نسائم خير
Nasaem Khair

SYRIA
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER

FEASIBILITY OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES IN NORTHWESTERN SYRIAIN

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Report by:

SYRIA DEVELOPMENT CENTER
sdc@uswa.cc
London, United Kingdom

and

NASAEM KHAIR ORGANIZATION
Info@nasaemkhair.org
Gaziantep, Turkey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This rapid assessment conducted by Naseem Khair organization sought to identify how school feeding programmes might effectively tackle the nutritional and educational needs of children in Northwest Syria, with a view of exploring the feasibility of such programmes and informing future implementation in the studied areas. The study explored the potential impacts of School Feeding Program (SFP) on nutritional, health, and educational outcomes of school-aged children in northwest Syria.

The assessment methodology relied on field studies in six sub-districts of Idleb governorate (Idleb, Ariha, Dana, Maaret Tamsrin, Jisr Ash-Shugur and Harim). These studies used 56 key informant interviews, 14 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 72 Household surveys . Being a thematic assessment, its scope called for findings and conclusions brought to a governorate level.

The assessment revealed that school feeding program is feasible in all targeted areas, despite that variation of the level of readiness to such programmes in studied areas. Nearly all respondents from various stakeholders expressed a desire to implement SFP and offered recommendations for improvements. The assessment indicated that school feeding programmes are critically important to alleviate short-term hunger, improve nutrition, cognition,, school enrolment, and attendance of children. However, the positive impact of school feeding on growth, cognition, and academic achievement of school-aged children is associated with a set of constraints that are specific to the settings in northwest Syria. The large-scale needs, security restrictions and limited technical expertise, often combined with the lack of essential infrastructure, represent the main constraints for implementing school feeding programmes in northwest Syria.

The assessment identified locally driven programme planning as a key element for responding to these emergency-related implementation challenges. Here, implementing agency (s) should be able to clearly articulate and consider the specific comparative advantages of SFP, as well as manage all associated challenges/risks. Consequently, the SFP must be properly aligned with education sector support programmes.

In the design of its SFP projects, implementing agency (s) should find ways to systematically address the implementation constraints hindering support to the most vulnerable groups of school-aged children. First, the choice of SFP implementation modalities (e.g. biscuits vs. cooked meal) has to take better account of the infrastructure-related constraints at school level (cooking facilities...etc.) to avoid delays and irregularities in the distribution of food to the students. Second, implementing agency (s) has to carefully consider the specific objectives of the project to make sure that the chosen implementation

modality and food commodities optimally support the project objectives within the constraints of the school environment. Third,a comprehensive feasibility appraisal is therefore required, which includes logistical challenges and possibilities for food delivery, in particular to the most remote – and often most vulnerable – schools.

In the absence of reliable educational data in the targeted areas, implementing agency (s) also has to develop other strategies to acquire the necessary understanding of the educational challenges and relevant objectives for support. In other words, the targeting of school feeding projects has to be based not only on an understanding the nutritional needs but, more importantly, the educational needs of the affected population.

1-INTRODUCATION

1.1 Terminology:

School health and nutrition programmes typically include an integrated package of health and nutrition interventions that together seek to meet the needs of pupils in the local context. School feeding could be one of these components. Other components include complementary activities such as: handwashing with soap, height measurement, weight measurement, deworming treatment, eye testing and eyeglasses, hearing testing and treatment, dental cleaning and testing, menstrual hygiene, supplying drinking water and water purification.

Historically, school-based programmes led by health sector have been called "School Health and Nutrition Programmes", while programmes that provide food in schools are "School Feeding Programmes", frequently managed by sectors other than health, especially education, social protection and welfare. Today's school health and nutrition programmes typically include school meal components, and school feeding programmes typically include health interventions. This assessment preferentially uses the term school feeding because it is the most widely accepted terminology in this area.

Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF): This happened when sourcing food for school feeding locally from smallholder farmers in a bid to boost local agriculture, strengthen local food systems and move people out of poverty. HGSF effectively augments the impact of regular school feeding programmes with increased food production and diversification as well as economic benefits for local communities. HGSF programmes emerged as an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of smallholder famers and local communities, and to strengthen the nexus between nutrition, agriculture and social protection.

1.2 Types of School Feeding Progarmme:

School feeding in its strictest sense refers to the provision of a snack or a meal at school, to be eaten by the students at school. More generally, the term can also include the provision of take-home rations to encourage schooling. Hence, the SFP could be implemented in one of the following means:

a) School feeding can be provided as a freshly prepared meal or snack. It mainly consists of a mixed food basket, consisting of staple food or fortified blended food commodity, pulses and oil, sugar or salt. Fresh foods and other ingredients are contributed locally, generally as part of the community support.

b) A ready-to-eat snack to be consumed at school can alternatively be provided; generally, these

are fortified biscuits. These are of lower nutritional value compared to a freshly prepared meal, hence bearing a smaller potential to improve the actual nutritional situation. On the other hand, being dry and 'ready to eat', they do not require major investments in establishing infrastructure or efforts to prepare and serve the meal at the school. Consequently, the use of fortified biscuits allows for a faster and easier implementation, which often makes them the more suitable commodity under extreme emergency conditions.

c) Take Home Rations (THR) is another modality of SFP which provides an income transfer to the child's household. This modality acts as an incentive for consistent school attendance by minimising the opportunity costs related to education. As a result, it stimulates participation in education, particularly among food insecure populations and those in which certain groups of children, such as girls, are denied opportunities to attend school. THRs benefit the entire family, but not the student directly. A THR programme does not aim to reduce short-term hunger or to contribute to better nutrition during schooling. The provision of THRs allows for individual targeting, hence supporting the most vulnerable or disadvantaged population groups. THRs are often used to reduce gender gaps in education or to stimulate participation in nonformal education such as literacy classes. In the short-term, THRs benefit the household food security; the food support helps to meet immediate needs, resulting in increased food consumption for all household members. Commodities are selected to best meet the actual needs, often being of a good nutritional as well as economic benefit to the family (i.e., staple food; oil, grain). In the longer term, there is often an increase in disposable income within the family that may be used for acquisition of other basic food or non-food item or to further support education for children.

d) Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF): This innovative approach links school feeding programmes with local smallholder farmers to provide schoolchildren with food that is safe, diverse, nutritious, and above all local. The benefits of this are evident and manifold. The schools provide local farmers with a predictable outlet for their products, leading to a stable income, more investments and higher productivity. The children enjoy healthy, diversified food; this makes it more likely that they will stay in school, perform better and improve their adult job prospects. At the community level, Home Grown School Feeding initiatives promote nutrition education and better eating habits and encourage the diversification of production with a special emphasis on local crops. Community involvement, in turn, enhances the sustainability of programmes.

1.3 A brief history of School Feeding Progarmme.

School feeding has a rich history; even the earliest schools would have had to consider how children might be fed during the school day. Modern thinking on school-based health and nutrition goes beyond that simple concept and recognizes school meals as programmes with specific broader benefits for children and their communities. In the early 1900s, programmes such as those launched by the United Kingdom government, gave a greater focus to social protection, targeting schools in the poorest communities. By the 1940s, this approach was often combined with a vision of school feeding as a stimulus for agricultural production, as occurred in the United States of America (United States). School feeding is increasingly viewed as a human right: India has led the way in declaring meals at school a legal obligation of those providing education; Brazil and Mexico have incorporated school feeding into social safety nets and community development; and Nelson Mandela's first 100 days of planning in South Africa viewed school meals for the poor as key to catch-up on lost opportunities and to invest in the next generation. [1]

In 2009, the World Bank (WB) and WFP, in collaboration with the Partnership for Child Development (PCD), published an analysis called Rethinking School Feeding.[2] The analysis was sparked by the food, fuel and financial crises of 2008, during which governments recognized that school feeding programmes offered multiple benefits to the most vulnerable: in-kind income support to families; learning and access to education; and maintaining health and well-being. As a result, governments increasingly viewed school feeding as an attractive, long-term social protection investment, as well as a short-term safety net. There were calls for greater rigour in the analysis of policy issues [3] and of the scale and quality of evaluations and trial design [4]. It became clear that governments invest in school feeding not because it delivers on one goal, but because it delivers on many.

It is estimated that 388 million children receive school meals around the world. Of these, the largest school feeding programmes are in India (90 million children), Brazil and China (both 40 million), the United States (30 million) and Egypt (11 million). Fifty-two countries have programmes reaching more

1) State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020

2) Bundy, D.A.P., Burbano, C., Grosh, M., Gelli, A., Jukes, M. & Drake, L. 2009. Re-thinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector. Directions in Human Development. Washington, DC, World Bank Group. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/ Resources/1099080042112-547664/1099079877269-278200/DID_School_Feeding.pdf

3) Alderman, H. & Bundy, D.A.P. 2012. School Feeding Programs and Development: Are We Framing the Question Correctly? World Bank Research Observer, 221-204 :(2)27. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/17114/10986/wbro_204_2_27.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

4) Kristjansson, E.A., Robinson, V., Petticrew, M., MacDonald, B., Krasevec, J., Janzen, L., Greenhalgh, T., Wells, G., MacGowan, J., Farmer, A., Shea, B. J., Mayhew, A. & Tugwell, P. 2007. School Feeding for Improving the Physical and Psychosocial Health of Disadvantaged Elementary School Children. Cochrane Database Syst. Rev. 1.

than one million children. South Asia has the largest number of school feeding programmes (107 million), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (78 million), East Asia and the Pacific (58 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (53 million). These numbers include children receiving school meals provided by WFP (17 million in 2019).[5]

The number of children receiving school feeding has increased worldwide since 2013. While there has been a 9 percent increase in school feeding overall, there has been a considerable scaling-up in low-income countries (36+ percent) and lower middle-income countries (86+ percent), especially where the number of children receiving school feeding was low in 2013, and particularly in Africa. There has also been an increase in school feeding programmes in upper middle-income countries (18+ percent), and a modest increase (2+ percent) in high-income countries, which already had high levels of coverage.

1.4 Objectives of School Feeding Programme:

The objectives behind all SFPs are primarily educational; that is, the programme aims to improve educational outcomes through improved access and participation in education, particularly through increased enrolment and attendance. These objectives may include the alleviation of short-term hunger, which enable students to concentrate and learn better. Short-term hunger occurs when children (predominantly those from food insecure households) have an inadequate breakfast and is exacerbated when they have to walk long distances to school.

Beyond the given 'educational support' outcomes, school feeding programmes can potentially contribute to an improved nutritional situation, particularly with regard to micronutrient deficiencies. This secondary objective of nutritional support is in some senses a 'given' but requires more care in implementation to achieve the objectives.

5) State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020

2-METHODOLOGY

The MEAL department in Nasaem Kahir organization conducted this study with objective to explore the feasibility of school feeding progarmmes and the role of these progarmmes in effectively addresses the needs of children -in NW Syria situations, by looking into the following:

- The relevance of objectives generally associated with SFPs operations in Idleb governorate;
- The constraints on and opportunities for managing SFPs operations in the targeted districts and how these influence the performance of these programmes;
- The factors influencing the sustainability of SFPs benefits in the NW Syria contexts.

Source of information used for the SFP study is based on findings from 56 key informants interviews (KIIs), 14 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 72 household surveys. The results were documented onto the Kobo platform between 05.07.2021 and 25.07.2021. The focus groups were primarily used to gain insights into the specific emergency and operational context, the needs for SFP and perspectives of the populations. The interviews conducted with Education Directorate officials, school directors/ coordinators, parents and NGOs› staff. The main objective was to collect feedback on possibility of implementing SFP in NW Syria and the constraints they could be faced by the SFP, as well as possible recommendations to overcome them. More specific questions on the existing infrastructure and facilities of the SFP at school and municipal level were also asked. For this data collection, data collectors used questionnaires composed of open-ended and close-ended questions, with a strong focus on gathering recommendations for the SFP's policy makers

Consequently, the study attempted to provide an evidence of the potential nutritional benefits of school feeding programmes, and the needs of such progarmme in NW Syria, with examining the constraints and opportunities they might be faced in the management of SFP operations in the different scenarios. This assessment does not include a cost-benefit analysis of SFPs operations to arrive at a quantitative estimate of their efficiency.


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3-FINDINGS

3.1 The relevance of nutritional objectives in School Feeding Programme.

It had been asserted SFP should focus on educational objectives (including relieving short-term hunger), in part because nutritional effectiveness cannot be adequately quantified. However, targeting mechanisms take nutritional needs of school children into consideration. In practice, this means that school feeding programmes generally provide food commodities of high nutritional value to help supplement the nutritional needs of school-aged children. It is therefore the SFPs can clrealy addressing the combined educational and nutritional needs school-aged children.

It was mentioned during KIIs that the stabilization of children's nutritional status is a pre-condition for their educational development. Here, school feeding has a definitive comparative advantage over other available means to address these educational challenges.

Under the circumstances in NW Syria, there is a need to strongly consider the nutritional improvement of students as a first-level potential benefit that would enable students to attend school regularly without gaps in attendance due to either sickness or the need to find food; it would also help meet short-term hunger needs to enable students to focus on their lessons. However, setting specific nutritional objectives should not be taken lightly – it has significant implications for the design and implementation of SFP projects.

Experts mentioned during KIIs that pursuing nutritional objectives requires a careful assessment of nutritional needs and the mobilization of sufficient resources to ensure an adequate nutritional response. It also helps to have a stronger focus on the effective use of food in terms of improved nutrition, and the inclusion of nutrition-relevant indicators in monitoring and evaluation. Nutritional objectives would help to strengthen the focus on better nutrition and would help to enhance nutritional benefits. This could add an additional value to SFP and possibly improve their comparative advantages. However, most interviewees stressed that responding to the high level of generalized food insecurity was the primary need in the targeted areas.

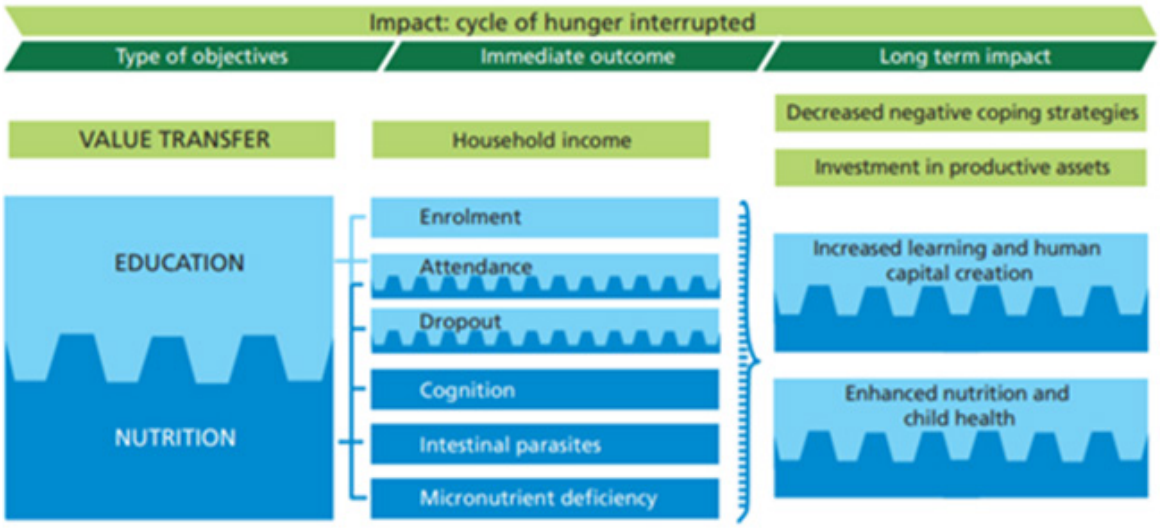

Figure 1: School Feeding Results

Source: WFP 2018

3.2 Appropriateness and potential nutritional, educational and social benefits of School Feeding Programme.

It has been noted that school feeding can improve children's attendance and enrolment in school. School feeding by and large is also thought to help offset the effects of short-term hunger, particularly prevalent when children have no or inadequate breakfast or have to walk long distances. As a result, school feeding holds a potential for creating a positive effect on the learning achievements of children, through more regular school attendance, increased attention, and concentration.

The vast majority of school directors stressed that improvements in student health and nutrition offer the possibility of improving educational efficiency and school-based health and nutrition programmes are seen as having a good potential to improve actual nutrition of school aged children but agree that school feeding alone can not be expected to address the full range of factors determining a child's nutritional status. The use of micro-nutrient fortified foods can make a positive contribution to alleviate micro-nutrient deficiencies particularly with regard to iron and iodine deficiency and can help to contribute to a better development of children.

Accordingly, a consensus seems to exist that SFP can have certain positive nutritional and health effects, in particular by minimising the consequences for children who are suffering from extreme malnutrition

and micro-nutrient deficiencies. SFPs are not nutrition interventions to tackle malnutrition at its roots or to compensate for nutritional shortcomings during early childhood. Malnutrition has multiple causes, including poor food consumption patterns, illness, lack of sanitation and poor health and hygiene practices. Serious mental damage, such as reduced intelligence and lower physical capacity is predominantly a result of poor nutrition during earlier periods in life, before children start going to school. SFP therefore cannot be considered to be pure nutrition programmes, and should not be prioritized at the expense of efforts to reach pre-school children with effective nutrition interventions. Strategically, SFP cannot replace nutrition programmes that target vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and lactating mothers or children under two years of age.

The comparative advantage of SFP therefore lies in their ability to play a supportive role with regard to children's education in that they can help to bring children to school. The added nutrition from school meals also can help students to be more attentive and to increase their concentration span during lessons, ultimately enabling children to learn better. This is particularly relevant in areas where malnutrition is a severe and acute problem.

The reverse question is, however, if SFP can be justified on the basis of its contribution to educational benefits alone - without considering its potential effects on the nutritional and health status of beneficiaries. The justification of 'food support to education' therefore critically depends on the link between food insecurity, malnutrition and effective learning. WFP has to demonstrate that even marginal improvements of food intake and nutritional status can effectively address those nutritional problems that often hamper the students' ability to learn. It is exactly this link that constitutes the unique comparative advantage of SFP.

The following aspects should be taken into account when considering the merits of school feeding:

1. the enriching contribution to teaching-learning processes;
2. the stimulation of community participation in education;
3. the provision of a setting for community development activities such as creating employment opportunities; and
4. the provision of an outlet for local food production.

Results demonstrated that education was already a priority for the targeted IDPs in NW Syria, and that the main issue for some of them was in fact the lack of access to education (i.e., the low number of

schools), not the lack of encouragement to attend. The assessment therefore concludes that school feeding was not as effective as a more directly related educational incentive may have been, such as a school supplies, the provision of school buildings, or recruitment of better qualified teachers. Similarly, one of the main barriers to education for girls is the extremely low number of middle schools for girls, creating limited access.

In addition, feedback from community members provided about the social benefit of SFP. it was noted that the meal at school gives children time to play and spend leisure time together. These are factors that contribute to the positive socialization of students in school and thus to the stabilization of the overall social environment in schools.

Table 2: Number of Boy students enrolled and dropping out of school:		
Sub-district	**Enrolled**	**Dropped out**
Idleb	25400	5000
Ariha	16566	1283
Dana	26566	986
Maaret Tamsrin	24400	1200
Jisr Ash-Shugur	6000	6400
Harim	25000	4000

Table 2: Number of Boy students enrolled and dropping out of school:		
Sub-district	**Enrolled**	**Dropped out**
Idleb	25400	5000
Ariha	16566	1283
Dana	26566	986
Maaret Tamsrin	24400	1200
Jisr Ash-Shugur	6000	6400
Harim	25000	4000

Table 3: Number of Girl students enrolled and dropping out of school:		
Sub-district	**Enrolled**	**Dropped out**
Idleb	29000	5800
Ariha	16730	973
Dana	24907	845
Maaret Tamsrin	24900	1300
Jisr Ash-Shugur	17000	6300
Harim	35000	2500

Table 4: Number of schools:	
Sub-district	**Number of schools (elementary, secondary and high school)**
Idleb	146
Ariha	142
Dana	97
Maaret Tamsrin	160
Jisr Ash-Shugur	140
Harim	155

Table 5: Gender balance in schools:		
Sub-district	**Boys**	**Girls**
Idleb	49	51
Ariha	50	50
Dana	48	52
Maaret Tamsrin	49	51
Jisr Ash-Shugur	49	51
Harim	45	55

Table 6: Gender balance in schools:		
Sub-district	**Boys**	**Girls**
Idleb	49	51
Ariha	50	50
Dana	48	52
Maaret Tamsrin	49	51
Jisr Ash-Shugur	49	51
Harim	٤٥	55

Table 7: Student–teacher ratio		
Sub-district	**Students for everyone teacher**	**Dropped out**
Idleb	45	5000
Ariha	10	1283
Dana	27	986
Maaret Tamsrin	39	1200
Jisr Ash-Shugur	17	6400
Harim	25	4000

Table 9: Number of students in each classroom		
Sub-district	**Students for everyone teacher**	**Dropped out**
Idleb	35	5000
Ariha	40-30	1283
Dana	35	986
Maaret Tamsrin	40-35	1200
Jisr Ash-Shugur	30	6400
Harim	80-70	4000

3.3 Comparative advantages of different SFP delivery modalities.

The respondents emphasized that the choice over the selection of different modalities and commodities for SFP is open to local decision-making, based on locally available resources, capacities, and operational requirements, such as inputs required at school level in selected locations. The respondents provided recommendations for different kinds of meals, such as early morning or mid-morning meals, lunch and snacks.

The particular characteristics of different delivery modalities for school feeding (prepared meals, dry-feeding, THRs) have implications for their relative potential to contribute to education and nutritional objectives. Each modality also brings with it different operational requirements for school feeding operations and requires different pre-conditions in the schools before food can be delivered. The significance of the particular characteristics and their implications for programming and implementation ultimately depend on the particular context of each school feeding project.

3.3.1 School meal:

From a nutritional perspective, the serving of a freshly cooked meal is more likely to lead to significant nutritional improvements and the alleviation of micro-nutrient deficiencies than the provision of biscuits, dates, or other “dry” foods. The mixed food basket in itself is, if well designed, more nutritious than the biscuits usually provided as dry rations. Sharing a meal at school among peers can also increase the social cohesion and improve the overall social and emotional experience of the students in the school environment, an opportunity that is not offered to the same extent by dry rations that are mostly used individually as snacks or by take-home rations.

Prepared meals are also particularly demanding in terms of resources that are required from the communities. The parents stated that they are reday to contribute to the meal progarmme either dueing coocking process or providing additional food commodities, cooking and eating utensils as well as soap to clean them. Compared to other modalities, the preparation and distribution of a school meal is particularly labour intensive and requires that a group of cooks, often volunteer women, work the whole day, from food preparation in the early morning to cleaning of pots and rationing for the next school day in the afternoon and evening.

Data demonstrated that cooked meals in that respect also provide the opportunity to channel food to most vulnerable families/mothers in the community, if the selection process is guided in this direction

and if the vulnerable families or mothers have the necessary skills and can be organized appropriately. The cooks need to be carefully selected (e.g., particularly poor, food insecure households) in a transparent process. Prepared meals also have particular potential to link school feeding to broader development processes in the communities. Local procurement, the creation of training and employment opportunities for cooks and possible links with school garden projects may be strategies to further pursue these possibilities.

Results demonstrated that prepared meals are by far the most demanding delivery modality in this respect. The daily preparation of fresh meals is obviously particularly demanding in terms of the school infrastructure required for this task. Schools need kitchens or at least basic cooking facilities, a basic store to protect the food from misappropriation and spoilage, utensils including cooking pots and serving bowls and water for cooking and cleaning.

In NW Syria proportion of schools are not adequately have these facilities for cooked meals, however, these could be encountered during design of the project.

The cocked meals holds potential to involve women in ways which promote leadership and capacity building without overburdening or reinforcing negative.

Regarding the issues of food safety at schools, one significant issue with prepared meals is the level of oversight that should be considered over the actual preparation of the food and consequently the quality of the food eaten. It was, therefore, stated the need for providing new training on a regular basis for staff who will be involved in preparing the meals. Still, it appears important to ensure that meals remain attractive to students, if prepared in variation, using different additional ingredients and flavours and applying different preparation recipes.

3.3.2 Dry Snacks:

Results indicated that the particular strength of dry-feeding lies in its efficiency in contributing to the alleviation of short-term hunger. Fortified Biscuits require minimal labour and almost no preparation and can easily be distributed early morning. Biscuits do not require the establishment of complex infrastructure and preparation facilities, although they do require basic storage facilities. biscuits were sometimes complemented by dried dates. They can provide a substantial contribution for additional nutritional energy, and they were attractive to the school children. Such local commodity-based snack can be less costly than High Energy Biscuits (HEB) and appropriate in some instances.

Some respondents noted that in areas where most of the children go to school on an empty stomach, an early distribution of food is necessary to alleviate short-term hunger. In principle, cooked snacks have potential to alleviate short-term hunger in a way that also provides a comprehensive food input, but the use of commodities that are easy and fast to prepare is required.

3.3.3 Take-Home Rations:

THRs are not assumed to bring a substantial direct contribution to the food intake of children, but have a particular strength in contributing to improved household food security. THRs particularly effective in serving as an incentive for parents to send and keep their children in school, providing that the rations are sufficient to overcome the support costs or cultural barriers. They are therefore a particularly effective modality to use for encouraging increased enrolment in school. However, while THR can promote long term retention, they do not impact the alleviation of short-term hunger. THRs do not require preparation or kitchen infrastructure, although like all other modalities they do require storage.

3.3.4 Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF):

The possibility for linking SFP to school gardens was being explored in several locations in NW Syria. School feeding benefits can be further increased by leveraging the institutional demand associated with school meals to support local smallholder farmer production through local purchases. it had been reported that HGSF programmes is an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of smallholder famers and local communities, and to strengthen the nexus between nutrition, agriculture and social protection. Linking schools to local production can complement other efforts to strengthen food production and diversification.

HGSF is not strictly limited to the purchase of local products for schools from smallholders, but is usually designed to achieve nutrition-sensitive objectives and includes complementary interventions for farmers and communities. HGSF programmes support smallholder farmers and agriculture in two main ways: by establishing strategic procurement and creating a structured demand for locally produced food; and by integrating additional, complementary interventions in order to enable smallholder farmers to participate in school feeding markets. The core benefits of HGSF are as following:

- Promote the design and adoption of quality and safety standards for fresh and local foods;
- Support crop and dietary diversification;

- Integrate food and nutrition education for behavioural change, and to support culturally appropriate, healthier eating habits;
- Maximize benefits for smallholder farmers, by linking schools to local food production;
- Strengthen the capacities of smallholder farmers and communities to produce food;
- Contribute to rural transformation.

The most important crops in the targeted areas are:

- Vegetables: Tomato, cucumber, eggplant, squash, pepper, potato, cabbage, leafy vegetables, cauliflower.
- Grain: Wheat, barley, fababean, chickpea, pea, lentil.
- Fruit: Fig, cheery, peach, apricot, watermelon.
- Tree: Olive, pistachio.

It also had been reported that nearly all schools in targeted areas have garden (agricultural land) which could be used to enhance planting practices as part of HGSF.

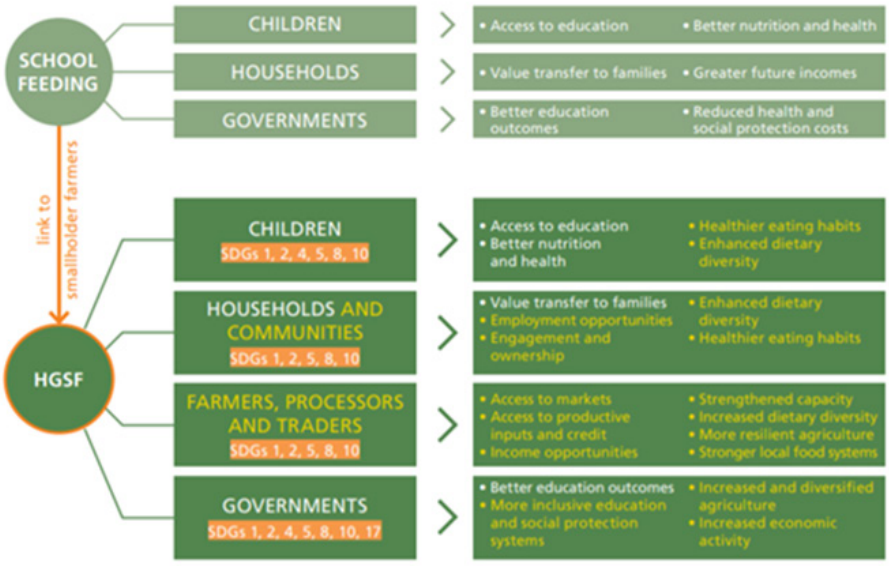

Figure 1: Beneficiaries and potential benefits of SFP and HGSF
Source: FAO 2019

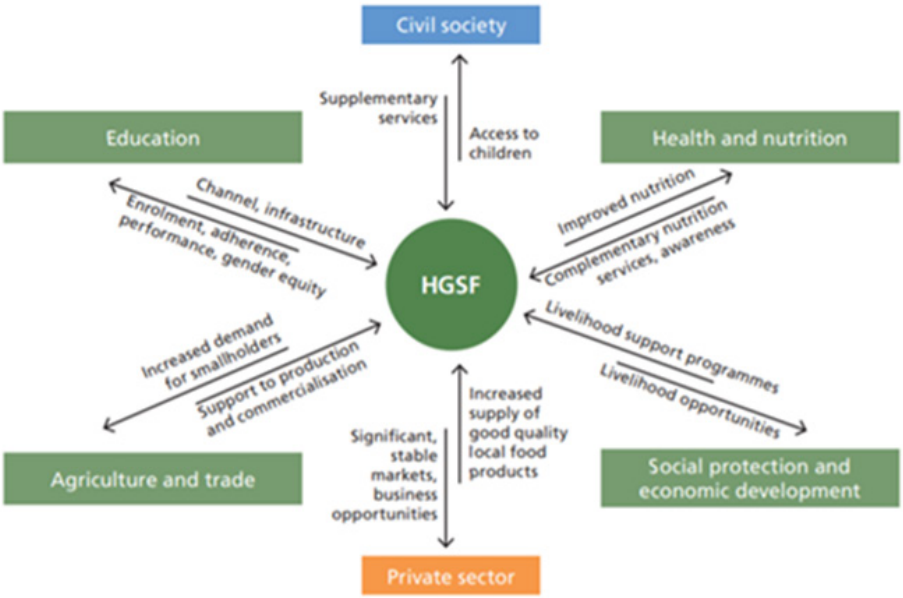

Figure 2: How HGSF can contribute to and benefit from different sectors
Source: FAO 2019

3.4 SFP Design Elements

The achievement of the desired outcomes is often influenced by the chosen design modalities for the school feeding programme. These modalities vary, and various design choices include, among others, the serving of meals in-school solely or the provision of complementary take-home rations; the embedding of incentives and/or conditions into the programme, meaning that students only receive school meals after meeting a certain set of conditions or requirements; and at what time of day school meals are served. It was reported that whichever design modalities are chosen, policymakers should endeavour to think creatively and strategically about how to combine different design elements to achieve positive results across education and learning indicators.

In addition to embedding conditions into or coupling other incentives with school feeding programmes, the timing of school meals is an important design consideration in reaping the full cognitive benefits from students.

The design of menus is one of the most important steps when embarking on SFP. It was recomnded that, programme designers have to consider a number of criteria for menu development, including:

- programme objectives;
- nutritional requirements of target beneficiaries (students);
- food consumption patterns and traditions;
- existing national (food-based) dietary guidelines;
- existing and potential food produced by male and female smallholder farmers;
- seasonality;
- price;
- storage and handling requirements;
- vulnerability to food safety and quality issues;
- preparation challenges. Broadly, the planning process involves assessing the nutritional requirements of the target group, setting recommended nutrient targets (or limits) to be covered by the school meals; and developing patterns or food combinations that can achieve these targets as a basis for defining the menus.

Setting pre-conditions to ensure that schools that join the programme meet minimum conditions to allow for the secure delivery, storage and preparation of food commodities. Moreover, it was stressed the importrance of including training and materials to educate food handlers in hygienic food preparation into programme designs, to reduce the risk associated with centralized food provision for student health. The availability of potable water and operational sanitation facilities are “musts”. The suggested minimal acceptable solution for sanitation is a pit latrine or a ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrine. Only schools that meet these minimum conditions are eligible to receive food support. Those who fail to meet them should receive support to help meet the standards.

On the other hand, some voices mentioned that where the primary (informal) objective of the SFP is to address the short-term hunger and nutritional support, fulfilment of minimum conditions at school level should generally not used as a pre-condition for participation, apart from accessibility of the school and the availability of water; there should be much more flexibility in the programming approach.

Among survey respondents, only %22 of participantes considered minimum criteria during the

selection of individual schools for programme participation

3.5 Acceptance of the program by beneficiaries

Most of the key informants at sub- district level highlighted the children's and parents' very high acceptance of the program and described benefits as reduced absenteeism and increased attention of children during class. Though parents may lack ability to adequately monitor technical aspects of education quality, they immediately recognize the benefit of sending children to school if a meal will be served. School directors stated the potential positive impact on enrolment rates, but also mentioned the potential negative impact when school feeding is inconsistent and interrupted. Parents gave similar feedback, stating that children might lack motivation to go to school on days meals are not served.

3.6 Poor supporting school infrastructure

Feedback from KIIs indicated that nearly all schools› lake of proper infrastructure for cooked meals support. Only %30 of schools have a storage room in the school. The size of the rooms used to store food in the schools was sufficient in %44 of schools (and smaller in other cases). Only %65 of schools have canteens. Access to water is very limited in some schools (%20). Toilets and handwashing facilities are available in good conditions in %80 of schools.

3.7 Market›s capacity for securing SPF items

Interviewees' perspective had been that all targeted sub-districts have a substantial markets that can ensure timely supply for necessary items of SFP.

Sub-district	# of substantial markets (general food items)	# of substantial markets (agriculture items)	# of retail trade	# of operational bakeries
Idleb	3	3	4	7
Ariha	4	4	15	10
Dana	10	10	30	30
Maaret Tamsrin	5	5	25	20
Jisr Ash-Shugur	3	3	15	15
Harim	6	6	30	30

It was reported that at the sub-district level the food storage facilities are exist with acceptable capacity. These facilities could be used to store the perishable food (vegetable and fruit).

3.8 Food safety and quality

It was strongly reported that food safety and quality are crucial for any school feeding programme. Food safety is a non-negotiable aspect, since unsafe food will prevent the full achievement of goals to improve food security and nutrition. The provision of nutritious and fresh foods increases the need for good food hygiene, which comprises conditions and measures necessary for the production, processing, storage and distribution/preparation of food to ensure a safe, wholesome product fit for human consumption. Food safety and quality have to be ensured in all elements of the supply chain, i.e.: on the farm; during transport; during processing; and at school (on delivery, during storage and during meal preparation).

Farmers, aggregators and other actors along the supply chain should be trained in best practices for safe post-harvest handling, storage and food management. Schools require adequate infrastructure and adequately trained staff or service providers to store food and prepare meals while respecting hygiene and safe food handling to guarantee that children consume good-quality and safe food. The combination of good hygienic practice during food preparation with systematic training on and supervision of hygienic food consumption (such as washing hands, eating from clean plates and with clean cutlery) is a crucial part of promoting the healthy eating habits of schoolchildren, which they will take with them after their schooling. Another important consideration is that local capacities to control food safety and quality may need to be strengthened.

3.9 Synergies with other programmes

It was noted that the benefits of a SFP can be maximized if it is closely linked with other related programmes, such as in the area of social protection, nutrition and health, agriculture and rural development. These complementary interventions are not only of direct relevance in the school environment, but also offer an opportunity to raise awareness and improve conditions among families and community members. They have a direct, positive impact on nutrition. Therefore, a SFP should be designed in close collaboration with the health and water and sanitation sectors in order to capitalize fully on the nutritional opportunities of a favourable food environment in schools. Nutritional awareness and education should always accompany SFP, so that children learn about what they are

eating and why they are eating it. This awareness will promote lifelong healthy eating habits. It is to be hoped that, as adults, these children will continue to eat balanced, diverse and healthy food. Synergies with existing agriculture programmes, in particular the complementary support to smallholders described above, and programmes aiming to help farmers adopt climate-smart or nutrition-sensitive production practices should be actively sought, as they enhance the benefits of both interventions and make them more efficient. Strong and beneficial synergies are also possible with educational programmes (improving curricula, teaching materials, teacher training and remuneration, school infrastructure, etc.) and social protection programmes including gender equity.

3.10 Gender

The contribution of women to food production is highly significant. An SFP can address the effect of women's underprivileged position in several ways, for example by:

- supporting the capacity of farmers' organizations to mainstream gender or have gender quotas, ensuring that women actually benefit from their membership and have a voice in decisionmaking processes within the organization;
- supporting gender-sensitive capacity development, such as training adapted to women's needs by being conducted at times and in ways that are compatible with women's typical chores; and
- increasing access to capital to invest in women's productive activities (for inputs, technology and additional labour on their farms, etc.). In these cases, the SFP should form part of an enhanced approach and wider effort, and include explicit goals for gender transformation.

3.11 SFP in the progression from emergency to rehabilitation.

It was stated that SFP could play a significant role in paving the way from emergency to rehabilitation phases. This could be materialized through establishing linkages with local producers or incremental steps towards building the capacity of communities to produce supplemental food commodities for the school meals. In light of this there are two issues should be taken in consideration:

- The school feeding programme has to be part of an overall education development framework either at local, regional levels and linked to other complementary interventions to increase the chance that it can be linked to "development interventions" supporting an improvement of educational or other social variables;

- Ownership of the programme should be gradually transferred to the authorities, communities and schools or other local actors with the will and the capacity to continue supporting an improvement of enrolment, attendance and quality of learning at the schools.

3.12 Sustainability issues to be addressed in the implementation of SFP

It had been asserted by the majority of school directors that to ensure the sustainability of SFP, the subsequent aspect should be considered.:

1. Setting milestones for achievement: The identification of and responsibility for reaching these milestones should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders and agreed to by all parties involved.
2. Authorities› commitment: Phase-outs are more successful if the commitment actually involves budget contributions from the Authorities and an active role in SFP implementation.
3. Community contributions: Commitments from communities, in particular parents, is also essential to ensure continued strong SFP after the project comes to an end.
4. Technical assistance: Technical support throughout the project, during the phase-out and beyond, is particularly important for ensuring an adequate transfer of skills and maintaining the programme›s stream of benefits long after external assistance has ended.
5. Management and communication: Phase-out strategies should be accompanied by a management plan that ensures that SFP leadership is taken over by national actors.
6. Making Sure Everyone Understands the Exit: The implementing agency must ensure phase-out plans are clearly communicated to all stakeholders in a school feeding project, including teachers, parents and beneficiaries.
7. Involving the private sector: Active private sector involvement helps develop support and expertise among key political and economic players. The sooner private sector interests are involved, the earlier and more concrete the support will be.

3.13 Challenges and possible solutions:

Particular challenges to consider for the design of school feeding interventions in NW Syria context. The challenges are as following:

1. Geographic targeting:
   The Geographic targeting should be based on the analysis of the NW Syria situation and the problems that food aid is addressing. The following targeting indicators were proposed for selecting locations/schools: i) gender-specific rates of enrolment and attendance; ii) gender-specific indicators of educational efficiency such as drop-out, promotion and repetition rates; iii) household food security; iv) average distance of schools from homes of pupils.

2. Student Targeting:
   During emergencies, school-aged children can find themselves in a variety of situations that expose them to physical, mental or socio-economic risks. Humanitarian organizations therefore have to be sensitive to specific vulnerabilities and should strive to address any corresponding needs through their support programmes. In terms of student targeting the following points were raised during FDGs:

- Girls are among the most vulnerable. Their socio-economic vulnerability is often particularly high, and physical protection is a cause of concern. School enrolment and attendance of girls is often low, particularly for older girls due to health and security concerns.
- Returnees also have particular educational needs, due to their specific socio-economic situation and history of displacement;
- The interviewees agreed that SFP is meant to support both remote rural schools and urban or peri urban schools. However, it was recommended that more efforts should be made to target more remote schools;

As conclusions, targeting criteria and the targeting process need to be responsive to both needs and resources. Ultimately, implementing agency also has to link the targeting process to a consideration of the logistical challenges and thus the related costs of supplying the selected schools.

3. Lack of proper facilities:
   No schools should be excluded because they lack facilities or water sources or because of low accessibility. Implementing agency (s) should instead work with its partners to build the necessary infrastructure. In this respect, it was mentioned that SFP would help restore a sense of normalcy in the camps.

4. Challenges to the timely and regular delivery of food commodities:
   The distribution plan should consider all elements of securing the necessary commodities during the SFP duration. logistic plan should ensure that food has reached to the schools on timely manner. In that regard was mentioned the importance of proper designing and monitoring to SFP.

5. Access:
   Problems of insecurity and/or insufficient transport infrastructure, including roads that regularly become inaccessible, affect the performance of SFP. This matter should be considered during the design of SFP, as well as it was recommended to enhance the coordinator with safety and security actors for timely implementing of risk mitigation measures.

6. Low management & administrative capacity at school level:

7. Some schools often also did not have adequate data that gave implementing agency a reliable picture of the educational situation on the ground. Therefore, essential data (enrolment, attendance, access to schools) should be collected as part of SFP design. In addition, conducted comprehensive training and capacity building regarding SFP for all involved staff is critical for successful implementation of SFP.


TOBAL FASHION
TOBAL FASHION

4-OVERALL CONCLUSION

Findings from this study can be used to enhance and adapt the potential intervention logic and theory of SFP in NW Syria context. This will help to better capture the particular characteristics and challenges of SFP activities that will be implemented in NW Syria situations. Practitioners and policy makers can build on this evaluation to expand the knowledge and understanding of the functioning of school feeding programmes in NW Syria situations. Based on the findings, the evaluation team draws the following overall conclusions:

- Customized design of SFP is central to increased effectiveness
  This presents the importance of locally appropriate, customized SFP design. This emphasis the significance of correctly assessing specific educational needs in the design phase; and properly considering the cost implications of targeting; as well as considering operational implications of the different delivery modalities.

- Tension between "targeting" and "provision of complementary inputs"
  Imprecise targeting in SFP and the fact that much needed "complementary inputs" are not developed are the main factors that could contribute to a reduced effectiveness of SFP. Precise targeting, however, will not solve the challenge of ensuring coordination with other complementary educational and nutrition/health activities. In order for WFP to more accurately respond to the combined objectives of educational access and retention and respond to the needs of the most food security vulnerable, implementing agency must be willing to co-ordinate with other UN agencies and NGOs and to partner around their education-related assistance to schools.

  However, this carries the risk that implementing agency compromises its own targeting principles, for example, in that nutritional vulnerability considerations are omitted from the targeting process completely. In that sense, there even is a certain tension and potential tradeoff between both factors. Ultimately, implementing agency has to strike a balance between increasing the accuracy of its targeting process and improving the coordination with strategic partners. However, in both areas, improvements are needed.

- Particular implementation associated with specific and individual context features
  Whereas some organizational or programme challenges cut across the different operational contexts, there are challenges that are logically and systematically linked to specific context features of the programme or programme environment. For example, low levels of community and

household resources are probably associated with a comparatively lower ability of communities to put in place infrastructure and other installations to meet the pre-conditions and operational requirements of particular school feeding modalities. This context specificity supports the argument for more educational inputs into the design and monitoring process. Without this, the suggestion of a local design may not achieve the desired objectives.

Table 1. The Power of school Feeding	
1. Nutrition	Improved micronutrient and macronutrient intake enhance nutrition and lead to better child health, increased learning and decreased morbidity for students.
2. Education	School meals help to get children especially girls- into school and keep them there, through increasing enrolment and reducing absenteeism.
3. Gender and reaching other vulnerable children	School feeding makes a proven positive contribution to gender equality. It especially promotes access to school for disadvantaged girls, boys, orphans and other vulnerable children.
4. Value transfer	School feeding works as a safety net that transfers significant level of value to households with school-age children. The school feeding value transferred frees up resources within households, averting negative coping strategies and allowing investments in productive assets.


نسائم خير
Nasaem Khair

5-RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Establishing a process for context specific SFP design

The weakness or absence of an appropriate locally driven design process is a major factor contributing to the reduced effectiveness of SF projects or programmes. The following aspects are therefore suggested to be considered during project design:

- Evidence of assessment of the educational needs of schoolchildren and of the primary barriers to education, in partnership with other stakeholders;
- Formulation of objectives that correspond to identified needs and justification of SFP as the appropriate tool for pursuing them, with reference to education sector needs as articulated by the education cluster or similar mechanism; an assessment of the cost effectiveness of SFP in comparison with other tools should be included;
- An appropriate targeting strategy including justification of the SFP modality and target population and specification of required minimum standards;
- Identification of strategic partners and statement of responsibilities of all parties to ensure maximum and sustained impact.

5.2 Follow appropriate targeting process:

The targeting process for support through SFP should ensure that the progarmme can reach schools in which serve the most food-insecure and educationally vulnerable children. The assessment should also include an appraisal of the resources that communities and schools can contribute to the SFP, e.g., to help install food storge facilities, latrines or other infrastructure elements.

In areas that are found to be difficult to access or whose communities are particularly ill equipped to provide needed infrastructure, implementing agency (s)should then adapt the design of the programme to ensure that needed infrastructure can be put in place over time or that the project foresees a sufficient budget to finance the transport of food commodities to inaccessible areas. One possible strategy here is to look for synergies between various agencies.

5.3 Develop SFP MEAL systems and considering feedback from the field as a prerequisite for project adjustments and improvements.

The availability of staff members with appropriate M&E related skills, as well as develop the solid M&E

systems. The analysis of monitoring data should also be strengthened to allow for a more meaningful but concise feedback to the management and field implementation levels.

M&E should incorporate a qualitative, result-oriented approach as well as the collection of quantitative data. This would entail monitoring in particular aspects of, for example, (i) food preparation, consumption and acceptance, (ii) timing of feeding, (iii) substitution of home meals (measuring for instance food intake at home on school days compared non-school days) and (iv) educational issues such as quality of teaching and learning (v) protection and/or risk elements of the school environment.

5.4 Design and disseminate training tools for SFP

Education and nutritional experts should strategically place in SFP targeted areas to improve the use of technical guidance in the design and implementation of SFP activities in the field.

Training tools need to be designed and used to familiarize staff members that take on SFP-related responsibilities. These need to incorporate the main features, available resources and key considerations to be taken into account in the implementation of SFP. In addition, the implementing agency should enhance its capacity to make full-time technical experts available that can function as resource persons for SFP implementers in the field, to be consulted during needs assessment and design, monitoring, or expansion of SFP.

5.5 Modalities and minimum standards should be chosen in relation to the objectives and the context, with attention to the risk of excluding the most vulnerable.

When considering which SFP modality to choose, the current availability of SFP related infrastructure in the targeted communities, such as kitchens, latrines, etc., and b) the availability of support (either from community and/or from other partners) to improve weak infrastructure in the schools, should be considred. In addition, impleneting agency has to match the modality choice to the specific objectives the SFP aims to address. Where resources for this kind of modality are not available, implementing agency should then consider the selection of less demanding SFP modalities and food commodities.

5.6 Taking advantage of opportunities for strategic partnerships

SFP can be more effective if accompanied by complementary activities: SFP could play a very specific supportive role for educational improvements in the targeted schools and can act as a catalyst for bringing about progress in other areas as well, such as capacity building at community level. However, in order to

realize its potential in this regard, SFP have to be implemented in concert with support programmes that drive these kinds of advances and therefore in coordination with partner organizations which support and/or implement such programmes. The complementary programming should be materlized through strategic partners in education and should look for synergies with partners to ensure that minimum operating conditions can be put in place over time.

5.7 Improving quality in implementation.

Recognizing the potential for nutritional benefits of SFP and optimize it in areas where severe food insecurity and malnutrition in school children hamper effective learning. In areas where food insecurity and severe malnutrition in school-going children is limiting effective learning, the nutritional benefit of SFP support could be optimised, going beyond the aim of only alleviating short-term hunger to aiming to contribute to an improved nutrition situation of school children, and thus more effective learning. This would require the provision of a food basket, sufficient in quantity and quality helping to meet children's actual nutritional requirements better and to contribute substantially to an improved dietary intake (including, most importantly, increased energy intake, often most importantly the increase in protein, fat as well as increased intake of micro-nutrients, most importantly iron, iodine and Vitamin A). Respective guidance for the formulation of an appropriate food basket responding to the needs and intended outcomes would need to be developed. Further work is required to develop possible outcome indicators, feasible to be assessed within an emergency context. A possibility would be to consider proxy-indicators, such as i.e. regular provision of a planned ration to all targeted children, the provision of good quality food, increased food intake, minimised substitution effect, community/ parental perceptions of changes etc. Those proxy indicators could become an integral part of monitoring and evaluation efforts.

5.8 Allow for flexible menus

The flexible menus will help to accommodate local foods based on seasonality, region and core nutritional guidance. It is important to clearly specify foods or products banned from use in the SFP and explain why (to promote healthier eating habits at home). This will help to achieve balance the portions of carbohydrates with the "vitamin foods" and "protein foods"

5.9 Enforce food safety and hygiene practices

It crucial to promote hygiene practices of cooks (washing hands with soap, covering hair, washing food before serving or cooking) and hygiene standards in food storage and kitchens (regular cleaning with detergent, washing cooking utensils, prevent animals from entering kitchens).

5.10 Enhance parents and students› participation during SFP design

Actively involve parents in the planning, procurement, implementation and monitoring of the SFP. As well as students should be actively involved in the SFP to learn about food, nutrition and hygiene to extend impact of the program into homes.

5.11 Support smallholder farmers in particular women to be part of SFP.

Transport and logistics requirements often prevent smallholder producers from participating in SFP, since they may have limited capacity to transport their products. This represents a significant operational barrier for smallholder producers in accessing food procurement schemes. Therefore, it may be necessary to adapt delivery conditions for the supply of food from smallholder producers at least until their transport capacity is strengthened, either through complementary support, or as an effect of their increased market participation and income opportunities. Ways of promoting the chances of smallholders to fulfil transport and logistics requirements include:

- use of short supply chains (SSCs), thus reducing quantities, delivery frequency and the transport and logistics capacities required;
- use of separate contracts between SFP and transport operators, relieving smallholders of off-farm logistics capacities but increasing the administrative burden of the programme;
- systematizing and training on good practices, making it easier for smallholders to understand and adhere to what is expected and required;
- further capacity support for smallholders, through complementary programmes, for example, such as the establishment of temporary storage and aggregation facilities, and access to credit to acquire means of transport.

SFP should consider how best to link smallholders to complementary interventions that address such constraints, with a view to fostering mutually reinforcing elements of demand and supply-side support. Complementary support programmes can involve the entire value chain from food production to post-harvest handling, processing and marketing, including interventions aiming at improving infrastructure, productive assets and inputs (including access to land and water), services, technology and knowledge, financial services, and the business environment as a whole.