



School Health and Nutrition: ensuring a better future for all children

A UNICEF and WFP partnership to scale up School Feeding, Nutrition, Health and WASH interventions



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Healthy and well-nourished school children learn better. Ensuring that girls and boys stay in school and are able and ready to learn allows countries to develop their human capital and for individuals to more fully achieve their potential in life. Investing in school-based health and nutrition interventions serves to promote a well-nourished, healthy and educated population, which can stimulate long-term growth and economic development.

For children to maximise their potential and break free from the intergenerational cycle of poverty, investments in the health and nutrition of children need to be scaled up alongside investments in the learning environment. WFP and UNICEF are seeking to lead a multi-stakeholder coalition to prioritise an integrated package of school health and nutrition interventions to 35 million of the most vulnerable children in 30 low-income and fragile countries.

What is this initiative about?

Under a renewed partnership commitment, UNICEF and WFP will join forces to ensure that millions of vulnerable school children, in fragile countries receive the health and nutrition support they need in schools to grow, learn and thrive.

WFP and UNICEF will kick start the initiative by deploying complementary operational capacities to support Governments to implement an integrated approach to improving school health and nutrition programmes. The two organizations will demonstrate on the ground that integrated packages of support can be scaled up in low income and fragile countries. By joining forces, and drawing on broader partnerships and networks, UNICEF and WFP aim to model UN reform and a new way of working.

The rationale for focusing on this issue

The world has made great strides in improving access to education, but learning remains a challenge. There needs to be more investment in quality education, but the world is failing its school children in other important ways that constrain learning. In low- and middle-income countries, about 300 million school children have anemia, causing them to lose some six IQ points per child. Lack of water and sanitation affects children's health and creates barriers, especially for girls, to attend school- 600 million children lack drinking water services in school.

While low-income countries invest some USD 210 billion annually in providing education for their children (infrastructure, teachers, curriculum), they only invest about USD 3.4 billion to 5.5 billion in ensuring the children have the health and nutrition to allow them to learn: we invest in learning, but not in the learner. There is a growing consensus that there is a need to fix this mismatch. Very simply: sick children cannot attend school and hungry children cannot learn.

The problem is that these investments remain out of reach in low-income and fragile countries, where they would do the most good.

Only 2 out of 10 children in the poorest countries have access to school feeding and school health programmes. In these contexts, a meal in school often determines whether children go to school or not, particularly girls. And yet there are 73 million children living in extreme poverty in 60 countries that do not have access to these programmes, most of these children are in Africa.

Evidence shows that effective school health, nutrition and water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions contribute to increased enrolment and retention of children in school and contribute to enhancing their learning opportunities. This is especially important for girls as they enter adolescence and face increased barriers to continuing education and increased risks including to early marriage and early pregnancy.

The opportunity: Why WFP and UNICEF, why now?

There is a growing realization that the health and nutrition of children has been neglected in global and national discussions and that there is a need to fix this. Multisectoral responses to the learning crisis and gender inequalities was one of the focus areas of the 2019 G7 Summit hosted by France, building on what had been done in the 2018 G7 discussions by Canada. From these discussions, an initial contribution was made by Canada to WFP and UNICEF for school health and nutrition interventions in Chad and Niger. This contribution provides seed funding to scale up integrated programmes in both countries.

From the education, health and food security sector, it is clear that better nutrition and health of school children is linked to learning and that we need to do more to ensure attention and investment in programmes. By working together, we have the opportunity to make a game-changing contribution to reposition school health and nutrition in support of education outcomes in global and national agendas. Not stepping up, conversely, means losing momentum and missing a crucial opportunity to demonstrate a new way of working under the UN reform and a tangible contribution to the decade of action under the SDGs.

Value for Money School Feeding, Nutrition, Deworming and WASH

School health and nutrition interventions contribute positively to the socio-economic benefits of the most vulnerable children and reinforce the human capital base of the communities while

improving the local economies' access to stable social safety nets, sustained food systems and value chains.

Based on an analysis of global evidence, the expected returns from joint investments are significant, ranging from US\$4 to US\$20 for every dollar spent depending on the context and specific intervention. This includes: substantial savings for households through reduced health care costs and expenditure on food; financial gains from improved academic achievement and wide ranging benefits to the local economy, social protection systems and other relevant government services.

By scaling-up this integrated, school health and nutrition package, there will be increased cost effectiveness, streamlined engagement with governments and partners and solid contribution to several sustainable development goals addressing poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), health and wellbeing (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequality (SDG10) and global partnerships (SDG 17).

The way forward: A coalition of partners for action at scale

UNICEF and WFP will galvanize a coalition of partners to work with national governments and systems to ensure that children living in extreme poverty in low-income and fragile countries have access to integrated health and nutrition packages during their school years.

Together with a wide range of partners, including governments; other UN agencies; non-governmental organizations; the private sector; foundations; and international financial institutions, WFP and UNICEF will mobilize the funding, support and capacities required to meet these urgent needs.

Through a coalition of partners, the lives of millions of school children can be improved, making this a substantive contribution to ending child hunger and poverty, ensuring that every child develops, learns and thrives and achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Paving the way ahead

We must work together in more streamlined and integrated approaches to ensure that millions of vulnerable children in low-income and fragile settings receive the health and nutrition support they need to grow, learn and thrive. Only by working together differently will we have the opportunity to make a game-changing contribution to the most vulnerable children.