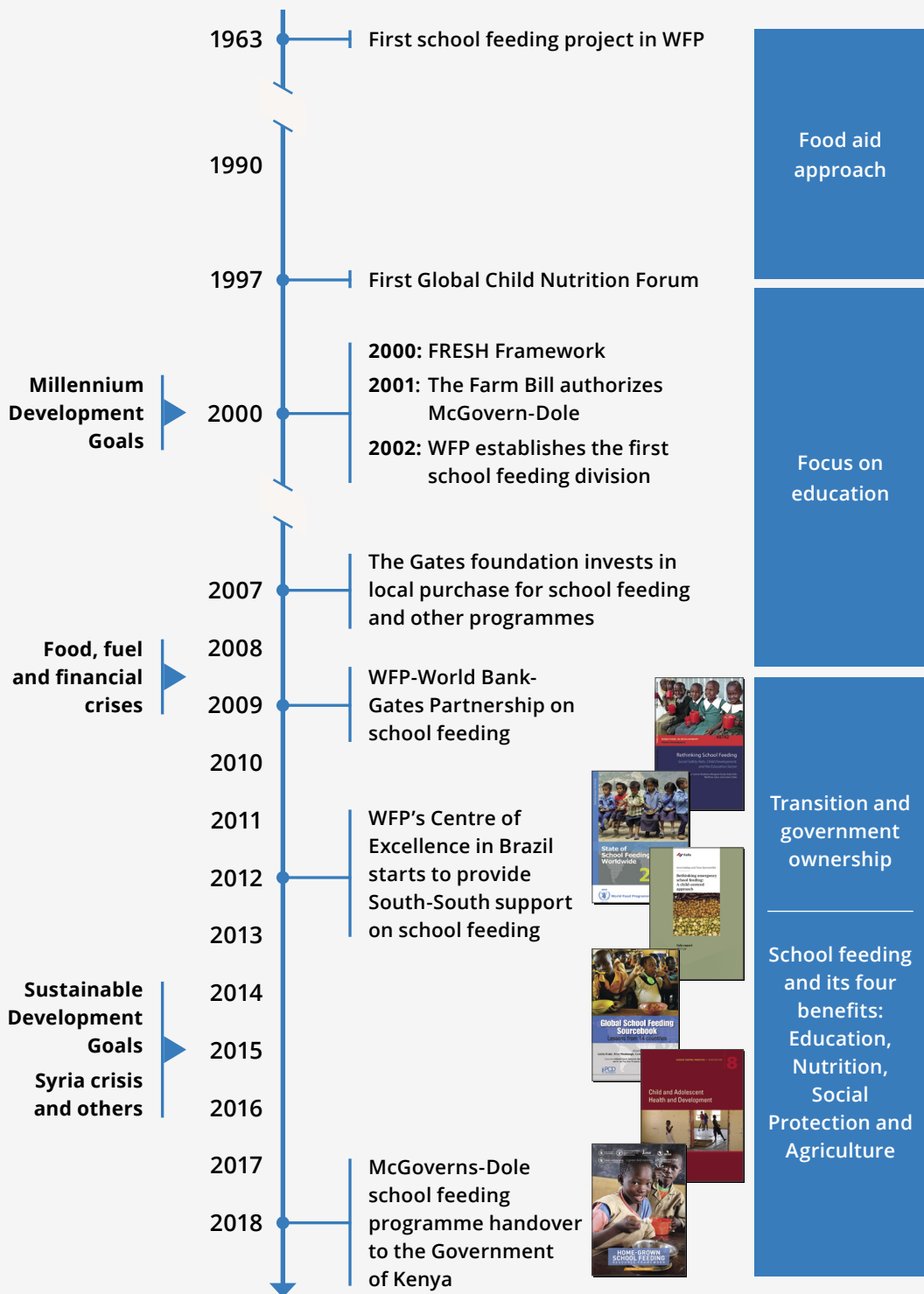
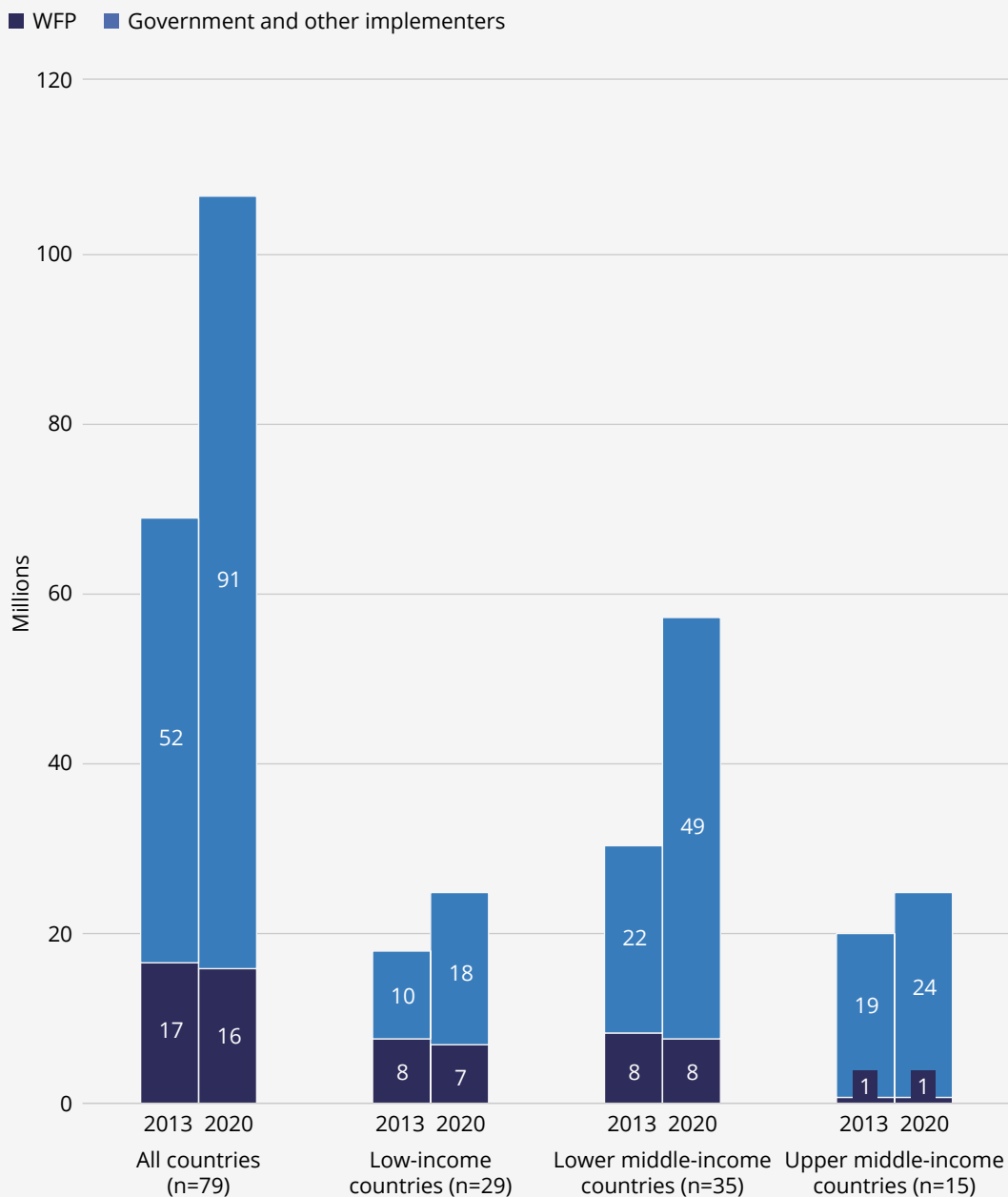


Figure 3

### Numbers of children reached by school feeding programmes in countries supported by WFP

**Legend:** The number of children receiving school feeding in countries supported by WFP has significantly increased between 2013 and 2020, especially in lower middle-income countries where WFP has supported transitions to government-led programmes. This increase is entirely attributable to government investments, while WFP's support remained unchanged.



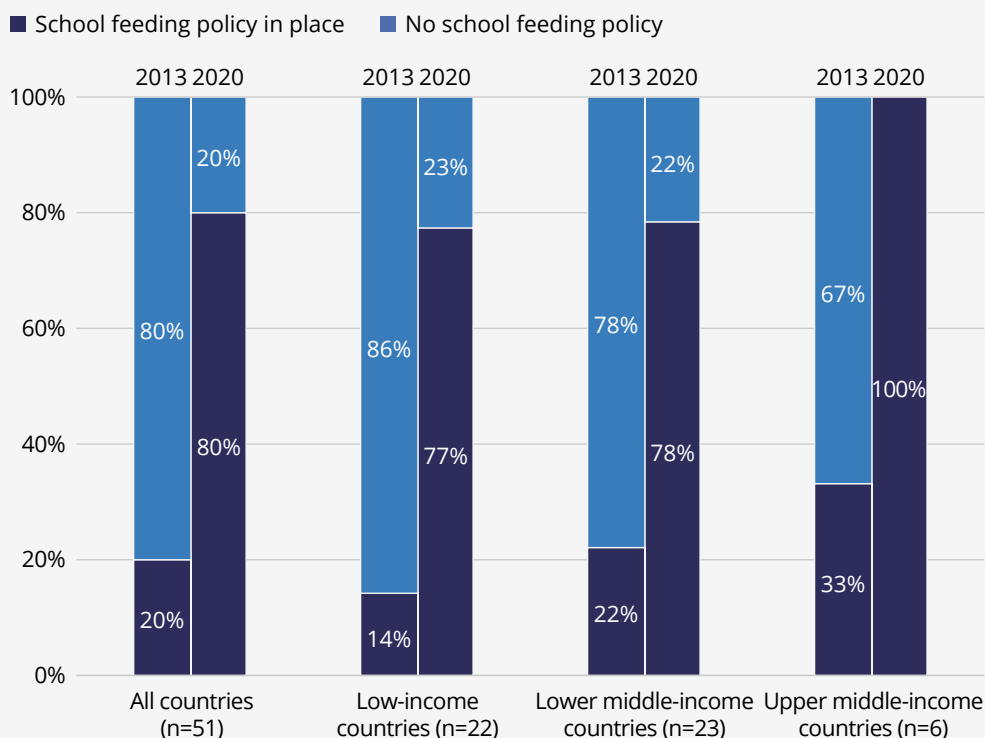
In 2013, 20 percent of WFP-supported countries had a school feeding policy, law or strategy. In other words, very few countries had a proper policy framework that established school feeding programmes as part of broader national development efforts. In 2019, 80 percent of countries that WFP supports have a policy framework (see Figure 4).

Progress has been made in all income categories, even in low-income countries that started from a lower baseline in 2013. Particularly impressive is the progress made in several crisis-affected countries including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Togo and Yemen.

Since 2013, 30 countries have adopted school feeding policies, laws or strategies. In each of these countries, WFP supported the government to clarify its policies on school feeding, including support for national and regional workshops and consultations, assessments and studies in preparation for legal and policy documents; seconding staff to government offices to support these efforts; and study visits.

**Figure 4**  
**Change in policy frameworks in countries supported by WFP**

**Legend:** Between 2013 and 2020, the majority of countries supported by WFP adopted a school feeding policy. Most of these countries received technical assistance and capacity strengthening support.





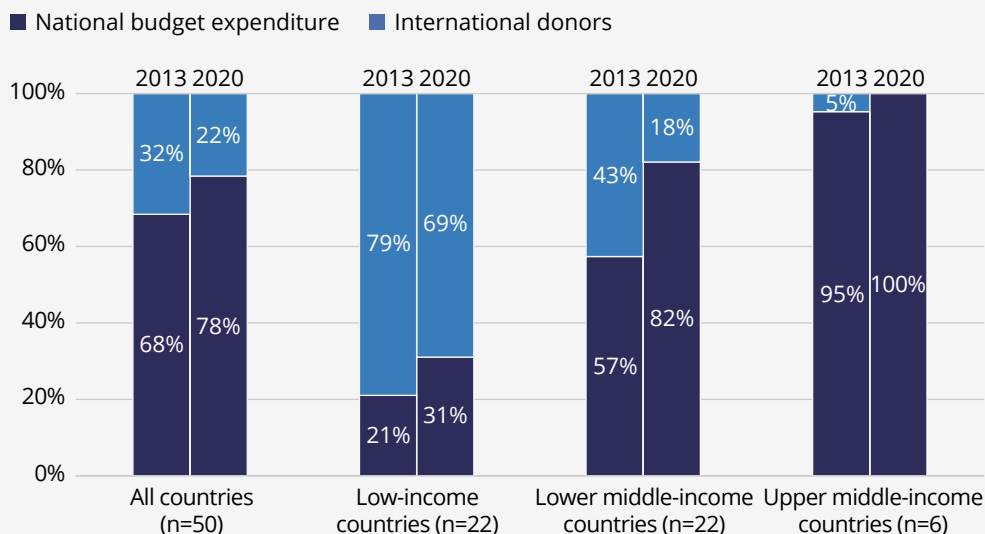
Most countries received support from the WFP Centre of Excellence in Brazil, starting with study visits to learn first-hand from the Brazilian experience, and then through direct technical assistance to help countries draft and approve national policies. The Centre of Excellence in Brazil has demonstrated the power of South-South Cooperation in generating political will and providing government-to-government targeted support.

Another important tool in the development of national policies was the SABER framework. Developed in 2011 by a World Bank-led partnership, the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) tool is an initiative to collect and disseminate comparative data and knowledge on education policies across all domains, including school health and school feeding. It is designed to help countries systematically evaluate and strengthen their education systems and policies. As mandated in its 2013 policy, WFP deployed the SABER tool in 55 countries, which helped governments design road maps towards the institutionalization of school feeding programmes. Based on the success of this tool, WFP is now working with the World Bank and partners on a revised version of SABER.

One last indicator that illustrates the trend towards progressive institutionalization is the programmes' funding sources. The data in Figure 5 indicate that since 2013, governments have increased their investments in school feeding in WFP-supported countries. Indeed, the trend in countries at all income levels is towards self-reliance, with a substantial movement towards domestic financing.

**Figure 5**  
**Change in funding sources in countries supported by WFP**

**Legend:** The share of international donor funding tends to be higher in countries supported by WFP compared to the global average. Nevertheless, governments significantly increased their level of funding for school feeding between 2013 and 2020, especially in lower middle-income countries where WFP has been supporting transitions to government-led programmes.





### 3 Unfinished business: how many children are not receiving school health and nutrition support?

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The majority of countries in the world are providing some level of school health and nutrition support, although the coverage is often limited (Sarr et al., 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 456 million schoolchildren – more than half of the target population – receive deworming treatment annually through school-based programmes in nearly all low and lower middle-income countries (WHO, 2019b), although these largely public efforts are variable in quality and coverage.

In many countries, the delivery of deworming medicines has been suspended or reduced in coverage due to school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The medium-term plan in most countries is to resume mass drug administration as part of the reopening of schools.

Recent analysis shows that today nearly half the world's schoolchildren sit down to eat a meal at school. Almost all high and middle-income countries have high coverage rates. India now feeds 90 million children; Brazil and China 40 million each; and Egypt 11 million. Despite this progress, there are still some significant challenges.

It is apparent that several hundreds of million schoolchildren are receiving some health and nutrition interventions on a regular basis. But is this support reaching the children who have the greatest need? As explored in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020*, while coverage of school feeding programmes is adequate in high and upper middle-income countries (reaching 80 percent of school-age children in most contexts), it remains inadequate in low-income countries (reaching only 18 percent of school-age children).

To answer this question, WFP partnered with PCD to explore the scale of need for school feeding in low- and middle-income countries globally (Drake et al., 2020). Of the 730 million primary schoolchildren enrolled in school, 338 million live where the coverage of school meals is inadequate (below 80 percent). Of these, 251 million children live in countries where there are significant nutrition challenges, including 20 per cent stunting in children younger than 5, and more than 30 percent anaemia among women (World Bank, 2020c).

The analysis shows that of the 251 million children living in countries with poor nutrition, a subset of 73 million are further challenged by living in extreme poverty, defined as less than USD 1.85 per day. These especially vulnerable 73 million children are spread across 60 countries: 84 percent in Africa; 15 percent in Asia and 1 percent in Latin America.

**WFP will help governments reach 73 million of the most vulnerable children that do not currently benefit from school health and nutrition support.**

Supporting governments to reach these 73 million primary schoolchildren in 60 countries with nutritious meals and other school health interventions is a priority, and clearly a focus on Africa is needed. Bridging this gap will require supporting governments to expand coverage in countries with existing school feeding programmes and to initiate school feeding programmes in countries where they are lacking.

These estimates were calculated before the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of vulnerable children is likely to have increased as a result of the global crisis. Therefore, these figures should be considered a lower-bound estimate and should be revised once it is clear how many of the most vulnerable children have been able to return to school after the reversal of the school closures.

## **WFP will work with a growing coalition of development agencies, donors, the private sector and civil society organizations.**

### **4 A renewed commitment: WFP's new school health and nutrition strategy**

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In 2019, WFP embarked on a comprehensive review of its support to school feeding programmes. This included a review of the existing evidence, lessons learned and best practices; and extensive consultations with internal and external partners. The process resulted in WFP's first ten-year school health and nutrition strategy, which was launched in early 2020.

Responding to the United Nations Decade of Action (2020-2030), WFP will work with governments and partners to ensure that all primary schoolchildren have access to good quality meals in school, accompanied by a broader integrated package of health and nutrition services. Building on its six decades of experience, WFP will advocate globally and nationally to ensure that the issue of school health and nutrition is prioritized.

Through this strategy, WFP will also contribute to promoting equity and inclusion, including, but not limited to, addressing issues of gender and for children with disabilities (see Box 2).

WFP will build on its existing operations in countries and leverage its expertise, tools, systems and partnerships to support countries to achieve their human capital objectives through increased investments in nutrition, quality of learning, gender equality and healthy growth. WFP does not aim to meet the needs of all 73 million primary schoolchildren directly or on its own. WFP will take a context-specific approach and adapt its role to the particular country situation, in partnership with other key players, including governments, UN agencies, the private sector, international financial institutions and NGOs.

The following are the four main areas that WFP will invest in under the new strategy:

### **1 – Generating and sharing knowledge and best practice globally**

As in 2009,<sup>1</sup> WFP will work with partners to establish a research agenda for school feeding for the next ten years, based on a mapping of learning needs, to ensure that global gaps in the knowledge base are being filled. A research consortium will be set up and managed by an academic partner, to ensure evidence work is credible and rigorous. Future areas of research identified by the WFP strategy include:

- nutrition and diet quality of school-age children;
- development of indicators to measure the impact of school feeding on nutrition status of schoolchildren;
- the contribution of school feeding to human capital, costs, cost-benefit and cost drivers of national programmes;
- the impact of school feeding on girls' education and on adolescents;
- analysis of how countries have transitioned from external support to country financing and management of programmes;
- the cost-effectiveness of using school feeding programmes as a platform for the delivery of other services (health and nutrition, protection, etc.); and
- the contribution of school feeding to peace and stability outcomes as well as cognition and learning outcomes.

As the leading international agency supporting school feeding, WFP has the responsibility to house and make available global knowledge so that countries can use the information to improve programmes and provide adequate support to vulnerable children. Drawing on decades of engagement in school feeding, WFP will support the development of global public goods such as a comprehensive school feeding database and will document and share global lessons learned, best practices, standards and norms more effectively.

In recent years, new decentralized approaches are emerging on knowledge sharing, including South-South exchanges, knowledge hubs and other initiatives at the regional level. These approaches need to be supported to create more of a networked approach to knowledge rather than a centralized approach. However, better coordination is needed between all these initiatives to ensure coherence.

## **The World Food Programme has launched a new ten-year School Feeding Strategy.**

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1. WFP revisited its research agenda in the wake of the publication of the World Bank's report *Rethinking School Feeding*, to which WFP contributed.

WFP will work with the World Bank and other relevant partners to document the results of almost five years of implementation of the SABER tool and to update it for further use as part of the World Bank's new Universal School Health and School Feeding Strategy. WFP will develop an operational tool to assess national capacities for school feeding more effectively and to provide technical assistance. WFP will work with partners such as GCNF on a global school feeding survey. This periodic flagship publication will consolidate and report back on the state of school feeding worldwide. Better outcome indicators to document and track results of school feeding operations will be developed, in particular those related to nutrition and capacity development.

## **2 – Increasing the investment in school feeding: a new funding model**

A new funding model that differentiates between contexts is needed. Low-income and fragile countries that do not have the same fiscal capacity as middle and high-income countries continue to rely on operational support from WFP, which in turn relies on a limited set of donors, making funds unpredictable and operations unsustainable. To finance its operations, WFP needs to establish a new compact with donors. A multisectoral approach is needed, bringing on board donors that have traditionally not been involved in funding school feeding programmes; blending funding from different sectors; and combining humanitarian and development funding streams. New multilateral funds, especially in the education sector, and innovative financing mechanisms are available that should also be explored.

In more stable and developed countries, governments need to move from relying on actors such as WFP and NGOs to financing their own national programmes. Countries could, for example, allocate funding from bilateral partners, negotiate debt swaps, introduce specific domestic taxes or levies, or work on corporate social responsibility projects with the private sector. WFP will learn to engage with governments in designing and implementing innovative fiscal policy approaches to finance national and regional school feeding programmes. The challenge for WFP is to support governments increase access to these funds while also securing funding for capacity strengthening activities. WFP needs to strengthen its ability to manage, implement and account for funding received from development sector partners.

International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank as well as thematic funds such as the GPE and others will be crucial to enable this transition to national ownership and sustainability by channelling financing to national programmes. Funding for technical assistance and capacity development work would need to be secured for WFP to continue playing its enabling role. Private sector support has been instrumental in mobilizing resources, advocating and providing technical assistance to strengthen school feeding programmes. WFP will continue to work closely with the private sector and identify avenues to expand cooperation through innovative financing mechanisms and individual giving, to contribute to the reduction of the funding gap, especially in fragile contexts.

# WFP will support governments to transition to nationally owned and funded programmes and enhance its direct support in fragile or low-income settings.

## 3 - Acting in partnership to improve and advocate for school feeding

WFP will champion the issue of school health and nutrition globally and advocate for its prioritization in the next decade of action towards the SDGs. Through its benefits to education, health and nutrition, social protection and local agriculture, WFP recognizes that school feeding directly contributes to SDG 1 “No Poverty”, SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”, SDG 3 “Good Health and Well-Being”, SDG 4 “Quality Education”, SDG 5 “Gender Equality”, and indirectly contributes to SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”, SDG 10 “Reduced Inequalities”, SDG 12 “Responsible Consumption and Production”, SDG 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” and SDG 17 “Partnerships for the Goals”.

WFP will work with partners to ensure that the additional elements of an integrated package of school feeding and health for children, which are not part of its mandate or areas of expertise but are nevertheless crucial for children, are provided in an integrated way. Joint approaches are proving to be more effective and cost-efficient, including joint advocacy and communication strategies.

In July 2019, an inter-agency meeting co-organized by UNESCO and WFP highlighted the importance of better UN agency collaboration in the context of UN reform and the need for a new, more effective, efficient and integrated multi-agency school health and nutrition approach (UNESCO, 2020a). Under the leadership of UNESCO, WFP will support this new partnership opportunity at global, regional and country levels.

WFP will update its bilateral partnerships with agencies including UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, GPE, World Bank and ECW through new memorandums of understanding or action plans, as appropriate. WFP will launch a joint initiative with UNICEF to provide an integrated package of school feeding and health, WASH and nutrition interventions. WFP is currently working with FAO on sustainable home-grown school feeding approaches, with a view to improving linkages between local farmers and school feeding programmes. Support will be provided to regional bodies such as the African Union to strengthen their leadership on school feeding.

At the regional and country level, WFP will work with governments as key stakeholders and with UN agencies and NGOs to:

- improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes and to provide better and more information to decision makers at the right time;
- engage and reposition school feeding in national policy discussions at the right level and with the right capacities;

- support upstream decision making by highlighting key trade-offs, best practices and solutions to governments; and
- WFP will foster multisectoral approaches at national level, convening across ministries, government structures and regional groups.

NGOs have clearly asked WFP to review its approach to partnering with them on school feeding. At the country level, there is an opportunity to develop shared platforms for knowledge sharing, development of indicators and coordinated support to governments. This may include jointly strengthening monitoring systems and transition plans. At regional and international levels, this engagement provides a basis for joint advocacy to increase the profile of school feeding and for global coordination and sharing of research, lessons learned and best practice. WFP will establish an NGO advisory board at global/headquarters level and include NGOs in various work streams, including the new research agenda.

The private sector – including multinational, national and local profit-making enterprises, foundations and individual giving – has been a strong player in school feeding, particularly in stable contexts where it has supported transition strategies with governments. Support in the form of funding, advocacy and technical support for the design and development of national school feeding programmes is increasingly being leveraged. An area of growth will be the development of new partnerships with national private sector companies who can and should be part of country-level advocacy and policy platforms to strengthen the quality and sustainability of school feeding interventions.

#### 4 – Strengthening programmatic approaches in key areas

WFP has identified six thematic focus areas that will be further strengthened, which all require integrated, multisectoral approaches.

- **Girls’ (including adolescents) education and well-being:** Helping girls stay in school, especially into adolescence, is an effective way of preventing early marriage and of delaying the first pregnancy, both of which can trap women in poverty, social exclusion, violence and chronic ill health. A multitude of gender inequalities hinder children’s access to schools, especially girls. In some countries, WFP has successfully operationalized approaches with partners such as UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women to address some of these barriers through integrated platforms, which need to be supported and scaled up.
- **Nutrition-sensitive school feeding:**<sup>2</sup> In the face of the double burden of malnutrition, priorities for school-age children include promoting healthy diets through nutrition education, physical activity and behaviour change communication; addressing and preventing micronutrient deficiencies; and tackling the specific needs of adolescent girls and other vulnerable groups. WFP will issue new nutritional guidelines for governments on how to design the best models based on their situation, nutritional needs and challenges, while promoting links with other health, hygiene and nutrition-related activities.

2. WFP’s 2017 nutrition policy frames the engagement towards improving nutrition in all WFP interventions.

- **School feeding and the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus:** School feeding is part of an essential package to bridge immediate response and long-term development efforts. For children living in fragile and conflict-affected areas and refugee settings, school feeding can become an essential safeguard by contributing to a sense of normalcy and educational continuation. A robust conflict/context analysis needs to underpin WFP programmes to ensure that assistance is conflict-sensitive and does not result in protection risks for children. The contribution that school feeding might make to improving prospects for peace on different levels needs to be further researched.
- **School feeding, food systems and value chains:** Despite over a decade of work, home-grown school feeding programmes are still not implemented at scale. WFP will deploy its significant expertise in this area to ensure that the connection between school feeding and local agricultural production is a reality. This includes market analysis and supply chain support; links to local food systems and smallholder farmers' groups; access to energy; support of cash-based programming; shock-responsive programmes; and improved monitoring and traceability solutions for local procurement to governments. Strengthening partnerships with the UN Rome-based Agencies, specialized international and national NGOs, and farmers' organizations will be important in this regard.
- **Data and digital innovation:** WFP is developing a school feeding digital platform to increase near real-time data availability from operations and enable better and quicker decision making (see Box 3). Eventually, these solutions can be linked with national reporting and monitoring systems in support of government-led programmes. Digital solutions for attendance tracking, monitoring of meals served and stock management in schools will be developed. Integrated dashboards will support country offices to improve their programme quality where needed. Digital platforms to train school feeding actors on nutrition education, food quality and safety, and to promote healthy eating habits will be further developed. The school meal optimization tool, Menu Planner PLUS School Menus, will also help to improve menu design, focusing on nutrition, local sourcing and cost optimization.
- **Local communities:** A variety of community-based actors contribute to school feeding programmes including school management committees, parent teacher associations, teachers, parents, traditional authorities, village leaders, women's groups, farmer organizations and, of course, students. Local communities have an important role to play in implementation of school feeding activities in fragile and stable contexts, with increasing importance placed on their ownership of school feeding in stable contexts. WFP will strengthen the engagement of local communities in school feeding to ensure the sustainability of activities; children's attendance; community members' contribution to school feeding through in-kind or financial assistance; and parents and teachers' leadership in the management of the daily activities.

## WFP will promote research on school health and nutrition.



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## Box 1

### What WFP learned from COVID-19 in the context of school feeding and education

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While the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the lives of the most vulnerable populations, it also gave WFP the opportunity to reflect on its current delivery of programmes. The key lessons WFP learned from the COVID-19 crisis are detailed below.

Looking beyond the immediate crisis: it is clear that the impact of COVID-19 will be felt for years to come. WFP must address the long-term implications of the pandemic on global food systems, unemployment and household incomes, and the effects on school feeding. Even as schools reopen, it is not guaranteed that all children will return to school as parents may no longer be able to afford to send their children back or require them to work for additional income. With the number of food insecure people increasing to record levels, WFP must find new ways to adapt its programmes in a post COVID-19 world.

Expand and scale up new programme modalities: WFP's response to school closures and the subsequent social shocks have shown the effectiveness of alternative feeding mechanisms in supporting children that no longer have access to school. WFP seeks to expand its programming options and scale up modalities such as the use of centralized kitchens and voucher systems, in order to build better, more flexible school feeding programmes. Specific attention will be brought to populations in urban settings as they will be most affected by the pandemic.

Strengthen partnerships with UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector: WFP recognizes the need to strengthen ongoing partnerships and ensure investments from donors are part of the broader education sector response. WFP must also capitalize on the COVID-19 response and support governments in bringing forward school feeding in their national policies. WFP's work with ministries of education; NGOs such as World Vision and Save the Children; and the private sector, e.g. Mastercard and Sodexo, is crucial to the long-term success of the strategy. ■

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## Box 2

### **UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusive school health and nutrition: A summary**

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Social inclusion and development are closely interlinked. In order to make progress towards the SDGs and the international pledge of leaving no one behind, policies need to tackle inequalities and ensure inclusive approaches. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, social inclusion is “...the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016). As such, any efforts to build human capital through school health and nutrition programmes must factor in and plan for these interventions to offer channels to improve the participation of all children, especially those who are most vulnerable to exclusion, including, but not limited to, children with disabilities.

UNESCO's Global Monitoring Education Report 2020 (UNESCO, 2020c), titled “Inclusion and education: All means all”, states that school feeding programmes can promote equity and inclusion, recognizing their contribution to poverty reduction, nutrition, health and education. The report highlights the government-led school feeding programme in Ghana which increased test scores, especially among girls, poor children and those from northern regions. The programmes in Yemen and India are also featured. The social aspect of school meals is highlighted in the report, while acknowledging that meaningful inclusion through sharing of school meals can be difficult to achieve in some contexts. Additionally, the report recommends cooperation across multiple actors, government departments and sectors, presenting school health and nutrition programmes as an example, with 89 percent of countries implementing such programmes (UNESCO, 2020c).

Children with disabilities are at higher risk of being excluded from education or dropping out, and school feeding programmes are recognized for having educational impacts on the most vulnerable learners (PCD, 2015). Approaches that are designed to meet the needs of all children, including those with disabilities, are referred to as disability-inclusive school health and nutrition (Graham et al., 2017). For instance, Zanzibar's 2008-2016 Education Sector Plan notes that enrolment of children with special needs is low, which leads to insufficient support for people with special needs. As such, its focus is on designing disability-inclusive education interventions; collecting more accurate data; and improving training for teachers (Government of Zanzibar, 2007). In Kenya, the home-grown school feeding programme aims to improve targeting and data collection for all vulnerable children, while sensitizing children and parents, and providing vocational training to improve economic outcomes (PCD, 2013). ■

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## Box 3

### Digital innovation in school feeding – Menu Planner PLUS, School Connect and Integrated Dashboards

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**Pierre-Guillaume Wielezynski**

Director of Digital Transformation

World Food Programme

Leveraging the power of technology, WFP developed three digital initiatives to help make school meals more nutritious and make data more available in a timely manner.

Building on earlier solutions and jointly with the Partnership for Child Development (PCD), the Menu Planner PLUS software is a digital solution that optimizes school menus with the potential of making them more nutritious, cost-efficient, and locally sourced using an advanced mathematical algorithm. The whole process is conducted in four easy steps and the results can be crafted to meet local recipes and culture.

Bhutan was the first country to support the development and piloting of Menu Planner PLUS as an operational application. The first Menu Planner PLUS-designed menu was implemented in the region of Punakha and underscored essential ways to improve school feeding rations. The Menu Planner PLUS menu is 20 percent cheaper than the previously used menu while maintaining its nutrient content and led to a 70 percent increase in food sourced from local farmers, all while respecting local eating habits. The scale up of the tool will start with three additional countries in the last quarter of 2020.

Another project in progress is ‘School Connect’, a digital data tracking solution working in unstable connectivity contexts that was developed by WFP specifically for school feeding programmes. Combined with the data integration project ‘Integrated Dashboards’, the aim is to reduce administrative work linked to paper-report handling and speed up data collection and analysis by equipping school feeding managers with near real-time interactive online dashboards on programme performance.

School Connect, which was tested by the Burundi operation in 20 schools in 2019/20, runs on electronic devices with an internet browser and facilitates tracking of important school feeding indicators such as enrolment, attendance, food utilization and current food inventory levels in schools.

The application is integrated with WFP's enterprise data management platform DOTS and Tableau analytics platforms to perform insightful school data analyses and provide staff with interactive, near real-time dashboards and alerts based on operational key performance indicators. This will enable better informed decisions for programme operations teams.

The application will help WFP not only improve operational efficiency, such as last mile food deliveries, better planning of monitoring visits and reporting to partners, but will also contribute to longer-term programme improvements aimed at increasing feeding days and nutritional impact.

School Connect will be scaled up to all WFP-supported schools in Burundi and rolled out to additional countries during 2020/21. ■

## 5 The way forward

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- Responding to the United Nations Decade of Action (2020-2030), WFP will work with governments and partners to jointly ensure that all primary schoolchildren have access to good quality meals in school, accompanied by a broader integrated package of health and nutrition services. Building on its six decades of experience, WFP will advocate globally and nationally to ensure that the issue of school health and nutrition is prioritized.
- WFP will build on its existing operations in countries and leverage its expertise, tools, systems and partnerships to support countries to achieve their human capital objectives through increased investments in nutrition, quality of learning, gender equality and healthy growth. The following are the four main areas that WFP will invest in under the new strategy:
  - generating and sharing knowledge and best practice globally;
  - increasing the investment in school feeding through a new funding model;
  - acting in partnership to improve and advocate for school feeding; and
  - strengthening programmatic approaches in key areas.

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## Case study 1

### Nepal: handover and transition story

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#### Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

#### Government of Nepal

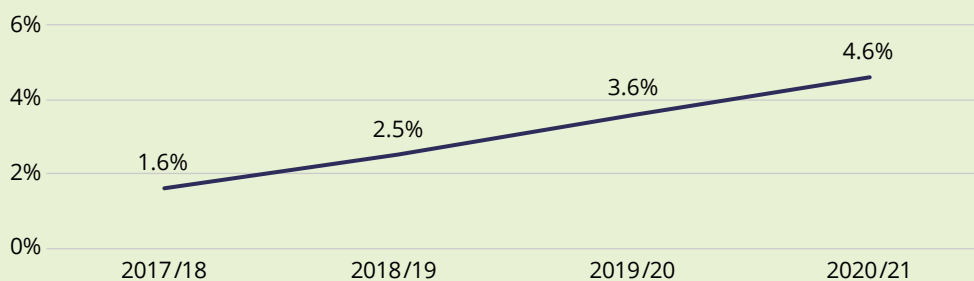
In 1996, the Government of Nepal took its first step towards ownership and sustainability of its school feeding programme by creating the Food for Education Programme and establishing an institutional framework. In 2008, the government initiated its own cash-based school feeding programme in five districts. The start of the McGovern-Dole programme in 2009 also provided an additional boost to government efforts, allowing WFP to accompany and support the Ministry of Education. After 24 years, the school feeding programme was institutionalized and fully embedded in Nepal's national system.

Over the last ten years, thanks to sustained investment by USDA and with support from WFP, the government has consolidated its policy and institutional framework: school feeding is now included in the national education sector policy; the government designed and launched a national school meals operational plan; and progressively increased the number of staff in the department/unit responsible for the programme within the Ministry of Education. These efforts have led to impressive results; for example, the current National Development Plan mentions school feeding as a programme that has helped to raise net enrolment and retention rates in schools; lower dropout rates; and achieve gender parity.

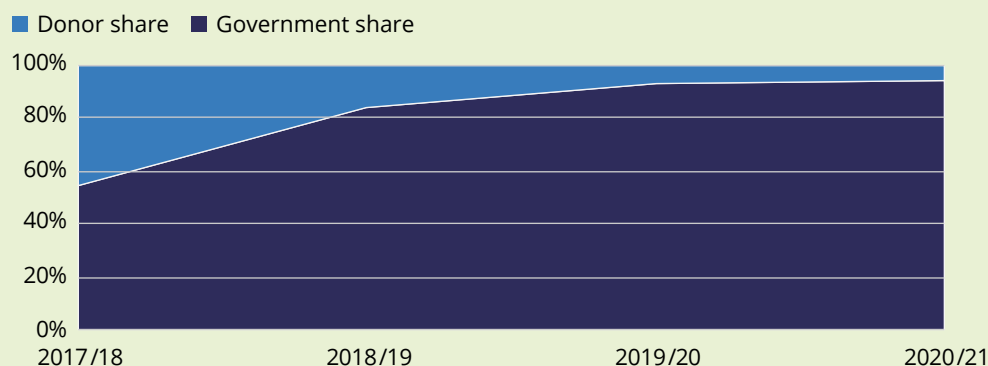
WFP, with support from USDA, also invested US\$18 million in capacity strengthening activities to support the transition. This investment has led to WFP indirectly benefitting the 2.8 million children who are currently part of the school feeding programme, demonstrating that supporting governments to expand their own programmes is more sustainable and cost-efficient in the long term.

In 2018, WFP commissioned a cost-benefit analysis in Nepal, which found that every US\$1 invested in school feeding yielded an economic return of between US\$4.1 and US\$5.2 (WFP, 2018a). These advocacy efforts, combined with increased fiscal space and national budgets, led the government to progressively increase its financial allocations to school feeding, accelerating and consolidating the transition to national ownership. This enabled the government to reach the most important milestone during handover which is an increased budgetary allocation. As illustrated in the table below, over the last four years, the national budget for school feeding has almost quadrupled (from US\$20 million in 2017 to almost US\$70 million in 2020), as external support has decreased (from US\$4.2 million in 2017 to US\$2.8 million in 2020) illustrating a successful transition process.

Nepal Budget (US\$ millions)	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Cash-Based School Meals budget supported by the Government	20.9	27.2	53.1	69.6
Food-based School Meals budget supported by external donors (USDA and WFP)	4.2	3.9	3.0	2.9
Total budget	25.1	31.1	56.1	72.5
Share of school feeding in the education sector budget	1.6%	2.5%	3.6%	4.6%



Nepal Budget (children)	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Cash-based School Meals supported by the Government	286,392	1,112,000	2,229,000	2,800,000
Food-based School Meals supported by external donors (USDA and WFP)	236,000	218,815	173,114	154,410
Total beneficiaries	522,392	1,330,815	2,402,114	2,954,410
Government share	55%	84%	93%	95%
Donor share	45%	16%	7%	5%



These investments have translated into more children being progressively supported. Between the Government of Nepal, USDA and WFP, a total of 7.2 million children have been fed since 2017 with a yearly increase in coverage of about 186 percent. Most of this increase is due to the scaling-up of the national, cash based programme, which accounts for 96 percent of the total caseload in 2020. The fact that 4.6 percent of the education sector budget is now allocated to school feeding further demonstrates the government's commitment to the programme and its importance to overall education-sector goals. ■

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## Case study 2

### **Bangladesh: The transition process**

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The school feeding programme, which started with WFP support in 2001, is currently transitioning from an externally supported programme towards full government ownership. As stated in the new National School Meal Policy (NSMP) approved by the Prime Minister in August 2019, the aim is to reach all primary schoolchildren with locally produced meals by 2030. The National School Meal Policy will be implemented in a phased approach with technical support provided by WFP. During the transition, the number of children reached will increase.

The government plans to deliver school feeding to all students in government primary schools by 2024. The food provided will gradually shift from fortified biscuits to diverse hot meals. Currently, the government allocates US\$75 million per year to the programme. The costs after full implementation of the National School Meal Policy is estimated at US\$910 million a year, which the government has committed to cover. ■



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## Case study 3

### Kenya: Consolidation of its national school feeding programme

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Since the 1980s, the Ministry of Education, together with WFP, has successfully implemented a school meals programme targeting the most food-insecure areas with the lowest school enrolment and completion rates, and high gender disparities. This programme included all primary schools in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya and in the unplanned urban settlements of Nairobi.

In 2009, the Government of Kenya made a bold move to start the first national home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programme in Africa taking on board an initial 540,000 children from the WFP-supported programme. The Ministry of Education and WFP agreed on a gradual handover strategy, which was completed in June 2018. Today, the government's programme, guided by the National School Meals and Nutrition Strategy (2017-2022), reaches over 1.6 million children in arid and semi-arid counties, exceeding the coverage achieved when WFP provided operational support by more than 400,000 children. Funding from the government increased from US\$8.5 million in 2009 to US\$24 million in 2018.

Kenya illustrates how government commitment can transform a programme from relying on donor support to full government financing and national ownership. The school meals programme in Kenya has become one of the strongest in Africa. The Government of Kenya will continue to work with WFP and other partners to strengthen the programme. Currently, the priorities are to:

- strengthen the data and management information system through digitization of HGSF processes to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and accountability;
- provide training on implementing and managing the school meals programme for education officers, teachers and parent representatives;
- strengthen coordination structures at national, county and school levels; and
- take advantage of South-South Collaboration to strengthen its programme and share experiences with other countries. ■



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## Case study 4

### Tunisia: A sustainable school feeding strategy

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#### Ministry of Education

#### Government of Tunisia

Tunisia was among the first countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to establish a national school feeding programme: the programme was implemented just after the country's independence and following the first reform of the education system in 1958. The aim of the country's national school feeding programme was to ensure that all children receive primary education, particularly the most vulnerable living in rural areas, and to boost the nutrition status of students in primary school.

In 2020, the programme reached 260,000 schoolchildren (125,000 girls and 135,000 boys), in 2,500 primary schools (25 percent of children in 50 percent of primary schools). The programme, fully funded by the government, is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and is implemented under a highly decentralized model, whereby all food procurement and management is conducted at the school level. The budget of the national school feeding programme doubled in 2019, reaching US\$16 million per year. The Tunisian Government invested US\$1.7 million in the construction and equipment of a pilot central kitchen and development of a School Food Bank.

With the support of WFP, a sustainable school feeding strategy was adopted in 2014. The purpose of the strategy is to:

- strengthen regulatory frameworks and tools in the areas of governance, targeting, cost-effectiveness, nutritional quality of school meals, and safety, monitoring and evaluation;
- support the upgrading of the current decentralized school feeding model in certain schools to increase the system's capacity to provide nutritious and hot meals;
- support the management of new implementation methods that are effective, responsible and promote local development; and
- support the revitalization of school gardens as centres of nutrition and environmental education.

An innovative model was implemented, and piloted, using locally sourced foods for school meals, based on nutrition and hygiene guidelines, and delivered from a central kitchen to satellite schools.



In partnership with the National Nutrition Institute, Ministry of Health and WFP, nutritious, balanced meals were designed, contributing to a more diversified diet to address the double burden of malnutrition: micronutrient deficiencies leading to conditions such as anaemia, and obesity. Moreover, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, school gardens were created as hubs of nutrition and environmental education, as well as a complementary source of vegetables and fruits for school lunches, in line with a home-grown school feeding approach.

School feeding activities create jobs and generate profit for smallholder farmers, as well as for those involved in the transportation, processing and preparation of food along the school feeding supply chain. Such job creation in rural communities can provide off-farm income generation opportunities, many of which are filled by women. Off-farm investment may, in turn, further stimulate productivity and agricultural employment, producing a “virtuous cycle” benefitting long-term food security and improving welfare in rural households. Driven by the lessons learned and best practices stemming from the pilot experiences, the government plans to streamline this approach across schools participating in the school meals programme nationwide. The National School Feeding Programme (PNAS) also acts as a social protection mechanism for the schoolchildren reached.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, which forced the closure of all schools, students no longer received the meals on which they depended, which aggravated the already dire situation of poor families. These children will lose the protection of key vitamins and micronutrients they receive in the school meals, with negative impacts on their learning. Moreover, loss of food support in schools may compound health impacts at a time when staying healthy and keeping a strong immune system is particularly important.

As a response to COVID-19, an innovative and rapid solution was identified through flexible cash-based transfers (CBT) to reduce the human and social suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for those households of children that have not received school meals due to school closures. The objective was also to harmonize the school feeding database with the national social register and make sure food security and nutrition aspects are part of the targeting criteria of vulnerability. ■

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## Case study 5

### Lebanon: A school feeding programme in an emergency context

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**Niamh O’Grady**  
Evaluations Officer

WFP School-Based  
Programmes  
Service

The Evaluation of Emergency School Feeding Activities in Lebanon (2016-2019) is part of a four-country (Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Syria and Lebanon) Evaluation Series on School Feeding in Emergency or Fragile Contexts, commissioned by WFP and funded by Canada. The evaluation series promotes learning at the strategic and operational levels, both globally and in-country.

Data collection was based on a mixed-method approach, including a quantitative and qualitative survey along with interviews with key informants. The evaluation questions focused on:

1. The appropriateness of school feeding to the needs of boys and girls in the evolving crisis context.
2. The coherence of SF with the humanitarian response of WFP and other actors.
3. The effects of SF on education, food and nutrition security of boys and girls.
4. The effects of SF on the ability of households to cope with crises, and the effects on the local economy.
5. The additional effects of SF on social cohesion, psychosocial well-being and exposure to harmful practices (child labour, early marriage).
6. The creation of a sustainable system for SF in line with government priorities and capacities.

The presence of an estimated 1.5 million displaced Syrians in Lebanon has placed increased demands on infrastructure and basic services, and has exacerbated the vulnerability of the refugees. Concurrently, Lebanon is dealing with a deepening economic and social crisis resulting in increased vulnerability and poverty in Lebanese communities.

The evaluation found that school feeding in Lebanon has contributed to improved diet diversity, and reduced food insecurity and short-term hunger for both Lebanese and Syrian children. The design of the school feeding programme appropriately responded to the differing needs of both Lebanese and Syrian refugee children while recognizing the distinctions and similarities between both population groups.

The programme allowed for adjustments to contextual changes and the nutritional needs of beneficiaries. Evidence shows that the programme had a greater impact on food security for Syrian children where levels of food insecurity were higher.

School feeding has increased the retention of children in both morning and afternoon school shifts – especially the latter – and is positively influencing the enrolment rate of Syrian refugees. Schools where the school feeding interventions took place have reported improved retention rates, and the availability of school snacks provided an incentive for enrolment, although a multitude of social, economic, cultural and institutional barriers remain, putting students at risk of dropping out of school.

Targeting criteria emphasized reaching communities with a high concentration of vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee families. However, the weighting of gender-sensitive vulnerability or protection concerns was less evident when selecting the intervention schools in the eight governorates.

Coordination of educational efforts and sharing of information took place in the education sector working group. However, direct synergies or targeted complementary actions between school feeding and interventions implemented by other UN agencies and NGOs were limited. A link between a national school feeding programme and the wider national social protection system and strategy is not yet evident, largely because a nationwide, gender-sensitive social protection system is at a nascent stage.

There was no conclusive evidence that school feeding had a direct effect on negative coping strategies and there was limited evidence of impact on social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian children. However, the school snack distribution was perceived to instil a feeling of equality between children. In the nutrition summer camps, it was found that social cohesion did not happen automatically and that concerted efforts to bring together population groups from different nationalities or socioeconomic backgrounds were required. ■

# State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020

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Healthy and well-nourished children learn better. One of the most important human capital investments that a country can make is to support the health, nutrition and learning of its children. This publication by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) provides an analysis of how countries across the world are supporting their children through effective school feeding programmes.

In 2013, WFP published the first edition of *State of School Feeding Worldwide*, the first ever global snapshot of school feeding programmes. This 2020 version follows a similar format, using the best available data sources to describe key aspects of coverage, implementation practices and costs of programmes worldwide. This second edition seeks to analyse the direction and scale of change between 2013 and 2020. The award of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize has further strengthened WFP's commitment to deliver on the 10-year strategy *A Chance for Every Schoolchild*.

The 2020 edition is being published with an even greater sense of urgency as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020 brought an end to a near-decade of sustained global growth in school feeding programmes. At the height of the crisis, 199 countries had closed their schools and 370 million children were suddenly deprived of their daily school meal. This shock has highlighted the importance of school feeding as a social safety net, and has sharpened global resolve to restore access to education and to create school-based programmes that can play a stronger role in protecting the health and nutrition of children.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to one in every two schoolchildren every school day, more than at any time in human history. This publication examines how this most extensive social safety net in the world was created, and explores how countries can build-back-better and re-establish effective school feeding programmes.

The full publication is available online at [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)



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