

Impact Evaluation of WFP School Feeding Programmes in Kenya: a mixed method approach

Context

Kenya is an oil-importing, food-deficit country, which ranks 147th out of 179 on the UNDP's Human Development Index 2009. It is at the lower end of the middle-income class of countries but exhibits great variability in agro-ecological characteristics, livelihood systems and income levels. 80% of its almost 40 million people live in rural areas, but most of the land is not suitable for rain-fed agriculture and is subject to severe drought. Kenya imports 20% of its cereal needs (2009). The largest pockets of vulnerability to hunger are concentrated in regions with arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), which account for two thirds of the total land mass. While national net primary school enrolment figures rose from 77% in 2002 to 92% in 2009, the increase in the North East region in the ASAL's was from 17% to 29%.

School Meals

WFP is the largest implementer of school feeding programmes in the world. In 2008, globally, it reached an average of 22 million children in school in around 70 countries. WFP's school meals programme in Kenya is one of the largest and most long-standing (since 1980). From 1999 onwards, responding to increased frequency of food crises resulting from drought and political violence and to the introduction of free compulsory primary education in 2003, the programme in Kenya expanded significantly, peaking at 1.85 million children in over 5,000 schools. In 2008, the Government of Kenya took over responsibility for half the programme, while WFP focused on providing meals in primary schools with the lowest education indicators in the most food insecure part of the country (the ASAL's and urban slums of Nairobi & Mombasa). Government of Kenya commitment to education is high. A new programme of Home-Grown School Feeding and a new policy on School Health and Nutrition herald an integrated, cross-sectoral approach, including commitment to providing a 'balanced' meal at school.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation was the first in a series on school feeding, assessing the outcomes & impact achieved in relation to:

- (a) stated educational, gender and nutritional objectives; and
- (b) WFP's new social safety net objectives, not explicitly intended in past programme design.

The evaluation was also to identify changes needed to meet objectives of Government of Kenya policy, WFP's Strategic Plan (2008-2013) and the new WFP School Feeding Policy (2009).

The evaluation covered the period 1999-2008 and was carried out between May and December 2009 by a team of independent evaluators. The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in June 2010.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Results: education & learning

Enrolment rates were on average 28% higher in schools that offered school meals, than in those that did not. The difference was even more marked in the early grades. The rate of completion of primary school was also higher in schools offering school meals, especially for girls, and a higher percentage of children from primary schools that offered meals moved on to secondary school after graduating. School meals had a positive effect on attendance rates and on scores in exams in the final year of primary school. Educational outcomes were more positive in urban areas than in rural semi-arid and arid areas. In schools with nearly as many women teachers as men, the number of girls and boys are also closer to parity.

However, school meals do not reverse the significant drop in primary school completion rates and attendance rates in the last two years of primary school, as students reach puberty. The problem occurs nationwide and is worse in schools without school meals. Nevertheless, in arid and pastoralist semi-arid areas – even with school meals – most students do not finish primary school; among those who do finish, few move on to secondary school, thus reducing the potential for a successful career pathway.

Gender objectives are being achieved for enrolment and attendance, but not for completion of primary school in the targeted areas where the social, cultural and economic constraints on girls' education are extensive.

Results: nutrition

School meals did make a significant and positive contribution to reducing students' hunger and improving nutritional intake. The evaluation assessed the value of the school meal in meeting the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of energy, protein, Vitamin A, iron and iodine. Less than 10% of children surveyed had consumed the RDA of the target nutrients (except Vitamin A) in the previous day. School meals accounted for more than half of the RDA attained by 40% of students. Qualitative methods reinforced the finding that school lunch provided the largest meal of the day for many children and, frequently, the only meal. School staff and parents also noted that regular school meals improved children's health, reduced the incidence of illness and increased attentiveness and interest of students in class.

So, while school meals provide important access to nutritious food, they do not compensate for inadequate dietary intake at home, especially among poor rural children. Further, many households prepare less food at home when a child receives a meal at school.

Results: safety nets

School meals were found to provide multiple safety nets in Kenya. Reduced food purchase represents a direct cash saving of between 4% and 9% of annual household income through. School meals also encourage parents to leave their children in school for the entire day, which frees up the parents' time. Almost 30% of households – and even more in urban areas – use this time for income-earning activities. In addition, when children graduate from school and obtain stable livelihoods, there is a strong pattern of assisting the household from which they came – a deeply rooted commitment widely acknowledged by households surveyed. In so far as school meals increase primary school completion rates, this contributes to the likelihood

Factors affecting the results

The physical and learning environments of the school are critical complements to the school meal. They are frequently deficient, thus reducing the health and learning outcomes.

Key elements of the WFP-UNICEF Essential Package, which addresses the school physical environment, were widely absent. First, there is a widespread lack of potable water, washing facilities and adequate latrines. Food is not prepared when there is insufficient water. A second priority element is the use of fuel-efficient cooking facilities in sheltered structures. Currently, the provision of water and firewood has fallen to students and parents. The integration of these elements of the Essential Package requires a much greater level of institutional collaboration that WFP has been able to mobilize in the past.

The quality of the learning environment and the inadequate level of parental involvement are also key constraints. In schools with meals, lack of teacher time, study space and school materials is exacerbated by the higher student population, class size and lower student-teacher ratio. The current School Management Committees do not systematically promote community participation other than to exact contributions (water, labour, money) from parents.

WFP field staff were generally found to be highly skilled and dedicated. However, the current monitoring system focuses on management of food stocks (outputs) without attention to the contextual factors that constrain the effectiveness of school feeding (outcomes and impact).

The impact chain

School meals play a major role in attracting children to school, especially at an early age. The evaluation calls this the “**magnet effect**”. With adequate school infrastructure and a conducive learning environment, a “**catalyst effect**” can occur: students acquire a love of learning and begin to perceive optional pathways in life. As a child approaches puberty, his or her value to the household becomes significantly greater than the direct value of school meals and there are economic and, in some areas, cultural pressures for a child to abandon education. Children who pursued education often did so because of a supportive family or community environment or because of the intercession of a “well-wisher”, such as a non-governmental organization, an individual, or other basis of support – an “**enabling effect**”.

Conclusion

The WFP school feeding programme has targeted the most vulnerable populations, developed effective partnerships with Government of Kenya and systematically adjusted operations to meet changing needs in a timely manner. The programme is coherent with Government priorities on education and health.

However, the benefits of school feeding are limited if separated from the larger context of learning, health and livelihoods. School feeding programmed in isolation without an appropriate learning environment and family or community support is insufficient to achieve WFP’s objectives of healthy educated children. In order to justify investments and meet objectives, the school feeding programme must take better account of social, economic and cultural constraints.

Cooperation between institutions across sectors is necessary to maximise the gains achieved through school meals and increase the value of food provided. The Government of Kenya has taken important steps in this direction by integrating improved health practices into the school context and by introducing Home-Grown School Feeding. WFP is well-positioned to contribute significantly to this process.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Re-orient the field monitoring system to include indicators of the school environment that affect the effectiveness of school meals, such as seasonal lack of firewood and water, student-teacher ratios, sudden changes in enrolment (e.g. due to violence). WFP Country Office can then anticipate when problems are likely to occur, where, and develop response strategies with other development actors in the district.

Recommendation 2. Consider piloting a fortified morning biscuit in the particularly vulnerable ASAL schools and evaluate the intervention rigorously (with a baseline and control group).

Recommendation 3. With partners, initiate an advocacy campaign in which “graduates” from participating communities support scholarships for girls with high potential to attend secondary school. This would address the cultural dissonance between a traditional life pathway and an education pathway.

Recommendation 4. Introduce mentoring programmes for school administrators, teachers and parent members of School Management Committees from the best-performing schools to share their best practices with poorer-performing schools and create mechanisms of mutual support.

Recommendation 5. With partners, integrate food-based activities to improve the school environment and encourage community participation, building on past experience of the same. Activities should be based on needs identified under Recommendation 1, such as protection of water sources and dining hall construction. This will make the school a community resource where training sessions on health and hygiene or animal husbandry can be organised by WFP partners.

Recommendation 6 (to be implemented in collaboration with other institutions). As a priority within the Essential Package, move to develop a school water strategy with Government of Kenya partners, sister UN agencies NGOs and donors linking in to existing programmes, such as the Child-Friendly Schools initiative (UNICEF) and the water, sanitation and hygiene programme (WASH).

Recommendation 7 (to be implemented in collaboration with other institutions). Develop comprehensive integrated strategies to maximize the development impacts of the school meal, building on the new model for collaboration that exists between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation. WFP should move to expand the mandate of existing inter-sectoral working groups of which WFP is a member, such as the School Nutrition and Health group in the Ministry of Education.

- Taking advantage of the Kenya Educational Sector Support Programme (KESSP) II, propose a needs assessment of all primary schools in the country, beginning in the ASALs and urban slums. This should build on the current educational management information system and add indicators of school infrastructure. This would form the basis of an integrated approach to health and education through school feeding.
- Use school feeding to enhance the status of the school as part of the community. Food brings children to school and can also bring parents and other community members to school for adult learning and sharing. Such approaches have been successful in Afghanistan, Brazil, Sierra Leone and Honduras.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation and the Management Response are available at:
<http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation>

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