



# World Food Programme School Meals and Education

School meals programmes promote educational outcomes by enabling more children to attend class consistently and improving children's ability to learn once they are there. The shape and scope of a school meals programme depends on the context and government objectives. Priorities may include health and nutrition improvements and local economic development along with educational outcomes. School meals can play a clear role in promoting global food security, nutrition and education goals. When emergencies arise, a school meals programme can help to ensure that an entire generation does not go without an education. This is why WFP prioritises school meals programmes, providing meals, snacks and/or take-home rations to almost 17 million children in 2015.

## Access

We know that the incentive of a school meal or take-home ration gets children to school and keeps them returning. Given that in 2013 there were 124 million children between the ages of 6-15 out of school, it is essential that we use every tool we have to make an impact. Global analyses have shown that the introduction of school meals programmes within a given country can increase attendance and enrolment significantly. For example, from 2012-2014,

school meals programmes in Kenya helped increase attendance by 7 percent. In Madagascar, during a two-year period, attendance rates increased from 88 percent to 98 percent, showing school meals' potential to promote universal education. Take-home rations are key incentives to keeping children, especially adolescent girls, in school. They have proven to reduce dropout rates by over 40 percent. Given that this is an especially hard group to reach and looking at the multi-generational benefits of educating girls, school meals are uniquely situated to create lasting impacts.

## Cognitive Development

School meals programmes provide nutritional benefits that contribute to both learning and health outcomes. They help ensure that children are not too hungry or malnourished to learn, once they reach a classroom. One way to achieve this is to fortify school meals with essential nutrients such as iron. A study in rural China showed that students who received iron in meals at school scored higher on math exams.<sup>1</sup> In Uganda, both take-home rations and meals helped reduce anaemia by 20 percent for adolescent girls.<sup>2</sup> Nutritional benefits can even extend to entire families with the provision of take-home rations, which have been shown to boost younger siblings' nutritional status.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luo Renfu, Yaojiang Shi, Linxiu Zhang, Chengfang Liu, Scott Rozelle, Brian Sharbono, Ai Yue, Qiran Zhao, Reynaldo Martorell. 2012. Nutrition and Educational Performance in Rural China's Elementary Schools: Results of a Randomized Control Trial in Shaanxi Province. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 60 (4). 735-772.

<sup>2</sup> Adelman, Sarah, Harold Alderman, Daniel O. Gilligan and Joseph Konde-Lule. 2015. Addressing Anemia through School Feeding Programs: Experimental Evidence from Northern Uganda. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.

<sup>3</sup> Kazianga, H., D. de Walque, and H. Alderman. 2014. "School Feeding Programs, Intrahousehold Allocation and the Nutrition of Siblings: Evidence from a Randomized Trial in Rural Burkina Faso." *Journal of Development Economics* 106:15-34.

## Lasting Economic Benefits

The economic benefits stemming from the educational and nutritional outcomes provided by school meals last a lifetime. School meals programmes have proven to be cost-efficient interventions, especially when combined with related educational programmes. A sample of ten countries providing school meals, take-home rations or biscuits, showed that every US\$1 invested brought a US\$3 to US\$8 economic return from improved health and education among schoolchildren and increased productivity when they become working adults. Evidence like this helps encourage governments to invest in school meals, creating sustainable programmes with pervasive results. When school meals programmes use local products, this provides additional benefits for smallholder farmers and communities and supports rural economies.

## Education in Emergencies

Education is critical during emergencies and protracted crises. Schools can protect the children from conflict and related risks. Depending on their age, children risk health or developmental problems, early marriage, labour exploitation, recruitment into armed forces, or radicalisation.

Affected communities systematically identify education and food among the top priorities in times of crisis. By providing school meals and take-home rations, which both offset the cost of school fees and increase food security, school feeding programmes are essential elements in the 2030 agenda. School meals have proved to enhance access when many other systems break down during emergencies. They are especially helpful in encouraging children to attend informal schools when classrooms aren't available. In Malawi, during the recent flood, classes were held under trees. In 2015, WFP provided school meals to 6.5 million

children in emergency and post-emergency areas in 24 countries.

In Syria, UNICEF and WFP plan to expand the Self-Learning Programme that supports outside-classroom learning. The programme particularly targets out-of-school children involved in child labour. To support their families and address poverty and food insecurity at the household level, WFP provides cash conditional on the school attendance and snacks to 315,000 children in pre-primary and primary schools. The aim is to reach 500,000 children by the end of 2016.

The new framework of action for WFP's response to education in emergencies will call for new partnerships. While in acute crises and conflict-prone countries WFP will continue working with governments as its main partners. Additionally, working with UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR and NGOs, in areas where systems are in place and need to be strengthened or can be used in response to crisis, WFP will increasingly work with the ILO, the World Bank and other agencies working in social protection and education.

### Facts and figures in 2015:

**WFP provided meals, snacks and/or take-home rations to 16.9 million children.**

**WFP's school meals presence, whether through direct support or technical assistance, was in 72 countries, almost every country in which WFP works.**

**WFP fed children in 63,000 schools worldwide.**

