

SCHOOL FEEDING

A COMPROMISE BETWEEN NUTRITION AND EDUCATION SINGLE SECTOR INITIATIVES

OVERVIEW

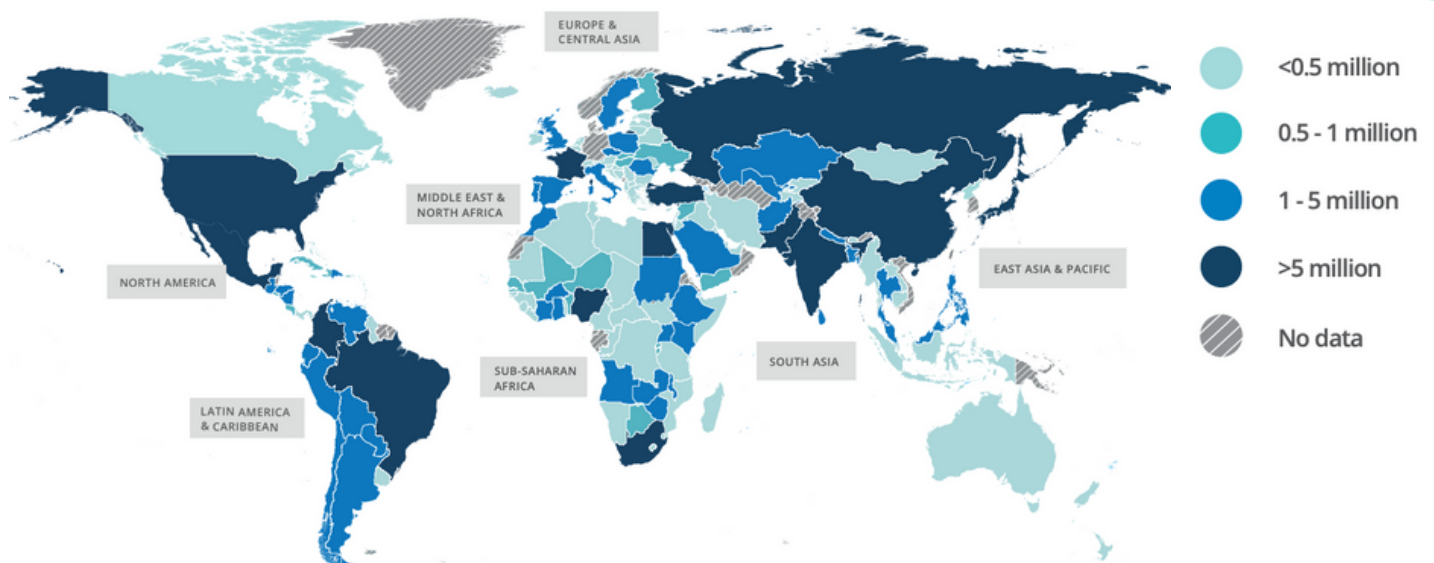
Adequately designed and well-funded school feeding programs provide a self-reinforcing cycle of nutrition, health, and learning progress. The WFP's State of School Feeding Report (2021) informs that "school meals programmes are most limited where they are most needed, and where the potential returns are highest – in the poorest countries and among the poorest children." (7) Violence-stricken countries replete with poor nutrition and poverty have enormous learning constraints and minimal school retention. Evidence suggests that school feeding programs are one of the most extensive social welfare interventions and offer all-encompassing benefits. In order to direct resources most cost-effectively and holistically, specifically for countries with human capital deficits related to learning, nutrition, and school participation, relief funds must not only be directed to develop but reinforce local school feeding programs worldwide.

TRIPLE CRISIS



- The COVID-19 pandemic triggered massive setbacks in human development. Even before the pandemic, global education was already in trouble, especially in third-world and war-ridden countries. UNICEF surveyed 32 low- and middle-income countries, finding that early-grade deficits, poverty, and malnutrition instilled broader learning failures. When schools re-opened after the pandemic, the poorest children were seen to have been impacted the most. (6) Not only were these children falling behind due to lost learning, but increased poverty and malnutrition created a catastrophe.
- As the world was thrown into an unprecedented learning crisis, the safety net of school feeding programs that had been built was deteriorating. From the pandemic, it could be noted that schools play a vital role in creating human capital and that there is an urgent need to ensure not only good education but also quality health and nutrition to develop the whole child. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent relevance for investments in school feeding programs.

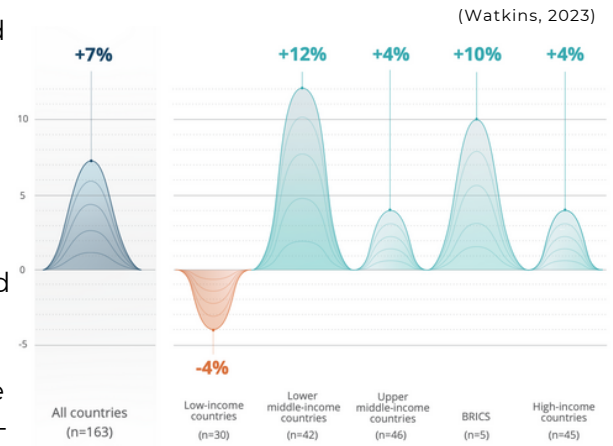
Children receiving school meals around the world (millions)
(Watkins, 2023)



IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Not only were low-income countries falling behind in learning outcomes and school feeding programs, but after the pandemic, evidence continues to suggest that countries most in need of support in nutrition and learning are lagging behind. (7)

- Despite solid efforts, nutrition programs in low-income countries reach children 4% below pre-covid coverage levels. Although worldwide country investments in the political economy of school meals have increased from \$43 billion to \$48 billion, only ~\$300 million is given as assistance to other countries, and even less after the pandemic. (7)
- It has been estimated that \$5.8 billion is required annually to recover school feeding programs affected by the pandemic and to reach an additional 73 million children. (6) However, this requires international assistance and partnership to back the limited capabilities of a national government in war-ridden and low-income countries.



SILOED INTERVENTION: IS LIMITING PROGRESS

The factor that underlies the broad spectrum impact of school feeding programs is its multi-dimensional approach, which is also its limiting factor. Often, bilateral donors allocate funds siloed, supporting single-sector initiatives within marked boundaries such as health, education, agriculture, and nutrition. For example, post-pandemic, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing \$106 million in additional assistance through the UN World Food Program (WFP) to help provide food and nutrition to 914,000 crisis-affected people in South Sudan. (4) USAID then announced an investment of \$305 million in Global Partnership for Education to assist partner countries in building education systems. (5)

“How come additional funding is not allocated to school feeding programs?”

School feeding programs often fall into institutional policy cracks between the siloes; thus, little funding will go to a crucial intersection of nutrition, health, and learning, causing a barrier to development. Additionally, child development programs receiving funding tend to hone in on the first 1000 days of life, when the first 8000 days of transition from childhood to adulthood are essential to support. (7) It is crucial that supporting organizations stop looking only at the single-dimension effects of siloed investment but also the multi-dimensional impacts of intersecting programs such as school feeding.

TRIPLE **i** APPROACH

Implement new school meal programs focused in low-income and violence stricken countries

Improve quality and coherence of school feeding programs worldwide

International support to re-establish effective school feeding programs and repair losses of pandemic

SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS

BENEFITS TO LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

1. Reduced food insecurity
2. Reduced malnutrition
3. Reduced poverty
4. Increased enrollment and school attendance
5. Improved learning

\$ **Cost Effective Compromise** \$

Studies show that on any assessment of benefit-to-cost returns, school feeding programs are of the best investments available for policymakers, specifically for countries with low learning achievement and high levels of child endemic poverty, malnutrition, and learning. (2)

Strong evidence suggests that school feeding has even more comprehensive benefits for equity, with girls having some of the most significant increases in school attendance and learning. School feeding programs also create larger markets for farmers, thus positively impacting the wider community and the development of sustainable food systems. (2) Not only are the benefits to school feeding several times greater than returns to public health alone, but failing to invest in such programs has a detrimental impact. (7) Failure to invest in school feeding programs has led to lower levels of economic growth, increased inequality, nutritional deficits, and learning losses. Thus, going beyond monetary metrics, investing in school meal programs is the most effective intervention for developing the child, their family, and the encompassing community.

POSITIVE GLOBAL OUTCOMES

Evaluation studies of large-scale national programs demonstrate significant equity effects and cross-generational gains (6)



India

Midday Meals Scheme (MMS):

World's Largest School Meals Program

- 13-32% overall national reduction in stunting
- Height-for-age scores of children born to mothers who participated in program were greater (SD .4) than non-participating mothers
- More maternal years in education, delayed age of first child (+1.6 years), fewer (-0.8) children, and higher probability of antenatal care visits and hospital births

Outcome:

Demonstrates effects of positive health and education across generational boundaries



Ghana

School Feeding Programme

- Moderate improvement in average learning in maths and literacy, but increase for children living below poverty line (0.8 learning adjusted years of school) was double the average
- Lowered social gradient in learning and increased human capital, where areas marked with food insecurity had more girls registered with higher learning outcomes
- Significant effects on height-for-age scores for girls and children below poverty line

Outcome:

Shows cross-generational catalyst for breaking the cycle of poverty across generations

These studies indicate improved learning outcomes associated with a mix of school participation, nutrition, and health effects due to the implementation of school meals.

CONCLUSION

International assistance is essential to prospering low-income countries, especially those affected by war and those still recovering from the pandemic's effects. Investing in the multi-dimensional model of school feeding programs will encompass the care of the whole child, whole family, and whole community instead of the limited and often minimal impact siloed single-sector initiatives have on these communities. School feeding programs even have the potential to be expanded and combat the double burden of obesity (30%) that co-exists with the prevalence of malnutrition (30%) in low-income countries.(7) Children's minds and bodies must be cared for to increase human capital and the flourishing of global nations. School feeding programs will improve health and education, promote gender equality, support the national economy, provide social stability, and make communities more resilient in this dynamic world.

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