

Global Status of School Meals

Objectives and Program Abstract

- Understand the extent to which the nutritional quality of food consumed by children at school is an international concern.
- Learn why governments are increasingly investing in school meals, home-grown school feeding programs and other nutrition and health-related actions.
- Recognize the progress countries have made to improve meals and subsequent health outcomes for students.

The nutritional quality of food consumed by children at school is an international concern. School meals are an investment in the next generation, helping ensure every child has access to education, health and nutrition.

Meals provided during to children during the time they attend school are well-recognized as a social safety net. An estimated 368 million children globally receive a meal at school every day (World Food Program). Governments are increasingly investing in school meals, home-grown school feeding programs and other nutrition and health-related actions to advance education, health, nutrition and environmental sustainability goals, as well as economic and agricultural productivity and intergenerational well-being.

Childhood undernutrition can lower learning capacities and educational outcomes, compromising children's futures and perpetuating a generational cycle of poverty and malnutrition, with negative consequences on individuals, communities and nations.

Nutritional standards for school lunches are one of several important tools to ensure nutritional quality of school lunches. Such standards can be nutrient or food-based. This presentation will look at what countries all over the world are doing to meet the school nutrition needs of their students. It will place a special emphasis on how these programs have changed and what initiatives they have employed to improve meals and subsequent health outcomes for students. Examples of such initiatives are farm to school, restricting the type of food sold in vending machines and mandatory nutrition education.

The discussion will also include The World Food Program's emergency school feeding program, which is an integral component of recovery operations and a safety net in emergency situations and provides school meals to children in emergency and post-emergency areas in 24 countries.