



THEME: Convergence of Forces for Resilience and Sustainability of School Feeding Programs Worldwide

PREAMBLE

The 23rd Global Child Nutrition Forum was organized by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF), the government of the Republic of Benin, and co-hosts Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and World Food Programme (WFP).

Held in Cotonou, Benin in October 2022, the 23rd Global Child Nutrition Forum brought together 244 participants. Arriving from 44 countries around the world, participants ranged from officials from government and multilateral institutions to representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the business sector, academics, and researchers.

In an effort to recognize and document the voices, priorities, and needs of participants at the 2022 Global Child Nutrition Forum, GCNF implemented a participatory approach to the annual Forum Communiqué. Each day participants were provided with prompts designed to elicit information from two district groups: 1) government representatives and 2) partners including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the business sector, academics, and researchers.

VOICES FROM GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

The majority of the government representatives who responded at the Forum reported they were able to maintain or increase school feeding coverage between 2019 and 2022, a period of time that saw unprecedented emergencies and the intersection of multiple crises - including the COVID-19 pandemic, political strife, conflict, climate impacts, soaring food costs, and stalled supply chains. This response demonstrates the astounding resiliency of school feeding programs in the face of global crises.

WHAT WORKED:

The government representatives articulated the following elements that allowed them to maintain or expand coverage:

- Intersectoral collaboration between Ministries of Agriculture, Education, and Health
- Efficient program management systems, coordination mechanisms, and multi-sector communication
- Government initiation and support of take-home rations to offset the rising costs of food commodities during the global food crisis caused by conflict, climate change, and COVID-19
- Expansion of school-based food production initiatives to bring children back to schools who dropped out due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Active involvement of the private sector to help countries sustain healthy school meals.
- Increased involvement of donors



- Increased financial support

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS NEEDED:

Government representatives, both those who reported increased coverage *and* those who reported decreased coverage, recommend the following *additional* actions to increase the resiliency of school meal programs in the future:

- Raising awareness of school meal programs to activate the political will necessary for government policy and investment
- Dedicating budget lines for school meals
- Increasing funding and advocacy to implement better policies in school meals
- Educating parents on the necessity of school canteens for effective education
- Remunerating school cooks/caterers for their work in school canteens in a timely manner
- Focusing on the development of legal frameworks and capacity building so school meal programs can run independently and are sustainable through government transitions
- Regulating private sector marketing of unhealthy foods and ensuring children, families, and communities are informed consumers
- Expanding take-home ration programs
- Utilizing school feeding programs to address decreased enrollment
- Identifying solutions to the high costs of accessibility and production
- Rapid implementation of innovative solutions to crises, testing early, and scaling up to ease the challenges presented by these crises
- Supporting existing government school meal program systems, not creating new ones
- Prioritizing the collection of disaggregated data to build a comprehensive picture of how many children are being reached and through what modality
- Finding ways to provide school feeding in areas occupied by military groups
- Accelerating the integration of a school feeding element into SDG 4 (Inclusive education for all)
- Setting a global goal of a percentage of the budget that should be allocated to school feeding, such as how GPE insists on a certain increase in the education budget by 2023
- Pursuing nutrition security strategy (not just food security)
- Requesting that implementing partners buy into the government systems. Help governments streamline their systems instead of creating new ones which ultimately weaken the government systems. *“Nobody in the world can replace what the government can do for its people.”*

VOICES FROM PARTNERS

The majority of responding partner organizations reported increased investments and support in school feeding programs during the same time period. To further support the maintenance, improvement, and expansion of school feeding programs, the partners recommend:



1. A concerted effort toward developing policy frameworks for the implementation of school meal programs
2. Raising the school feeding priority in the global agenda to increase investments
3. Identifying strategies to mitigate competition between implementing partners
4. Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and address the gap between the work at the operational level and the institutional/administrative level
5. Engaging better and more frequently with local players
6. Enacting laws to ensure national commitments to school feeding are respected when there are changes in government administrations
7. Working to address all forms of malnutrition, from stunting and wasting to micronutrient deficiencies to overweight and obesity
8. Agile coordinating of partnerships with NGOs and the private sector
9. Implementing climate-smart farming in agricultural production in partnership with the ministries of agriculture
10. Creating waste-conscious food management systems to ensure unused food does not go to waste.
11. Using cleaner sources of energy for feeding and cooking
12. Continuing to focus on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as it interacts with rising food, fertilizer, and fuel costs, through increased funding and home-grown school meals
13. Clarifying strategic focus within partner organizations to ensure high alignment with local communities and other programs
14. Strengthening partnerships with other organizations to mobilize children to go back to school
15. Building better trust and confidence in implementing organizations through increased transparency
16. Incorporating, from the beginning, strategic planning for high-quality program design that can accomplish their mission at scale
17. Implementing learning exchanges between school feeding entities to be acquainted with current best practices
18. Scaling up the availability and use of biofortified crops and fortified whole grains
19. Establishing key performance indicators
20. Involving the voices of children in identifying needs and solutions
21. Asking governments to take a leading role in mobilizing communities for sustainable food production

The 23rd Global Child Nutrition Forum recognizes that school meal programs demonstrated astounding resiliency in the face of global crises. Many governments reached a higher number of children in their school feeding program in 2022 compared to 2019 and donors increased investments and maintained commitment. Let us use the information within this Communiqué to continue the significant work and to take further action in all areas as recommended by government representatives and partners.