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# School Meal Programs Around the World

Report Based on the Global Survey of  
School Meal Programs ©



# About GCNF

## A Global Community to Nourish Children

The Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF) brings together a committed community of governments, civil society, and the private sector to ensure that hunger is not a barrier to learning for any child. Together we advocate for school feeding programs as a powerful investment in every child's human capital; share innovations, challenges, and lessons learned among our peers; and provide support through forging valuable partnerships and connecting resources to meet the needs of our network members.

We achieve this through the **Global Survey of School Meal Programs** ©, by connecting leaders of school meal programs at the annual **Global Child Nutrition Forum** and regional learning exchanges, and by supporting governments and civil society to strengthen school meal policies and programs. It is the strength of our community and our growing partnerships that have helped GCNF to grow and support increased access to nutritious school meals around the world.



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# About the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©

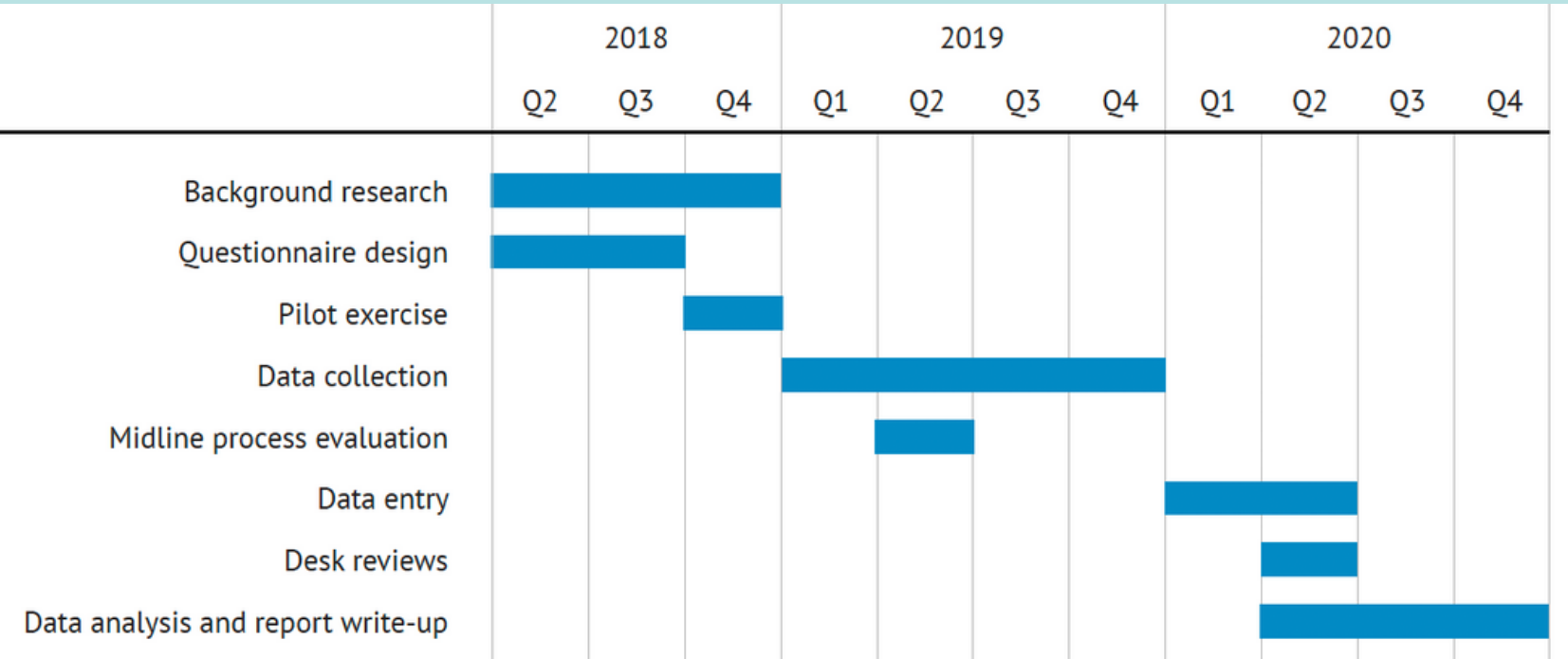
# Methodology for the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©

The Global Survey of School Meal Programs © is a set of standardized questions using standardized definitions, asked of all the countries surveyed across the globe, about large-scale school feeding programs, that is to be conducted every 2 to 3 years.

## Sections

- A Pre-survey filter questions
- B National context
- C Program overview
- D Design and implementation
- E Food sourcing
- F Governance and leadership
- G Funding and budgeting
- H Agriculture, employment, & community participation
- I School-based emergency feeding
- J Education system and infrastructure
- K Successes and challenges

## Timeline



- Governments identified survey focal points to work with GCNF to complete the survey.
- 22 experts reviewed core content, 10 reviewed the questionnaire
- Reviewers were from AUDA (NEPAD), FAO, IFPRI, PCD, USDA, WFP, 5 universities, private sector partners, and GCNF's Board



# The Global Survey of School Meal Programs © Report

Chapter 1	<b>Coverage of School Meal Programs</b>
Chapter 2	<b>Characteristics of Beneficiaries and Components of the School Meal Programs</b>
Chapter 3	<b>Food Baskets and Food Sources</b>
Chapter 4	<b>Funding and Costs</b>
Chapter 5	<b>Management and Implementation</b>
Chapter 6	<b>Health and Nutrition</b>
Chapter 7	<b>Infrastructure</b>
Chapter 8	<b>Agriculture, Employment, and Community Participation</b>
Chapter 9	<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>
Chapter 10	<b>Program Sustainability</b>
Chapter 11	<b>Successes and Challenges</b>



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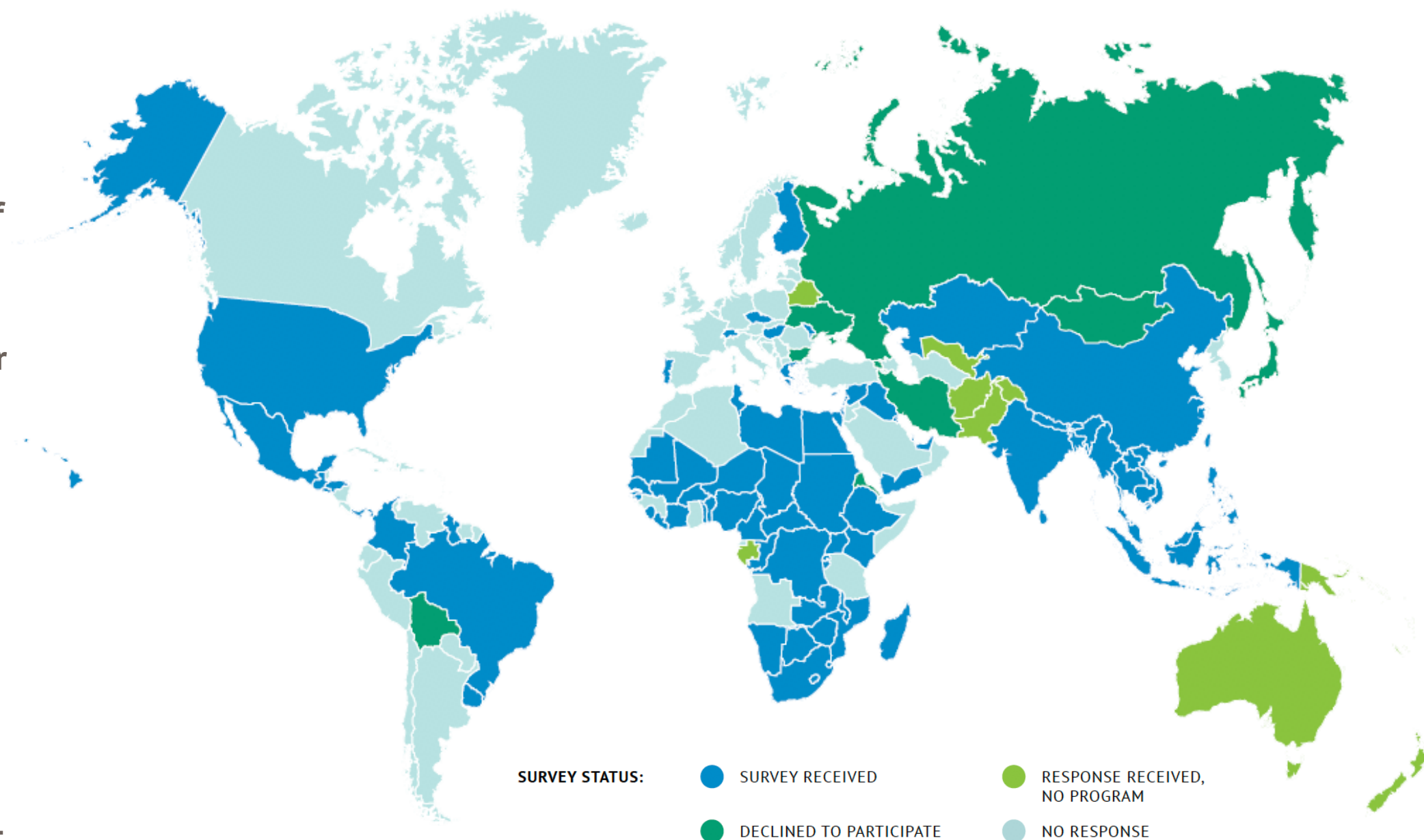
# Rationale for the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©



# A Global Database on the Current State of School Feeding

The Global Survey of School Meal Programs © fills a void by establishing a comprehensive global database of school meal programs.

- Provides a systematically updated view of the current state of school feeding programs around the world.
- Equips countries to share survey information and advocate for their school meal programs with global stakeholders.
- Facilitates knowledge sharing among countries.
- Identifies trends, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Strengthens country level data collection and monitoring.
- Provides data to the public in the global effort to strengthen research on the child and adolescent health and development.



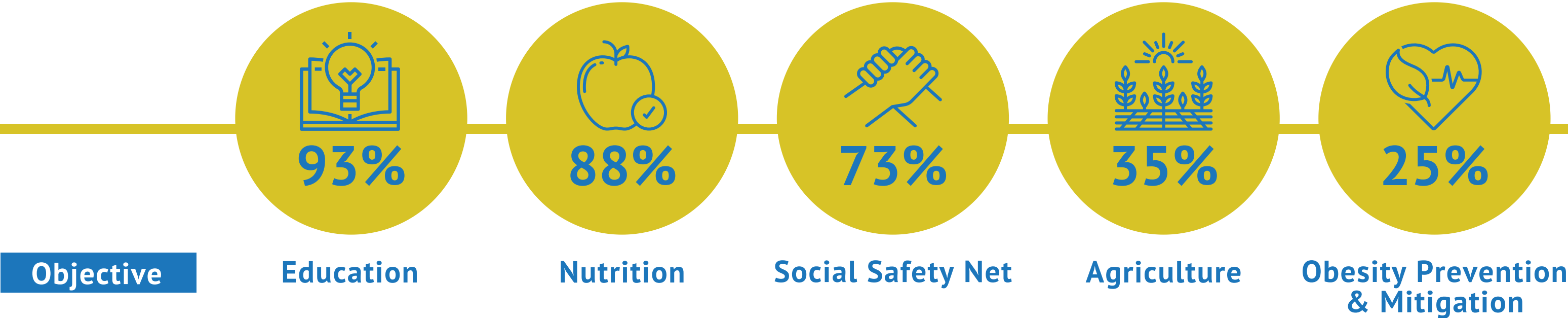
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# What did we learn?



# School Meals Enhance Human Capital

By investing in school feeding programs, countries are making transformative human capital investments, ensuring children are well-nourished and ready to learn, and are able to fulfill their potential as healthy, skilled, productive adults.



## School Feeding Provides Multiple Benefits

The Global Survey of School Meal Programs © found that nearly all programs were designed to meet educational goals and 88% aimed to meet nutritional and/or health goals. It was also common, at 73%, for programs to serve as a social safety net, providing food for poor or vulnerable children and offsetting household costs for their families.

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Governments across the world must invest in grey matter infrastructure; the infrastructure that helps brains grow from nutrition; the infrastructure that builds the healthy and productive workforce of the future.

DR. AKINWUMI ADESINA, PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK  
2017 GENE WHITE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT



# School Meals Provide and Promote Nutrition

The first 1,000 days of life is a critical window for establishing a strong foundation for a child's lifelong health, but in order for a child to achieve her full potential as an adult, the focus must expand to cover her first 8,000 days. School feeding is a powerful and practical tool for the nutrition of children and adolescents, with lasting impact for subsequent generations.

88%

of surveyed school meal programs cited [improved nutrition](#) among their objectives.

66%

of countries reported having [nutrition laws, policies, and/or standards](#) linked to their school meal program.

91%

of programs reported they provided [nutrition education](#).

59

programs among the 85 countries surveyed reported [nutritionists' contributions](#) to their school feeding programs.

68%

of programs served [fortified foods](#). 22% used [micronutrient supplements](#); and 12% said they use [biofortified foods](#) in school menus.



# School Meals for Lifelong Health

The growing triple burden of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising obesity among children and adolescents creates high risk of serious and chronic illness as children and later in life. School feeding programs designed to meet children's dietary needs lead to better nutrition and health, decreased morbidity, and increased learning capacities and positively leverage investments in education.

## Undernutrition

- A large majority of school meal programs (88%) cited the goal of improving students' nutrition among their objectives.
- Programs showed increased dietary diversity when food was purchased domestically
- Roughly two-thirds of programs serve micronutrient fortified foods, boosting nutritional benefits for children and families.

## Overweight & Obesity

- Less than 25% of school meal programs listed obesity reduction among their goals.
- 47% of programs had nutritional requirements for food baskets that are intended to address obesity.
- Nutrition education, health education, food education, and physical education were incorporated in 65%, 53%, 51% and 49% of programs, respectively.

## The School Health & Nutrition Package

- A health service was offered at the same rate at which it was mandatory, indicating policy drives programming.
- 97% of programs reported handwashing with soap; 91% of programs offer nutrition education; 65% offer health education; and 61% of programs were paired with deworming.
- Only 29% of programs reported offering menstrual hygiene.



# School Meals Can Transform the Food System

School meal programs can be leveraged to transform food systems to increase the availability of nutritious, safe, sustainably produced, and affordable foods. A food systems approach is crucial to improving access to these foods, but to date the nutritional needs of children and adolescents have not been prioritized. This paradigm can change, however, and prioritizing school food can be the starting point.

**78%**

of the world's population make up the countries that responded to the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©.

**\$45 bn**

was the total expenditure reported for school feeding programs.



Harnessing this **buying power** could have a powerful and positive effect on both national and global food systems.

# School Meals Can Transform the Food System

## SCHOOL FEEDING SUPPLY CHAINS FOR HEALTHIER DIETS



### LOCAL PROCUREMENT & NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SUPPLY CHAINS

By creating significant institutional demand, school feeding programs can support the livelihoods of local producers and encourage production of healthier foods for children.

- Diverse & nutritious menu
- Fortification of staple foods
- Vitamin-rich biofortified crops



### OPTIMAL DIET FOR CHILD & ADOLESCENTS

On a global level, there is a lack of standard dietary guidance for children and adolescents. This inhibits alignment and progress in achieving nutrition objectives.

- Evidence-based nutrition standards
- Improved food quality, quantity & food environments



### SCHOOLS ARE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

School food environments, which include school feeding programs, are an important and foundational influence on dietary patterns of children and adolescents.

- Nutrition education
- Obesity Prevention & Mitigation
- Lifelong healthy habits

# School Meals Drive Inclusive Economic Growth

## EXPANDING THE LOCAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

82%

**Most programs purchased some or all school food domestically.**

Several low income countries viewed this as a positive and new form of sourcing food for their programs.

76%

**Many programs purchased at least some school food locally.**

A slightly smaller percentage of programs reported investing in local agriculture by purchasing at least some school food locally.

43%

**Farmers were directly engaged in school meal operations.**

Farmers were directly engaged in some manner in 43% of the school meal programs. Small-scale farmers often received support, such as agricultural extension, subsidies, and training.

1/3

**Few countries had agriculture policies, standards, or laws linked to school feeding.**

Less than half of the surveyed programs reported directly involving farmers; and the levels of engagement with farmers varied significantly across geographic regions.



**The survey showed greater school food diversity where food was purchased locally.**



# School Meals Drive Inclusive Economic Growth

## An Opportunity to Empower Women

In Côte d'Ivoire, the Integrated Program for Sustainable School Canteens has established micro-agricultural projects linked to school canteens and led by women's groups, with 70% of the production sold to benefit these groups.

**78%**

of programs reported that 75% or more of food preparers are women.

**31%**

of programs reported that very few or no cooks received payment for their work.

## Engaging Youth

Youths in Niger are engaged in school gardening and animal husbandry linked to the school meal programs, and youths in Zambia are encouraged to form groups and undergo skills training in agricultural value and supply chains prior to being provided with soft loans associated with the school meal program.

**30%**

of programs reported a special focus on creating opportunities for youth.

**32%**

of programs reported a focus on creating opportunities for other groups.

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## **What needs further investigation or requires action?**

**We have so much more information than before and we can now see a landscape of school feeding from multiple angles. But most topics require more in-depth examination—or even action.**

## For further study or action:

### GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT

Are governments harnessing economies of scale to achieve the greatest cost-effectiveness?

### MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Can stakeholders identify and promulgate the aspects of successful management and coordination that are good practices in the broadest sense?

### OBESITY

Can the costs and benefits of obesity-mitigation and prevention activities linked to school meal programs be quantified?

### FOOD SAFETY & QUALITY

Are adequate systems and controls in place to ensure school food safety and quality in countries?

### GENDER

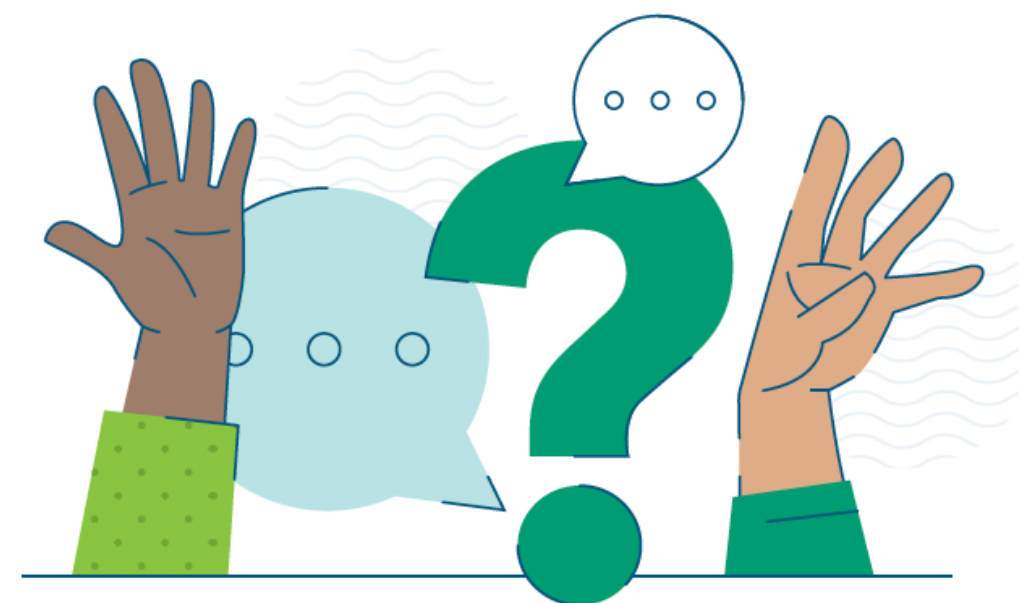
How can countries—with already limited resources to reach primary school children—also support the nutrition and retention of secondary school students, especially adolescent girls?

### AGRICULTURE AND LOCAL PURCHASING

Can public sector food purchasing be a driver of higher production and/or lower cost of nutritious foods?

### JOB & THE PRIVATE SECTOR

How important are job creation and successful private sector engagement in terms of program sustainability?





## For further study or action:

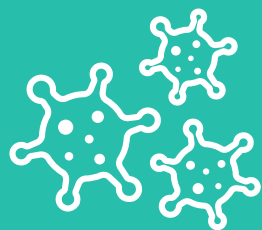
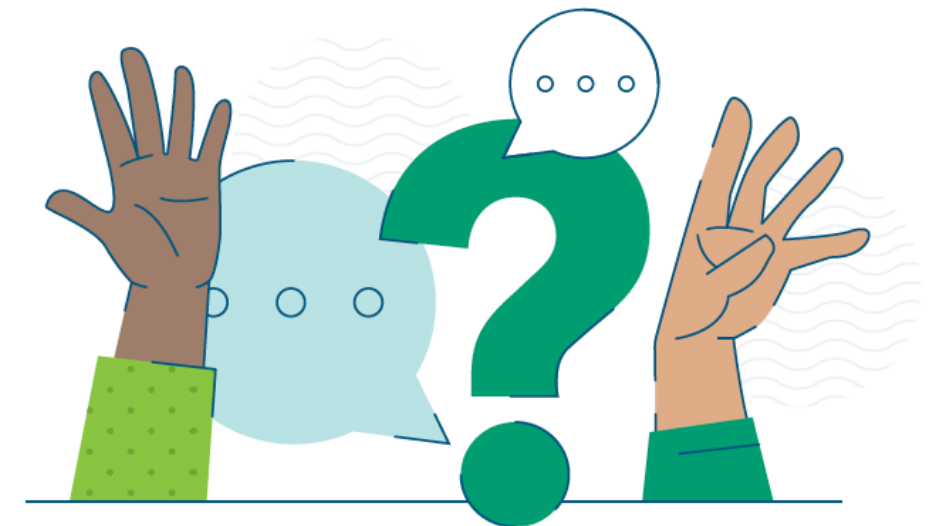
### COVID-19 PANDEMIC & EMERGENCIES

Which—if any—preparedness measures have proven useful so far for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Were countries that had experienced health-related emergencies or epidemics (such as Ebola) better prepared to handle the COVID-19 pandemic?

How do programs secure financial support to address emergencies that require immediate attention?

How can school meal programs be used to reach large numbers of vulnerable people during crises, and what factors support or inhibit their effectiveness in “pivoting” in the course of such emergencies



*The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on school systems and disrupted school meal programs around the world, depriving vulnerable children of a daily meal at school, causing new levels of child hunger, and globally throttling education for nearly all children. Program implementers worked desperately to adjust their programs to safely serve the most vulnerable despite the closure of schools, borders, travel and transport options, and most businesses. Funding for school meals was also taxed, as governments and donors alike focused their resources on health care, safety measures, and finding a cure.*

*The 2021 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © aims to capture the impact of the pandemic for at least one full school year. The 2019 survey will serve as the baseline against which we can begin to measure the toll of the pandemic on the school food ecosystem. We also hope to document the resilience and creativity of school meal programs in the face of such dramatic challenges.*



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PEACE BEGINS WHEN THE  
HUNGRY ARE FED;  
THE FUTURE BEGINS WHEN  
THE HUNGRY ARE EDUCATED.

GENE WHITE, GCNF CO-FOUNDER

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# Partnership Opportunities to learn more, advocate, and take action

# Advocate and Take Action with GCNF

Prioritize school feeding as a high-return investment and strategy for **human capital development**.



Champion school meal programs as a catalyst in **transforming food systems** to be sustainable, safe, healthy, and affordable.



Strengthen and invest in **child nutrition data** and the capacity to utilize it.



Promote school feeding to tackle the **double burden of malnutrition** and establish **lifelong health**.



Include school feeding in **global targets & commitments** for education, nutrition, health, and economic development that drive action.



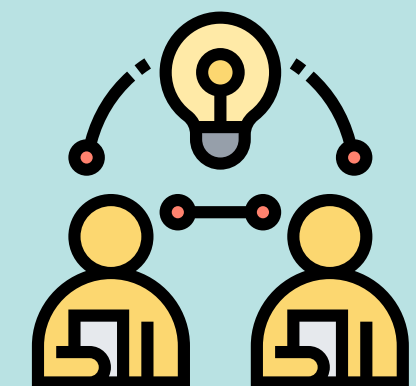
Build **equal partnerships** that invest in sustainable solutions to improved nutrition for school-age children.



Improve monitoring and evaluation of **school feeding impacts on girls, women, and marginalized groups**.



Work with GCNF to **catalogue and share** best practices in school health and nutrition.





"I will not rest until every child in Africa has at least two meals a day and can go to school, because then maybe they will have a chance of following in my footsteps—have a right to control their destiny."

AGNES KALIBATA  
PRESIDENT OF AGRA  
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR 2021 UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

"School feeding seems like an obvious but underutilized platform to changing the way kids think about food from climate and environmental impacts to health and cultural impacts as well as educating their families and communities."

DR. LAWRENCE HADDAD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR IMPROVED NUTRITION  
AND WORLD FOOD PRIZE LAUREATE

"The McGovern-Dole program doesn't just feed hungry children, it invests in their future potential. Supporting healthy families and improving access to education helps to combat the root causes of poverty and fosters sustainable economic growth in developing nations."

TOM VILSACK  
U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE





**Reach out to us and discuss how  
we can advocate together!**

 **global child nutrition**  
F O U N D A T I O N

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