



# School Feeding Interventions in Humanitarian Responses

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## Questions

*What outcomes do school feeding interventions aim to achieve in humanitarian response, and what evidence is there that they have achieved them? What is the evidence of the added value (or not) of school feeding when combined/ compared with other social protection programmes e.g. cash transfers?*

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## 1. Executive summary

There is limited information on the outcomes of school feeding in humanitarian responses. The available evidence mostly relates to school feeding programmes as a tool for development in low- and middle-income country contexts generally, rather than in humanitarian emergencies. Where evidence does exist in humanitarian settings, information relating to the achievement of intended outcomes (which include improved access to nutritious and diversified food, improved access to education and safe spaces and improved nutrition and health status) is scarce. For example, Drake and Woolnough (2016: xlviii), comment on a “surprising lack of information on the impacts of school feeding” and note that “few impact evaluations have been undertaken, and even fewer which could be described as controlled or systematic trials, particularly in humanitarian crisis settings.” Kristjansson et al. (2016) similarly note in a peer-reviewed journal article that “only one study in the literature exists on the cost outcomes of school feeding”. The evidence found for this report addressed gender, but not disability issues, and found that school feeding benefits are clearer for middle-income rather than low-income countries.

School feeding interventions aim to support food and nutrition security, improved learning and educational outcomes, and social needs and social safety nets in humanitarian crises. Evidence about their impact is limited and mixed. In terms of the value added by school feeding initiatives when combined with other social protection programmes, evidence suggests that programmes operating cash transfers provide greater opportunities for improving school participation, but generally tend not to improve learning outcomes although some individual programmes have demonstrated positive results.

The main findings in the literature on school feeding programmes specifically in humanitarian contexts that we were able to identify in the time available for this report are:

- Children’s access to food and protection from deprivation are *elementary and primary functions* of emergency school feeding (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:5).
- Nutritional impacts of school feeding in humanitarian contexts are less often documented, in part because the age group reached directly is less at risk of undernutrition than younger (pre-school) children (Gentilini, 2016).
- In crisis settings, increased school attendance and reduction in school-drop out objectives are regularly met by school feeding and Food for Education (FFE) programmes (Gentilini, 2016).
- Protection (against child labour, recruitment into armed forces, and early marriage) cannot be a stand-alone objective of a humanitarian intervention, but must be a co-objective, alongside aims to improve children’s food access, nutrition and educational access (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:35). In a case in South Sudan, school feeding ‘pulled’ children from other schools to the schools supported by school meals, which resulted in some children walking longer distances to school and which could result in protection risks (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:13).
- When responding to natural disasters or economic or political shocks, relationships with governments from the national to the local level are key to successful school feeding programmes (Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017), especially as there is a tendency to favour local purchase of food for ‘home grown’ programmes which support local (smallholder) agriculture as well as reduce costs.

- Food for Education (FFE) is considered a safety net during times of crisis, but is not a substitute for a well-organised education system and teacher performance (Alderman and Bundy, 2011:213). FFE programmes can only be effective in education terms if combined with quality education programmes (Alderman and Bundy, 2011:213).
- The school feeding system is potentially an important base for shock-response and humanitarian assistance. Despite concerns about capacity, FFE has proven flexible in response to crises. However, the flexibility in the system is currently provided by WFP and its partners. Governments can only adjust their own school meals programme to respond to an emergency if they handle two capacity requirements that this would impose: additional material resources and timely financing (O'Brien et al., 2018:31).
- School feeding programmes (SFPs) often provide more food, and food of higher nutritional quality, than take-home ration (THR) programmes (Alderman et al., 2012:193). In general, both SFP and THR programmes perform similarly well; for example, significant positive impacts on attendance in both in-school meals and THR programmes have been reported in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps in Northern Uganda. However, school meals may have the unintended effect of increasing the time taken to complete primary school because the child is motivated to attend through the provision of meals and may place less emphasis on the learning environment (Alderman et al., 2012:190-192).

Findings related to school feeding programmes more generally include:

- In general, school meals may only have minor physical and psychosocial benefits for disadvantaged pupils in LMICs (Kristjansson et al., 2007; Kristjansson et al., 2016).
- School feeding may contribute in the long run to improved food security and resilience to food shocks (Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017). Whilst school feeding is most effective in supporting positive learning outcomes, it has limited effect in areas without malnutrition, and where school participation rates are already high (Snilstveit et al., 2016:46).
- Households receiving at least two forms of assistance – general food distribution (GFD) and school feeding – register statistically positive effects on nutrition outcomes. Effects were not significant for households that received only one form of aid (WFP, 2018:8).
- Generally, SFPs and conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes are on par with each other in terms of added value (Alderman and Bundy, 2011). However, there are virtually no comparative impact evaluations that contrast school feeding to CCTs in attaining educational goals (Drake et al., 2016:42).
- There is no 'one-size-fits-all' programme for school feeding interventions. Capacity building, along with service delivery, is an important aspect for achieving long-term goals for school feeding in humanitarian response (Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017).

## 2. Aims and outcomes of school feeding interventions

School feeding programmes (SFPs) can take the form of school meals, snacks, or take-home rations (THR) (Drake et al., 2016:41). Although school feeding programmes are most often considered to be long-term social protection initiatives, they have been widely used in humanitarian contexts. During the 2007/08 food and fuel crises at least 38 low- and middle-

income countries (LMICs) scaled up school feeding schemes in response to a crisis, whether related to food prices, conflict, natural disaster or financial volatility.<sup>1</sup>

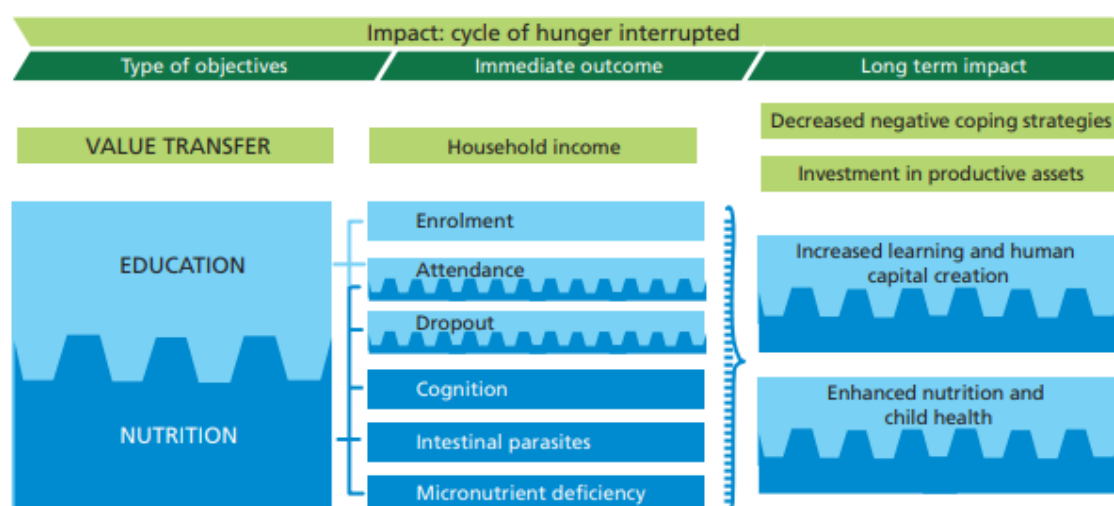
In Liberia, following 14 years of conflict between 1996 and 2010, one of the immediate responses as part of the World Bank's Global Food Crisis Response Programme (GFRP) was to provide vulnerable women and children with access to food through a well-established World Food Programme (WFP) school-feeding initiative. The main objective was to engage with local partners to improve malnutrition rates and stabilise school attendance. Similarly, in Burundi, due to 'human-induced disasters' a school feeding programme was implemented and led by a steering committee which included representatives of parents, students and school management. However, the outcomes of these initiatives are not highlighted in the literature (Ambrosio et al, 2012:10-13).

School feeding programmes can contribute towards short-term and long-term outcomes for nutrition and education in humanitarian contexts. The aims of these interventions include:

- Achieving food and nutrition security for improved health
- Improving learning and educational outcomes (this includes engagement and progression in primary education for children living in poverty)
- Improving physical and psychosocial wellbeing
- Increasing protection and gender equality
- Promoting partnerships for engagement and food security

As Figure 1 shows, by breaking the cycle of hunger through the introduction of school feeding, school enrolment is more likely to be consistent and the added value of nutrition directly impacts upon children's cognitive abilities which then has positive outcomes in the long run for the development of human capital and the enhancement of nutrition and health status.

Figure 1: School feeding results









Source: WFP, 2011:2

However, school feeding can be a springboard for many positive outcomes for poor children and their families. In a broad developmental sense, school feeding programmes can make significant

<sup>1</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/05/440462-un-report-highlights-benefits-school-meal-programmes-crisis-settings>

contributions towards achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to hunger, education, and gender equality (WFP 2017c).

### Contributions of school feeding programmes to the Sustainable Development Goals according to the World Food Programme

	<i>Sustainable development goals &amp; targets</i>	<i>Relevant targets</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>
Direct contributions		2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4	“School meals can improve the nutrition status of pre-school children, primary school children and adolescents, by addressing macronutrient and micronutrient deficiencies. This leads to enhanced nutrition and health, decreased morbidity, and increased learning capacities.”
		4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4.6	“School meals facilitate access to school, increase enrolment and attendance rates and improve the nutritional status, health and cognitive development of children.”
		5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4	“Girls struggle more than boys for access to education... are also more exposed to hunger and malnutrition... more vulnerable to forced marriage, early pregnancy, violence and even human trafficking. When adequately designed, school meals programmes can narrow these gender gaps and help break the vicious cycle of discrimination against girls.”
Indirect contributions		1.2, 1.3, 1.4	“When well-designed, school meals programmes have direct benefits for children... These direct outcomes further contribute to wider processes such as the reduction of poverty and inequality and economic growth.”
		8.3, 8.6, 8.7	
		10.2, 10.4	

Source: WFP 2017c

### Improving nutrition and health

Throughout childhood, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies contribute to higher risk of infection and chronic disease in adulthood. Providing food for consumption at school can relieve immediate short-term hunger, which is very beneficial for learning and is linked to improved performance on school tests and promoting normal progression from grade to grade in completing a basic education (WFP, 2011:2).

Initial impacts of a SFP in Malawi following a combination of floods and drought which devastated crops and left many families on the brink of starvation in 2016 found that it contributed towards reduction in classroom hunger and reduction in reported levels of anxiety around hunger, but no nutritional data are presented (Mary's Meals, 2016:10). In another case, assisting internally displaced persons in Iraq, a WFP pilot school feeding project providing healthy meals for school children in the southern governorate of Thi Qar aimed to prevent malnutrition among children and encourage their parents to keep them in school. The programme is described by WFP as successful and continuing, but WFP's annual report did not include data on impacts (WFP, 2015:10).

In general, nutritional impacts are infrequently documented in research, in part because the age group reached directly is less at risk of undernutrition than are younger (pre-school) children. Moreover, given trends in obesity, it is not even clear what gains should be monitored in humanitarian settings (Gentilini, 2016). Process findings state that, in general, a moderate to high proportion of the dietary reference intake (DRI) for energy and key micro-nutrients is desirable. However, caloric density should be carefully considered in school or supplementary feeding programmes, as overweight may be a concern in some low-income countries (Kristjansson et al., 2016:83). Meta-analyses of RCTs in school feeding reviews found small, positive effects on weight (0.37 kg gain per year/school year respectively). For height, meta-analyses of the RCTs found no significant effects on height for school feeding (Kristjansson et al., 2016:81).

## **Increasing protection and gender equality**

In conflict and other humanitarian crises, SFPs may serve additional objectives linked to protection, e.g. child safety, dignity, integrity, and normalcy, which may sometimes override the more general goals of promoting schooling and health (WFP, 2007). They may also contribute to the protection of children against threats of recruitment into armed forces and groups, forced/early marriage and other forms of child labour (including worst forms of child labour). Such programmes can work as an incentive to draw children to safe spaces that offer additional support (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:13). In post-conflict and transitional contexts, school feeding can be used to assist in the restoration of education systems, to encourage the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and to promote social cohesion among children (Harvey et al., 2010).

Prior to a school feeding intervention in South Sudan, which has been impacted by years of conflict, girls were not attending school due to parental fears surrounding their protection. The UNICEF South Sudan Education Cluster Unit prioritised counties (with exception of Twic East in Jonglei State) where WFP is not intervening with Food for Education Programme (to avoid duplication). Children walked together in groups, sometimes escorted, in humanitarian school feeding interventions; prior to the intervention children were missing school due to long walks to school with empty stomachs (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:9-10).

Research suggests that protection cannot be a stand-alone objective of an intervention, but must be a co-objective, alongside aims to improve children's food access, nutrition and educational access (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:35). Another consideration is that school feeding 'pulled' children who were attending at other schools, to the schools supported by school meals. This resulted in some children walking longer distances to school, as they no longer attended the school closest to their home areas. This also could result in protection risks related to abduction of children on their way to and from school (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:13).

School feeding can also help close the gender gap in schools, helping to empower women by increasing their probability of employment. Another longer-term aim is that when girls are educated they are more likely to have fewer and healthier children, and to head families that are food-secure (Harvey et al., 2010).

Examples of programmes with these aims include a school feeding project implemented by the Christian Mission for Development (CMD) in South Sudan in 2017-18 which aimed to provide female and youth income generation and encourage female retention (Opio et al, 2018:7); and a programme in Sri Lanka launched in 2003 by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education and WFP to ensure the protection of schoolchildren in the areas affected by the Sri Lankan civil war (World Bank Group, 2015:3). However, we did not find evidence of the outcomes of these interventions.

## **Improving physical and psychosocial wellbeing**

In the long term, SFPs are designed to improve children's physical, mental and psychosocial health. In a crisis, programme goals include: prevention or amelioration of growth failure, improved survival, lower morbidity, promotion of normal cognitive and behavioural development and increasing enrolment and attendance at school. They aim to help students stay in schools for the long-run, reducing the burden of parents.<sup>2</sup> SFPs can help to safeguard households' investments in education by defraying some of the costs of schooling, encouraging parents to enrol their children in school, and ensuring that they attend class regularly throughout the complete cycle (Molinas and de la Mothe, 2010:221). This can help protect children from the risk of both formal and informal child labour and facilitate social integration.

However, a systematic review by Kristjansson et al. (2007) found that school meals may only have minor physical and psychosocial benefits for disadvantaged pupils. Evidence from one programme in Malawi did indicate that children's happiness at school increased and anxiety decreased due to the provision of school meals (Mary's Meals, 2016).

## **Enhancing education and learning outcomes**

Short-term hunger can adversely affect students' attention and interest when it comes to learning. At a secondary level, SFPs in humanitarian contexts aim to increase support for education within vulnerable communities (Mary's Meals, 2016:17).

Evidence shows that school feeding programmes contribute to increased school attendance and reduction in school drop-out (Gentilini, 2016). A systematic review found that school feeding had a significant positive effect in LMICs, with results from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) showing increases of 4 to 7 days a year (Kristjansson et al., 2016:81). A randomised controlled evaluation of FFE programmes in Northern Uganda in 2005-2007 showed large impacts on school attendance and reduced grade repetition (Alderman et al., 2010). Early (first year) results from a longitudinal quasi-experimental impact assessment of a programme in Malawi (responding in part to flooding) providing school meals to more than 800,000 children daily showed enrolment increased by 33.1% for boys and 39.8% for girls (Mary's Meals, 2016). In South Sudan, a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) programme providing hot meals twice a day resulted in enrolment increasing by 90% for girls and 120% for boys, resulting in a near-doubling of enrolment overall (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:9-10).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/over-13m-students-benefit-school-feeding-program>

More recent analysis shows that school feeding also had significant effects on maths performance in two RCTs and two controlled before-and-after studies (CBAs) (Kristjansson et al., 2016:81). To build long-term impact, it is suggested that school feeding should be institutionalised (OPM & HESPI, 2018:72). On the other hand, results from a programme in Northern Uganda showed no impact of either SFPs or FFE programmes on progression to secondary school, although children in grade 6 or 7 in SFP schools in 2005 were significantly more likely to remain in primary school as of 2007; this suggests that school meals might have the unintended effect of increasing the time taken to complete primary school (Alderman et al., 2012:190).

Unlike in more developmental settings, SFPs' contribution to education access and as a household safety net should be a significant but secondary objective (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:). Prior to school feeding interventions, children often miss school, leave early or fall sick. School meals have a 'pull' factor, which result in more children being enrolled in schools and completing homework assignments. However, once the intervention ends, it may become a 'push' factor (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:12).

School feeding programmes in South Sudan undertaken by the Christian Mission for Development reported improvements in enrolment rates and pass rates, but these programmes were part of a set of other interventions to support schools, so the impact of the feeding programmes were not distinguishable from the other activities. The programmes noted that other factors such as availability of teaching materials and personal hygiene kits constrained attendance.(Opio et al., 2018:8-9).

Other factors affecting the magnitude of the impacts include initial attendance rates, school quality, and the food transfer size. Evidence shows that FFE programmes can only be effective in education terms if combined with quality education programmes (Alderman and Bundy, 2011:213).

However, if raising school participation is the only goal of an FFE programme (though it rarely is), research suggests that other programmes, such as deworming, free school uniforms, parent-teacher partnerships, and programmes improving teacher incentives, may be more cost-effective (Alderman et al., 2012:188). The impacts of these programmes on school participation may not be as large as from an FFE programme, but these alternatives are sufficiently cheaper to operate.

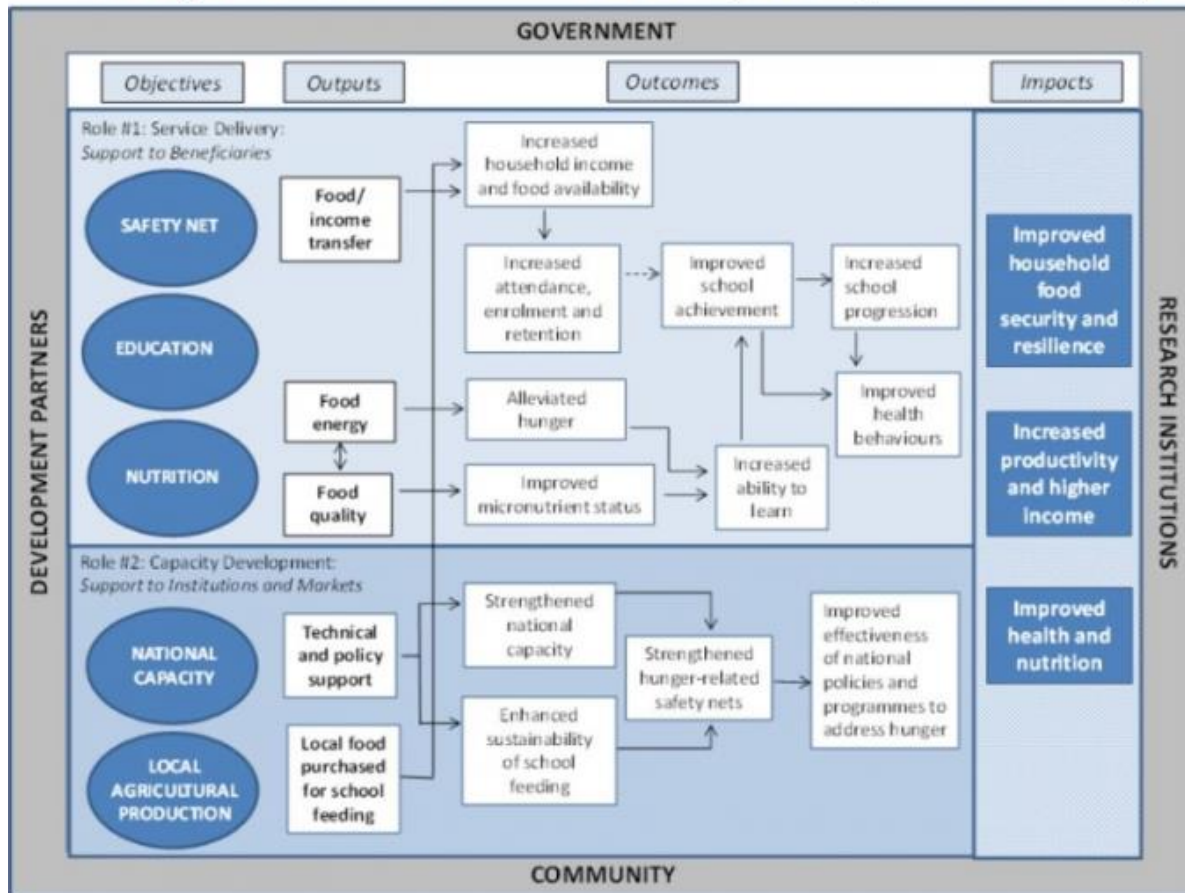
## **Promotion of partnerships and engagement for food security**

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) can be considered the largest international actor in school feeding. It introduced a global School Feeding Policy in 2009, which was revised in 2013. WFP states that "while continuing to advocate for the universal adoption of SFPs that help increase children's access to learning opportunities and improve their health and nutrition status, WFP will focus increasingly on helping countries to establish and maintain nationally owned programmes linked to local agricultural production." The revised School Feeding Policy recognises the complexity of school feeding, and reflects this in its Theory of Change, depicted in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: WFP School Feeding Policy (2013) - Theory of Change for school feeding**



## First Type of Results: Child Outcomes and Theory of Change for School Feeding



Source: Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017

Food For Education (FFE), one of WFP's ongoing development activities, is designed to enhance communities' ability to cope with periods of food security. Since early 2008, the World Bank Group and WFP have been working together to help countries develop sustainable SFPs that provide social safety nets and promote education through FFE programmes. Such programmes aim to engage parents and communities in the promotion of public health, education, and the creation of an independent future. At a secondary level, they aim to impact on: improved livelihoods for disadvantaged smallholder farmers, and support and replication of effective SFPs by governments (Mary's Meals, 2016:17). Examples of this include Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iraq (World Bank Group 2015, 2017; WFP, 2015).

Partnership at multiple levels has been shown to be important to the success of school feeding interventions:

- **International engagement:** As well as WFP, many other international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are engaged in school feeding both within humanitarian contexts and more general developmental contexts (WFP, 2011). These partners provide implementation support, including funding, and complementary activities.
- **National governments:** Mid-term evaluations of WFP school feeding programmes in Bangladesh, Lao PDR, and Nepal in 2016 showed that relationships with governments

from national to district/local level were important, and WFP's effort to support governments in policy making and strategic planning to hand over the SFPs completely was evident (Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017).

- **Private sector engagement:** Partners in the private sector that help with 'last mile delivery' include The Boston Consulting Group, TNT, and Unilever. Other partners include Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and International Food Policy Research Institute.
- **Local engagement:** The 'emergency school meals' programme in South Sudan showed that community participation was a key component. Communities were supported at all stages of the intervention. For example, youth were engaged as youth food monitors to help maintain discipline during the distribution of the meals, as well as mobilisers to share information on importance of education, and urge parents to send their children to school (UNICEF SSEC, 2018:11).

## 'Home Grown' school programmes

More recently, there has been movement towards school feeding and FFE programmes promoting local agriculture, with labels like 'Home Grown School Feeding' (HGSF) or 'Home Grown School Meals' (HGSM) (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). There is a tendency to favour the local purchase of food for such programmes. This has increased focus on procurement and quality. Further research is required to confirm their contribution to local economies. However, the following country case studies demonstrate their value and sustainability:

**Haiti:** As of January 2016, six million Haitians lived in poverty, surviving on less than USD \$1.90 a day. Haitian poverty was largely driven by food insecurity, following the 2010 earthquake. A 2017 review of SFPs was undertaken by the World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education – School Feeding (SABER-SF) team. Recognising its potential as an agricultural country, Haiti decided gradually incorporated more local production to catalyse economic growth and reduce reliance of imported food for school feeding (World Bank Group, 2017). In October 2015, with support from Brazil, WFP launched a HGSM programme with diversified seasonal menus in the department of Nippes, to provide schools with food sources from small farmers in the region. In the 2016/2017 school year, the programme was aiming to double its reach to 7,000 children.

**Honduras:** In Honduras, work between WFP, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch has grown into a National School Meals Programme reaching some 1.3 million schoolchildren. WFP is supporting the government in testing and implementing different HGSM models. The regular food basket is complemented with fresh local food, such as fresh vegetables and eggs, purchased through the Cajas Rurales (cooperatives of small farmers), the Mancomunidades (associations of communities), or directly by the schools. In 2009, the school meals programme was linked to the Purchase for Progress (P4P). Since then, more than 18,000 tons of maize and beans were bought from some 11,000 small farmers for the programme.

**Kenya:** In response to the drought in Kenya in February 2017, the country has developed a HGSM programme based on cash transfers (CTs). Under this model, WFP transfers cash to the bank accounts of schools, so that they can purchase fresh food locally for the daily menu. The amount of cash the schools receive depends on the enrolment rate and number of school days. The model has in-built flexibility to decide which produce to buy, when, and how much. The food is procured by school committees on which teachers, parents, and community members are

represented: this ensures accountability and transparency, as well as reduces mismanagement of cash or food. With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Plan International started an SFP in April 2017. As part of the programme, volunteers from the community help with preparing the school meals. The project is now reaching an estimated 11,000 children in 94 pre-schools in Kilifi County, significantly more than the original target of 8,000.

## Flexibility

School feeding can contribute in the long run to improved food security and resilience to food shocks. Capacity building, along with service delivery, is an important aspect for achieving these long-term goals (Berger-Fenning & Keylock, 2017). SFPs aim to be flexible in their response to crises. Their long-term focus on delivering nutritionally balanced menus throughout the school year, with an emphasis on adjusting the service delivery to account for seasonality, both in terms of food production and diet diversification, and in terms of seasonal hunger (Drake et al., 2016:5-6). There is also the opportunity to focus on specific age groups that have the biggest potential to benefit from the intervention, for example pre-schoolers or adolescent girls.

In Syria in 2014, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, WFP started a SF programme targeting IDP areas that were largely stable as the pressure from new pupils on schools in these areas is high, and many of the schools run double shifts. WFP distributes vitamin and mineral-fortified date bars that are locally produced. It is estimated that 375,000 children receive these bars daily. Given the acute insecure situation in Syria, it was essential to plan for an SF programme where food distributed has long shelf life and a maximum reach. Subsequently, it has been possible to bring date bars into besieged areas in relatively calm periods. Due to the high nutrient and energy density of the date bar, transportation and storage is more efficient. Therefore, if the bars are stored in schools, they can also be distributed during periods of armed fighting (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:53).

## 3. Outcomes of combining school feeding with other programmes

Social protection encompasses a range of instruments, including school feeding, general food distribution (GFDs), cash transfers (CTs) (which may or may not be conditional), vouchers, grants for goods and basic foodstuffs, subsidies, health insurance, and pensions (Kardan et al., 2017a:2). These 'safety nets' can save households from desperate measures, such as selling assets at knockdown prices or taking children out of school so they can work.

Social protection is increasingly seen as a sustainable tool to build human capital and reduce poverty during conflict and other crises, thus potentially bridging the gap between humanitarian responses and long-term development (FAO, 2017). However, "despite the critical role of social protection in conflict and emergencies, evidence on the impacts, particularly [of] food-based programmes, on child education is remarkably thin" (Aurino et al., 2018:3).

### School feeding programmes versus take-home rations

Research shows that the impact of SFPs in non-conflict and humanitarian settings depends on the timing, i.e. school lunches may have a very different impact on classroom performance than THR (Alderman and Bundy, 2011:212). In-school meals often include milk products or other nutrient-dense foods, while THRs typically include cereals and oils, which may or may not be

fortified. SFP programmes often provide more food and food of higher nutritional quality than THR programmes. The benefits of the programmes may differ for this reason alone (Alderman et al., 2012:193).

In terms of the outcomes of SFP v THR in humanitarian contexts, three factors have provoked criticism. First, school feeding has always been considered an education-only intervention. In other words, donors, national governments and development stakeholders view the provision of food to hungry children in school as an effective tool for promoting and improving *only* educational outcomes in poor countries. Second, WFP has very often implemented school feeding as a standalone intervention, with very little integration or alignment with national policy strategies. In most countries, WFP's partnership and co-operation with national governments has been limited, and this has often hindered the effectiveness of hand-over strategies and the transition to national ownership. Third, traditional SFPs have been associated with high costs relative to national education budgets and other food aid tools (Molinas and de la Mothe, 2010: 218). These three factors have had a profound impact on donors' willingness to fund school feeding, and on national governments' interest in achieving national ownership.

In general, both the SFP and THR programmes perform similarly well in humanitarian responses. However, the SFP impact is not statistically different from that of the take-home rations (THR) programme. The WFP Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit commissioned Fafo, an independent research foundation based in Norway, to review existing evidence and practice of school feeding in emergencies and draw out the key issues for WFP and other actors to consider (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017:5). The review promotes a child-centred approach to emergency school feeding that intensifies the focus on food security and nutrition benefits, along with protection for the child population affected by an emergency. It emphasises children's access to food and protection from deprivation as elementary and primary functions of emergency school feeding.

## School feeding and cash transfer (CT) programmes

Cash transfers (CTs) have become a common feature of humanitarian responses worldwide and are one of the most heavily researched approaches in humanitarian aid (Bailey and Harvey, 2015:2). The rigorous evaluation of cash-based social assistance programmes in Latin America (notably *Progresa* and *Oportunidades*) provides a solid evidence base that CTs could form an effective and appropriate part of social protection strategies to alleviate poverty (Bailey and Harvey, 2015:2).

In general developmental contexts, school feeding forms a component of the 'safety net' (OPM & HESPI, 2018:73) and "is a plausible candidate for a social protection investment on a par with CCTs" (Alderman and Bundy, 2011). However, there is virtually no comparative impact evaluation that contrasts school feeding to CCTs in attaining educational goals (Drake et al., 2016:42)

The Sahel (including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal) has been one of the last regions in sub-Saharan Africa to engage in the development and consolidation of social protection systems for the poorest and most vulnerable. However, new social protection programmes have emerged, including long-term, regular CT programmes for extremely poor households; seasonal CTs; long-term labour-intensive public works programmes; HGSP programmes linked to local markets; health fee waivers; and measures to set up general health insurance (O'Brien et al., 2017: iii). Subsidies for food or fuel products are tending to be

complemented with, or replaced by, long-term CTs, public works programmes, SFPs and health fee waivers. Of the six countries, Senegal's CT programme is the most institutionalised within government systems; Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are all implementing programmes, though at a smaller scale; Mauritania and Chad are starting to elaborate similar schemes.

## Value of school feeding and general food distribution

Food assistance has been a key element of humanitarian aid (Aurino et al., 2018:3). Results found that households receiving at least two forms of assistance – general food distribution (GFD) and school feeding – registered statistically positive effects on nutrition outcomes, while the effects were not significant for households that received only one form of aid (WFP, 2018:8). Access to GFD was found to significantly increase calorie intake by 52% and zinc consumption by 64%; access to school feeding was found to increase vitamin A intake by 48% (WFP, 2018:10). It is concluded that combining various other forms of food assistance with GFD may be an effective strategy for supporting vulnerable populations.

## Value of school feeding, general food distribution and cash transfers

According to a systematic review conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), cash transfer programmes result in the largest and most consistent improvements in school participation (increase school enrolment, reduce drop out and improve completion rates overall). However, on average, CT programmes do not improve learning outcomes, although some individual programmes show positive results. School feeding is most effective in supporting positive learning outcomes, but has limited effect in areas without malnutrition and where school participation rates are already high (Snilstveit et al., 2016:46). Few studies included in the review measured the long-term effects of programmes (Snilstveit et al., 2016:14).

Oxford Policy Management analysed the contribution of free food distribution, SFPs and cash transfers (CTs) in Mali. As for relevant policies by ministries other than the Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action (Ministère de la Solidarité et de l'Action Humanitaire, MSAH), the Ministry of Education established the National Centre for School Canteens (Centre National des Cantines Scolaires, CNCS) and issued a National School Feeding Policy in 2011. This does not explicitly refer to the use of school meals as a response to emergencies, but it does prioritise the establishment of the scheme in the 166 communes that have been identified by the government's early warning system as being most vulnerable to food insecurity (O'Brien et al., 2018:14).

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## Key websites

- WFP Home Grown School Meals (HGSM): <http://www1.wfp.org/home-grown-school-meals>

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