



## The XXII Global Child Nutrition Forum

### Communiqué

The twenty second annual Global Child Nutrition Forum was organised by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forum was held virtually, consisting of a series of related events from 26 October through 12 November 2020.

The Forum brought together 624 participants (350 women), representing 35 countries, including high-level government officials, different governments, donors, private sector, NGOs and media institutions. At the close of the event, online conversations had achieved 29,200+ impressions on Twitter, and session recordings were viewed over 450 times. Participants from 109 countries engaged with the event website, GCNF2020.org

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the world of school feeding programs. At the peak of the first wave of the crisis, around [1.6 billion learners](#) had been affected by school closures, and over [370 million children](#) were missing out on the school meals they rely on to learn and thrive. The twenty second Forum Communiqué focuses on opportunities and shares many of the challenges that have arisen during this phase.

The COVID-19 Pandemic will have long-lasting impacts and has already demonstrated the importance of strategies to tackle global emergencies of other types that can have similar implications for school nutrition and health programs, wherein school feeding programmes play a prominent role.

The 22nd Global Child Nutrition Forum **recognizes** the impact of COVID-19 on school closures and school feeding programs, and the dedication of partners to meet child food and nutrition needs. In addition the Forum **recommends** opportunities to meet current and future needs.

1. **School feeding programmes catalyse the commitment of stakeholders from national governments and international organizations to private sector partners and civil society** . In addition, school feeding programmes are a pathway for complementary interventions and programmes (e.g. school health and nutrition services, literacy/education, social protection, WASH). The commitment of stakeholders and complementary interventions should be furthered in order to mitigate the health, and food and nutrition vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has and future emergencies could effect.



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2. **Legal frameworks enable and empower Governments to lead emergency responses.** Governmental policies, legal frameworks, operational guidance, overall system planning, and public messaging to support local communities and local and provincial governments is critical.
3. **Multi-sectoral partnerships, voices and influencers are key for the prioritisation of and investment in school feeding programmes.** Partnerships with governments and other stakeholders have been strengthened, and new partners and champions for school feeding have emerged. At the same time, public awareness has been raised in response to the Pandemic. There is an opportunity to advocate for school feeding programs on multiple levels: community, local, national, regional, and international, engaging stakeholders and new players in the process.
4. **School feeding programmes are adaptive.** School feeding programmes have proven to be important and innovative, adapting to evolving circumstances to ensure that children receive needed nutrition. These features should be promoted for addressing this Pandemic, including for the reopening of schools, and for future emergencies.
5. **Systems for capturing timely data and insights enable responsiveness.** The Pandemic has required timely data collection and analysis, knowledge sharing , and broader use of technology (e.g., mobile phones, live dashboards, virtual meetings, e-learning). The tools and approaches for rapid capture of data and insights should be permanently adopted for use in the future.
6. **Government and Donor flexibility reduces the risk of leaving children behind.** Governments and Donor flexibility to adjust funding to meet school feeding objectives through other pathways has met children and families where they are during the Pandemic. Flexible funding and implementation approaches provide lessons and a roadmap for addressing other emergencies.
7. **Deep family engagement strengthens education and nutrition impact.** Family engagement and relationships have been strengthened; school feeding stakeholders should incorporate and build on these stronger family ties to support achievements in education and nutrition.
8. **Country partners have demonstrated nimbleness in meeting family and child nutrition needs.** The Pandemic has required alternative school feeding modalities (e.g. take home rations, vouchers, food baskets, cash transfers) and/or delivery mechanisms. For some countries this was their first experience with these approaches and required quick adaptation.
9. **Importance of support and development of frontline systems and workers to promote health and safety.** Training and capacity building of frontline workers, and systems strengthening can ensure safety of workers, community members and food. It also draws special attention to prioritising nutrition when implementing programs through new and diverse modalities and delivery mechanisms.



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10. **Local food systems support livelihoods, diet diversity, nutrition equity, and resilience.** Local food systems are transforming in reaction to the Pandemic. It is clear that more effort is needed to link school feeding programs to local production to build a more sustainable, equitable and nutritious food system. There is an opportunity to involve and benefit local smallholder farmers and market vendors. Collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant ministries (e.g. Environmental protection) should be secured to guide and support farmers with sustainable practices for providing safe produce for school feeding programs.
11. **Local and domestic supply chains enable a safe, consistent and accessible food supply in times of crisis and stability.** During the Pandemic, countries experienced supply chain disruption and challenges in finding adequate ways to distribute fresh food. Local and domestic supply chains are pivoting to react more quickly to emergencies and meet local food, nutrition and health needs. National and subnational supply chains support nutrition and local economies, and they should be strengthened as they may perform better than larger, more complex supply chains within both emergency and development contexts.
12. **Nutrition-centered school feeding programmes can reduce health vulnerabilities.** Nutritious school feeding is important due to the linkages between malnutrition, immune system weaknesses, Non-communicable disease (NCD) risks and COVID-19 vulnerabilities. Nutrition should be the core element when designing school feeding programs going forward, taking into consideration location, population, and locally available and affordable foods
  - i. Local procurement of nutrient-dense foods can support nutrition priorities, dietary diversity and local preferences
  - ii. Biofortified and fortified foods should be integrated
  - iii. Best practices in WASH, health and hygiene, diet diversity, and other supportive interventions should be applied to support nutrition goals
  - iv. School food workers (cooks--in most cases, women--and food deliverers) provide an opportunity for frontline nutrition education and continue to perform critical services in creative, resourceful and nimble manners.
13. **School feeding programmes reflect local contexts and preferences.** School feeding programs should be designed according to context ( rural and urban areas). When adapting programmes to respond to emergencies and shocks, these differences and complexities in terms of contexts need to be considered.
14. **The support of private sector partners that have the capacity to respond should be encouraged.** Some private sector actors will be in a position to provide in-kind and financial support and contribute needed technical expertise in responding to crises, while others will



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be too negatively impacted themselves. The support of private sector partners that have the capacity to respond should be encouraged.

15. **South-South cooperation propels knowledge sharing, scaled action and investment.** South-South cooperation is an effective means to strengthen school feeding programmes: existing relationships and best practices, lessons learned, and strategies shared between South-South partners has laid the foundation for learning during COVID-19.

In addition, the Forum attendees **recommend:**

- **Visible demonstration of political will and leadership from governments as needed to ensure food and nutrition security to all children for integrated and sustainable school feeding programmes.**
- **National policy coherence and domestic resource allocation.** Governments should expand investment and coverage (e.g. implementing universal school meal programs) as part of Pandemic response, using evidence-based approaches to improve the design and implementation of programs.
- **Multisectoral pathways and mechanisms.** Governments should incentivize and support multisectoral and intragovernmental cooperation and mechanisms for implementing school feeding programs.
- **Foreign donor investment and technical assistance.** The school feeding community hereby issues a call to action for donor assistance, as the crisis threatens to eliminate progress made over the past decade or more in education and nutrition.
- **Flexible funding and rapid program adaptation.** Donors and Governments should continue to be flexible and to support greater local adaptation so that program implementers can be nimble and efficient in responding to the pandemic and to other crises.
- **Planning for school re-opening:**
  - Governments should utilize school feeding as a strategy to get students back to school.
  - When schools are preparing to open to students, governments and implementers should design simple procedures, parenting strategies and guidelines to help ease students' and their parents' or caregivers' worries about going back to school and the safety of schoolmeals.
- **Sharing school feeding knowledge systems, and evidence and insights:**
  - Synergies in knowledge management should be created among governments, international organisations, regional institutions, NGOs, academia and the private sector, capturing the success factors and reasons of failure from the past. Entities undertaking knowledge sharing initiatives such as [UN Agencies joint publications on the topic](#) can play a key role in this aspect,



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- Conversations among school feeding supporters and stakeholders should be encouraged and continued throughout the year, between Forums.
- Digital platforms to manage and share school feeding resources, evidence, case studies, documentation, etc should be implemented and used.
- **Using Lessons Learned, Good Practices for Programme Planning beyond the Pandemic**
  - Lessons learned during the Pandemic related to the implementation of school feeding programmes such as rapid adaptation of programmes, innovative flow of funding and other elements should be examined for permanent use and/or for addressing future emergencies