



World Food  
Programme

## **WFP Brief: School Feeding**

July 2001

**WFP Global School  
Feeding Campaign**

*Into School, Out of Hunger*

*Currently some 300 million children are chronically hungry in the world and 130 million of these do not go to school. About 60 percent of those not in school are girls. Without an adequate education, most of these children will never be able to break out of the cycle of hunger and poverty.*

## Global Poverty Alleviation through Basic Education

The benefits of education on economic growth and its contribution to increased productivity have been demonstrated. Investments in human capital, particularly in education, are more conducive to economic growth than investments in physical capital. Both society at large and individuals benefit from basic education.

Basic education, especially for women and girls, is thus among the most effective investments that governments and donors can make to improve the physical, social and economic conditions of the poor. For example, a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute concluded in February 2000 that women's education and their resulting higher status "have contributed to more than half of the 1970-95 reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition in developing countries". In developing countries the returns on investments in education are higher than in more advanced countries; the greatest returns are for primary schools.

Even the developed world has taken advantage of school feeding. Many countries have had or continue to run nation-wide or targeted school feeding projects. Japan and the US are among these examples as well as numerous European countries.

## Benefits of Girls' Education

The benefits education brings to economic and social development are particularly high especially when girls are educated. As literacy rates rise, the percentage of women in the work force increases. There are also clearly established inverse correlations between increases in female literacy and declining fertility and infant mortality rates. As the educational level of a population increases, the chances of living a healthy, productive life rise. This was illustrated in a survey of 106 developing countries, where strong, positive correlations between adult literacy rates and life expectancy at birth were found.

It has also been understood by the development community for more than 20 years that education of girls to just the primary school level has significant, positive and long-term outcomes:

- Each added year of schooling for a mother results in a 5 to 10 percent decrease in mortality among her children;
- Educated women reduce their family size. UN studies show that illiterate girls marry as early as 11 years of age and may have up to seven children before they are 18. In the developing world today, there are 100 million needy young mothers and pre-school infants and children;
- In contrast, girls who go to school marry later, practice greater restraint in spacing births and have an average of 2.9 children. More educated and mature mothers are also better equipped to rear their children.

## School Feeding as a Catalyst for Education for All

Providing a nutritious breakfast or lunch to children at school can help solve hunger and improve learning. When children no longer need to worry about food, they can concentrate on their lessons. With enough food to learn and thrive, they are more likely to stay in school longer. When food is available at school, attendance rates increase significantly. Parents are more inclined to send their children because they know their children will get at least one solid meal during the day, and it will add savings to the family budget.

In emergencies or protracted relief operations, school feeding (even in "makeshift" schools) is extremely important in several ways. Firstly, the feeding is a critical source of nutrition for children. Secondly, the school provides a healthier emotional environment for children whose normal lives have been disrupted; and allows schooling to continue during a period when precious school time would otherwise be lost, handicapping the child in the future.

### Focus on Girls

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, WFP has placed the needs and interests of women and girls at the heart of its activities. Education occupies an essential position in this context. WFP's "Commitments to Women," made at the Beijing Conference, include a provision for WFP to target 50 percent of its education resources within a country to girls.

Realising that traditional school feeding, WFP's standard mode of educational support, was often insufficient to reach this target and to close the gender gap in education, the agency developed an innovative way of using food aid to help educate girls. Basic

food items, like a sack of rice, are distributed to families in exchange for the schooling of their daughters. Such "take-home rations" compensate parents for the loss of their daughters' labour and enable girls to attend school. The results are impressive. For example:

- A take-home ration programme for girls' education was launched in Pakistan in 1994. At assisted schools in the Northwest Frontier Province, between 1994 and 1998, the enrollment of girls increased by 247 percent. In Balochistan, the increase was close to 200 percent. Student attendance and dropout rates were also positively affected.
- In Morocco, new entries of girls in first grade doubled over a two-year period under a similar programme. In one province covered by the project, girls now comprise 43 percent of total primary enrollment, whereas in the early 1990s, only one in ten students was a girl.
- In Niger, one of the five countries in the world where children have the lowest chance of receiving an education, the distribution of take-home rations has produced positive effects on girls' enrollment. At schools with the take-home ration programme, girls' enrollment increased by 75 percent after food distributions started.
- In a Masai town of Kajiado, in Kenya, a teacher from the local community where the school is located recounted to visiting WFP officials in March 2001 that in 1995 there were only a total of 98 enrolled pupils (64 boys, 34 girls). But with the introduction of school feeding, the number grew to 231 pupils in 1999 (78 girls and 100 boys in the primary school; 21 girls and 32 boys in the pre-primary school).
- In one of the poorest regions of Kenya, the Turkana region, the Minister of Education attested (also in March 2001) that girls' attendance increased by 130 percent and boys' attendance

by 60 percent within one year after the introduction of the school feeding programme.

Currently, such programmes are operational or under preparation in 16 countries in almost all parts of the developing world.

### New Help for HIV/AIDS Orphans

As is now widely recognized, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is having a devastating impact on developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the myriad effects the disease has had on poor societies, one of the most tragic has been on children. It is estimated that 13 million children worldwide have become orphans because their parents have succumbed to AIDS.

In many cases, these children are left to fend for themselves. Similar to war orphans, they must often earn money for the family and care for younger siblings. Sometimes they are taken in by relatives, neighbors, or foster homes. Many of these are poor households themselves. In urban areas, orphans often live on the streets and, in some cases become petty criminals or commercial sex workers. Surviving in the most desperate situations, they are exploited and left to scrounge for food. For these children, schooling is rarely an option.

Building on the success of its take-home rations and school feeding projects for girls, WFP is implementing a similar strategy for orphans of war and HIV/AIDS. Already the agency manages projects for these children in Uganda, Zambia, Kenya and Cambodia.

In these projects, WFP provides food to street children and orphans while they receive vocational training that will help them get jobs. Or the agency offers school meals to attract street children to class. As these activities are expanded, WFP will also implement projects in which the agency provides take-home rations at school to encourage the poor families caring for orphans to continue to do so.

This type of WFP assistance will help both to improve the orphans' school attendance and to support the families and institutions that provide them care and shelter. As HIV/AIDS unfortunately is expected to continue to produce more orphaned children around the world, WFP is working hard with donors and other partners to rapidly expand its operations to ensure that these children will also receive food and education.

### Other benefits

- Improvement of hygienic standards, by promoting hand-washing, hygienically acceptable food preparation, appropriate use of latrines/toilets;
- Enhancement of health through de-worming and other health treatments – in partnerships with other UN agencies and charity groups. De-worming is necessary to free children of intestinal worms which inhibit the absorption of nutrients into the body and cause anemia;
- Promotion of community spirit and participation – parents and teachers are encouraged to play a key role in planning and managing school feeding programmes, and also contribute cash or provide complementary food commodities (such as perishables) whenever possible;
- Children's early exposure to concepts of healthy food production and consumption – through participation in school gardens, education on nutrition, etc.;
- Increased opportunity for Rome-based international organizations to work together to create synergy around schools. For instance, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) may assist in school gardens and provide handtools while the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) could arrange for microcredit for women and small businesses that produce and process food in communities where WFP provides school meals.

## Nutrition and School Feeding

School feeding provides food for hungry children and boosts enrollment, attendance, and the ability to concentrate. These are the factors that determine the success of school feeding, and can be demonstrated as directly resulting from school feeding interventions. In addition, there is no doubt that getting food to the undernourished is a necessary first step towards better nutrition. In emergencies, the direct link between feeding and nutrition can be demonstrated.

On the other hand, the measurement of changes in nutritional status directly attributed to school feeding interventions in development situations is not as easily demonstrated. This is simply because it is difficult to isolate the impact of school feeding from other factors that determine the nutritional status of school children. Other factors that can influence the nutritional status of school children include parasites (especially intestinal worms), environmental conditions, and diseases.



## Ration Composition and Food Distribution

The composition and size of the rations in individual projects are determined by the availability of government and WFP commodities and resources, and bearing in mind the nutritional requirements of school children.

WFP supports school feeding with some combination of the following commodities:

- cereals: maize (whole or meal), wheat flour, bulgar wheat, sorghum or rice
- pulses: beans, lentils or peas
- canned fish or meat
- vegetable oil
- sugar
- fortified blended foods (BF) such as corn soy blend (CSB)
- fortified biscuits

The commodities can be delivered to beneficiary schools as they are received, to be prepared at the school. Or, they may be locally processed before their delivery (e.g. into the form of bread or biscuits). These two methods are the most common and most encouraged forms of delivering WFP-provided food.

In special circumstances, exchanging the WFP-provided commodity for locally produced food (e.g. donated wheat or oil "exchanged" for local rice) may be desirable. WFP does not recommend monetization (the sale of the commodity for cash which is then used for purchasing food or other inputs) for school feeding operations. This is discouraged unless the commodities are used in exchange or as payment for required processing or for preparation of food to meet nutritional requirements or local eating preferences. This option should only be considered when there is no viable alternative, when cost-effective, and when not damaging to local markets.

## WFP and School Feeding

For 38 years, WFP has provided nutritious meals to schoolchildren in poor countries around the world. Working with national governments, local authorities and non-governmental organizations, WFP uses food as a direct input to attract children to school in areas where enrollment ratios are the lowest. It is in these poor schools that WFP sets up canteens where hot food and nutritional snacks are provided to students.

In 2000, WFP fed over 12 million children in schools in 54 countries.

Food alone is not enough to make school feeding effective. Strengthening existing partnerships and forming new ones are envisaged to contribute to the goals of *Education for All*. This is a valuable opportunity for creating a synergy with numerous other inputs to be made available by other organizations and agencies.

The agency has already established school feeding partnerships with UNESCO, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and a large number of Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and is in discussions with UNICEF and FAO, among others, to maximize the positive effect of school feeding.

UNESCO, for example, is assisting WFP in the development of a study that evaluates the countries where WFP has phased out or phased down school feeding activities to better determine those factors that contribute to long-term sustainability.

In Spring 2001, WFP, WHO, the World Bank and the Canadian Government partnered with seven African governments to provide de-worming treatments to school children.

## Sustainability

An important objective of WFP school feeding is to serve as a catalyst for governments and communities to take concrete steps to improve the lives of their citizens.

The agency works with poor governments to make education a national priority and to create the infrastructure, management systems and policies needed to support sustainable educational systems. In addition to providing infrastructure and resources, the national government is expected to draw up a realistic management plan. This includes gradually increasing its financial or food contribution and eventually assuming full operational responsibility.

Provision for the sustainability of school feeding is built into WFP's approach:

- From the beginning, it is clear that assistance through the school feeding initiative (SFI) is timebound. In the case of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), proposals for up to 5 years initially are considered. If resources are available, and governments show concrete evidence of their commitment to *Education for All*, a further proposal may be put forward to continue support for up to 10 years. Relatively richer countries are eligible for support of shorter duration;
- Host governments are expected to contribute, within their means, and to put forward a realistic plan to increase gradually their contribution and eventually assume full responsibility (an "exit strategy");
- Technical support through the SFI may be appropriate to enable governments to build technical capacity to sustain school feeding.

More than 12 countries, including Brazil, Namibia, Swaziland, Mauritius, and Morocco, have "graduated" from WFP school feeding projects, taking over the operations themselves.



In some cases, however, national governments are unable to demonstrate their commitment to school feeding due to emergency conditions. While there is no substitute for that national commitment, WFP feels that even when the national government situation is not ideal, hungry children should have access to food and education. Basic steps may still be taken which contribute to viable national systems over the longer term. Thus, provision is made for WFP school feeding activities in some emergency and protracted relief situations where full government support is not possible.

WFP also creates partnerships at the schools themselves, with parents, teachers and local officials. The agency enlists their time, materials and when possible, also their money.

Parents' associations have proven to be a key to community participation. As a general rule, the essential services required for school feeding – cooks, kitchen helpers, guards – should be covered by the community, either by providing such services itself or by contributing cash to pay for the services. Other examples of ways that the community might participate

are: 1) construction of simple school canteens; 2) assistance in delivery and storage of commodities; or 3) contributions in cash or kind to school canteens.

In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, school canteens receiving WFP food aid operate largely thanks to parent-teacher associations (PTAs). For a school to qualify for WFP support, parents must organise an association and then build a kitchen and storeroom. The PTA then hires cooks and manages the canteen's food stocks. Moreover, all but the poorest families pay a daily contribution that covers part of the cost of the canteen's operation.

In other countries, parents provide fresh vegetables or other ingredients to the canteens and often take turns cooking or transporting food to the school. Often, WFP organises groups of local women to manage the canteens and food service. Parents also take responsibility for repairs to classrooms and the building of new facilities.

## Cost Effectiveness and Strategic Importance of School Feeding

Further to the positive impact already described, the low average running cost is an additional advantage of school feeding. Among the development projects in school feeding supported by WFP in 2000, the lowest cost per child per day was 5 cents (US\$) and the average cost was at 19 cents (US\$), (WFP; 2001).

These costs are all-inclusive ranging from the values of all food commodities provided by WFP, costs of transportation and monitoring, to internationally- and locally-recruited personnel.

In addition to cost-effectiveness, WFP's development projects (including school feeding) are strategically important

for immediate response to emergencies. Because WFP has pre-positioned stocks, staff, and working arrangements to support its ongoing development activities in each region, these resources can be quickly mobilized when emergencies arise. This can save precious days or weeks of response time. This approach has proven particularly useful in drought situations to meet the increased need of a larger number of children without instituting a new project. For instance, in Kenya and Lesotho, WFP expanded the coverage of school feeding through its emergency operations.

The development programme stocks are replenished/re-paid when the emergency supplies begin to arrive.

## Measurement of Impact

In 2001, WFP is conducting a comprehensive study of national school feeding programmes, beginning with those countries receiving resources from the recent US donation. By doing so, WFP will record the current status of school feeding worldwide and be able to follow the ensuing changes in a simple but user-friendly format. It is intended to be available for viewing by policy-makers and the general public. This will be a shared asset in furthering the objectives of school feeding as well as education for all, and eventually the economic and social development through school feeding.

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WFP provided nutritious meals to 12.3 million children in 54 countries in 2000:

Afghanistan  
Algeria  
Benin  
Bhutan  
Bolivia  
Burkina Faso  
Cambodia  
Cameroon  
Cape Verde  
Central African Republic  
Chad  
Colombia  
Côte D'Ivoire  
Dominican Republic  
Djibouti  
East Timor  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Eritrea  
Ethiopia  
Gambia  
Ghana  
Guinea  
Guinea Bissau  
Haiti  
Honduras  
India  
Indonesia  
Iran  
Kenya  
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of  
Lesotho  
Liberia  
Malawi  
Mali  
Madagascar  
Mauritania  
Morocco  
Mozambique  
Nepal  
Nicaragua  
Niger  
Pakistan  
Peru  
Sao Tome and Principe  
Senegal  
Sierra Leone  
Somalia  
Sudan  
Tanzania, United Republic of  
Tajikistan  
Uganda  
Yemen  
Zambia

Top 10 donors to WFP development projects with a school feeding component:

United States  
  
Canada  
  
Germany  
  
Norway  
  
Denmark  
  
Italy  
  
Japan  
  
Finland  
  
Australia  
  
Netherlands

Top 10 donors to WFP emergency and protracted relief operations with school feeding components:

United States  
  
Japan  
  
European Union  
  
United Kingdom  
  
Australia  
  
Germany  
  
Kenya  
  
Netherlands  
  
Canada  
  
Italy



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[www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org)

or contact:

WFP Public Affairs Service  
Via Cesare Giulio Viola, 68/70 - 00148 Rome, Italy  
Tel.: +39-066513-2628 • Fax: +39-066513-2840  
E-mail: [schoolfeeding@wfp.org](mailto:schoolfeeding@wfp.org)