

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**
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SUMMARY NOTE

Parallel Session: **Implementing Action in Key Areas: Improving Nutrition and Health**

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Title: **Improving Food and Nutrition Security through Food for Education Programs in Africa**

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Introduction

Basic education is one of the most effective investments in improving economies and creating literate, self-reliant and healthy societies. Yet, more than 46 million children are out of school in Africa. They represent more than 40% of the world’s out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2002). Girls are particularly at a disadvantage — more than 24 million of them are not in school. In April 2000, 164 countries participated in the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, and adopted the Dakar Framework for Action to reaffirm their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015. But without a strong and concerted effort to reverse current trends, this goal will remain a dream for Africa.

Moreover, the World Declaration on Education for All noted that poor health and nutrition are crucial underlying factors for low school enrolment, absenteeism, poor classroom performance and early school dropouts. In many African countries learning and school performance are compromised due to ill health, hunger and under-nutrition, which affect a significant proportion of school-age children.

Food for Education

In addition to the problems associated with malnutrition in school-age children, there is also evidence of negative consequences for children suffering from short-term hunger, common in children who are not fed before going to school. Children who are hungry are more likely to have difficulty concentrating and performing complex tasks, even if otherwise well nourished. Data from many studies on school breakfast programs suggest that omitting breakfast interferes with cognition and learning, an effect that is more pronounced in nutritionally at-risk children than in well-nourished children.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is the largest organizer of Food for Education (FFE) throughout the world. WFP provides food to schools in 70 countries, accounting for more than 15 million children in 2003. FFE includes a significantly broader array of interventions designed to improve school enrolment, attendance, community-school linkages, and learning. Among possible FFE interventions are take home rations targeted to girls, orphans and other vulnerable children who attend school regularly, in-school meals or snacks to reduce short-term hunger along with associated cognitive impediments, and food for work targeted to teachers or parents engaged in activities to improve schooling outcomes. There is abundant evidence that such interventions can be very effective in improving school enrolment, attendance and children’s active learning capacity.

How does Food for Education improve Nutrition and Food Security?

Basic or primary school education is a prerequisite for nutrition and food security because the resulting increases in literacy, numeracy and education positively impact food security through increased productivity and employment enhancement, better resource management, higher incomes, smaller families, and improved household management. Educated individuals are more likely to access information and employ agricultural and environmental management techniques that contribute to increased production and greater food availability. Furthermore, individuals who receive a quality education are better able to earn a livelihood that provides the purchasing power to obtain nutritious food. Educated individuals are also more likely to practice safe food storage and preparation techniques and to practice basic principles of nutrition, health and childcare. In the agricultural sector, studies indicate that four years of basic education significantly increase farm output (Moock, 1994 as cited in Levinger, 1996). FFE aims at increasing enrolment, attendance and enabling children to complete basic education.

FFE can have an impact on short-term household food security by improving access through the provision of an income transfer to families whose children attend school. FFE can be considered as a direct transfer through take home ration for girls, orphans and vulnerable children or indirect transfer when the child is fed at school. Income transfer is particularly important during the “lean” seasons just prior to harvests, when food insecurity is particularly heightened.

Successful strategies for implementing FFE Programs in Africa

The following strategies have been proven effective in successfully implementing food for education to improve nutrition and food security. In addition, the NEPAD/Hunger Task Force Initiative on Home-Grown School Feeding Program holds a lot of potential for increasing nutrition and food security, as well as sustainability.

Program design: From the outset of a project, identification of anticipated benefits and the development of an exit strategy that will maintain them should be incorporated in planning discussions, and such benefits, together with the strategy should be monitored in project activities. An exit strategy should be developed in coordination with implementing partners, communities, and the relevant government authorities, and should be based on six key components. These include: setting of milestones for achievement; government commitment; community contributions; technical support; management and communication; and involving the private sector. For instance, WFP successfully phased out of Botswana and Namibia seven years ago, and the governments have continued their programs without WFP assistance.

Promotion of girls' education: UNICEF and WFP (through food for education) are giving priority to girls' education in order to reduce gender disparities in basic education by 2005. Needless to say, the promotion of girls' education is an important strategy for improving nutrition and food security because women play key roles in maintaining the three pillars of food security — food production, economic access to available food, and nutritional security. Millions of women work as farmers, farm workers, and natural resource managers. In doing so, they contribute to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment, and family food security. Women account for 70 to 80% of household food production in Sub-Saharan Africa, 65% in Asia, and 45% in Latin America and the Caribbean (Quisumbing, 1995).

Hence, providing women with basic education would help improve nutrition and food security through: increased agricultural productivity and incomes, for better-educated farmers are more likely to adopt new technologies; ensuring that household members, particularly children, receive an adequate share of the food that is potentially available; and ensuring the nutrition security of the household, through the combination of both food and other resources.

Partnerships: The educational and nutritional value of FFE is thought to be enhanced if the following actions are taken (Del Rosso, 1996): provide a meal or snack early in the day. The goal is to eliminate short term hunger and increase children's attentiveness; offer other school-based health and nutrition interventions in

addition to food such as multiple micronutrient supplementation and deworming. This emphasizes the need for partnerships with other organizations to complement WFP's food aid.

In this regard, WFP and UNICEF have been collaborating on an integrated package of health and nutrition interventions to accompany the FFE and improve the quality of education, nutrition and health status of school children. Reduction of illnesses in this age group will result in nutrition and food security. The integrated package includes: support to basic education to improve the quality of education; food for education; deworming and micronutrient supplementation; provision of potable water and separate sanitary latrine facilities for boys and girls; health, nutrition and hygiene education; HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention with life skills training; and malaria prevention. The effective implementation of these interventions requires a wider partnership with governments, NGOs, communities and the participation of children themselves.

Home Grown School Feeding Program: Collaboration with Regional bodies such as NEPAD to ensure governments' commitment, ownership and sustainability, is critical. The NEPAD/Hunger Task Force Initiative aims at expanding school feeding programs to increase school enrolment while promoting increased local food production, marketing and demand in rural food insecure areas. NEPAD, in collaboration with the Hunger Task Force, WFP, UNICEF, and FAO will guide the implementation of the initiative to link school feeding directly with agricultural development through the purchase of locally produced food, school gardens and the incorporation of agriculture into school curricula. Interventions will also include support to small farmers to enable them to improve soil fertility, water management and seeds supply. Ten countries (Uganda, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya, and Ethiopia) have been selected for implementation.

References

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