



The **Global**
FoodBanking
Network®

A VIEW FROM THE FIELD

HEALTHY NATIONS START WITH HEALTHY CHILDREN

Lessons from GFN food banks





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The private sector (businesses and civil society) must help complement and extend public programs that aim to feed every child in need.

When The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) embarked on this work in 2019, the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, was not known to the global community. At this writing, everything has changed. COVID-19 has presented a health, economic, and humanitarian crisis unlike any other in history. As of August 2020, more than 24 million cases have been confirmed in 216 countries, areas, or territories. Over 800,000 of those cases have resulted in death.¹ The disruption to lives and livelihoods has been profound and continues to affect families, communities, and societies. The International Monetary Fund has declared that the COVID-19 economic crisis

will be the worst the world has faced since the Great Depression.² Current estimates predict that global economic growth could contract 2 percent and global trade could fall 13 to 32 percent.³

As with any calamitous event that seriously disrupts a community, the poor and disadvantaged disproportionately bear the brunt. People facing poverty are often the least prepared, are less able to invest in protective measures, have limited access to healthcare, and do not have the financial means to buffer themselves from disaster losses, driving them further into poverty or hardship. In 2020 more than 140 million people may fall into extreme poverty, a 20 percent increase from present rates.⁴ The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) now estimates the COVID-19 pandemic may add between 83 and 132 million people to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020 as a result of the economic situation and rising rates of poverty.⁵ The public health crisis caused by COVID-19 may become a global hunger crisis if the world community does not act.



Food banks provide the support, innovation, and operational agility necessary to ensure that nutritious food serves its ultimate purpose: to nourish life.

At the outset of the pandemic, food banks responded to food security needs in their communities by providing emergency food assistance to millions of additional people affected by this crisis. The food bank model exists in more than 70 countries through 1,500 community-based food banks serving 150,000 local agencies. The largest networks of food banks are represented by GFN, Feeding America, and the European Food Banks Federation.⁶ For more than 50 years, the food bank model has been a locally based solution that brings together multiple actors to support sustainable food solutions and reduce waste while providing emergency food assistance to those who need it most.

Before the pandemic, a growing number of people who were already vulnerable had to cut back on food. Research now shows that healthy diets are unaffordable to many people, especially the poor, in every region of the world. The most conservative estimates show that healthy diets are unaffordable for more than 3 billion people in the world, including 2 billion people—25.9 percent of the global population—who have experienced hunger or have not had regular access to nutritious and sufficient food.⁷ The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the problem, especially for the poor and newly poor. GFN food banks are committed to promoting diverse, healthy diets and distributing nutritious staples.

Today, food banks around the globe are on the front lines of COVID-19 relief efforts and are a lifeline to millions of people whose personal circumstances have worsened. As leading civil society organizations providing food and nutrition assistance to the poor, food banks have significant potential to marshal public and private resources to support vulnerable populations during widescale health emergencies. Their important role in social protection and community support is heightened in the case of a pandemic such as COVID-19 through their organizational infrastructure, supply and logistics chains, and local networks.

Pre-COVID-19, more than 300 million children in low- and middle-income countries received a school meal, ensuring at least one healthy meal each school day.⁸ With widespread school closures and school year disruption, meal provision has suffered, jeopardizing the health, nutrition, and productivity of millions of children worldwide.

The global pandemic has had an indelible effect on how food banks reach children in need. School closures, transportation restrictions, loss of volunteers, and social distancing measures pose challenges to regular program operations. Eighty-one percent of food banks in The Global FoodBanking Network that operate or support child feeding programs report that COVID-19 has impacted their programs; 66 percent report a decrease in number of students fed; 57 percent report a decrease in frequency of feeding; 40 percent report a decrease in size of rations; and 40 percent report a

decrease in the variety of food. As a result, food banks have had to be agile and creative in how they provide their services. They are answering the call in unprecedented ways through in-home deliveries, mass distribution, innovative outreach, new key commodity purchasing programs, state-of-the-art safety and protection protocols, extended hours, and partnerships with local and national governments.

This report shares how feeding programs for school-age children can successfully mitigate hunger's harshest effects. Food banks provide the support, innovation, and operational agility necessary to ensure that nutritious food serves its ultimate purpose: to nourish life.

I would like to thank all of GFN's food banking organizations for their ongoing work to support the most vulnerable among us. In addition to their inspiring efforts to provide nutritious food to low-income children and their families, they also provided insight into their programs and operations, which led to the development of this report.

I would also like to thank GFN's programs team—Doug O'Brien, vice president of programs; Halley Aldeen, director of impact assessment and research; Monica Dykas, director of child hunger programs; and Alyssa Ceretti, research assistant—who framed the scope of the project, analyzed survey data, reviewed countless external reports, and wrote the findings. I'm deeply grateful for the thoughtful insight and review of this report by Arlene Mitchell and Jennifer Shin, our friends at the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, whose ongoing work to expand opportunities for the world's children to receive adequate nutrition and promote school feeding has been invaluable to us. The Kellogg Company Fund, International Paper, and Bank of America Charitable Foundation provided financial support to this project. Sofia Pereson provided expert translation. Chicago Creative Group is responsible for outstanding editing and design work.

GFN is grateful to all who are involved in our movement: the food banks, community and national partners, national and international donors, and the tens of thousands of volunteers whose dedication and perseverance help make our communities and world better and more prosperous. Their service is needed now more than ever.

Lisa Moon
President & CEO
The Global FoodBanking Network

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Moon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Definitions

Prevalence of undernourishment

The prevalence of undernourishment is commonly defined as chronic hunger or chronic food deprivation. It represents the proportion of people who face dietary energy consumption (measured in kilocalories) below a set threshold of energy requirement norms.

Food insecurity

FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is an eight-question survey designed to be administered face to face to gauge a respondent's access to adequate food. The questions ask about varying degrees of access, including uncertainty about having enough food to ultimately skipping meals/not eating for an entire day. Moderate food insecurity is present when an individual has insufficient resources for a healthy diet, is uncertain about the ability to obtain food, or has probably skipped a meal or run out of food occasionally. Severe food insecurity is present when an individual has run out of food or gone an entire day without eating at times during the year.

Micronutrient deficiency

According to the *Global Nutrition Report*, micronutrient deficiency is “suboptimal nutritional status caused by a lack of intake, absorption, or use of one or more vitamins or minerals.” Lack of adequate iron, zinc, vitamin A, folate, vitamin B12, and iodine are among the most common issues globally since they are generally only satisfied in diverse diets. One general indicator of micronutrient deficiency is anemia, which is caused by the deficiency of many micronutrients, and its effects are exacerbated by several diseases.⁹

Malnutrition

Malnutrition includes any condition related to poor or inadequate nutrition, including undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight), inadequate intake of vitamins and minerals, overweight/obesity, and diet-related, noncommunicable disease.

Overweight/obesity

Overweight or obesity is the result of overnutrition, abnormal fat accumulation, as measured by body mass index, a weight-for-height measurement.

Stunting

According to the *Global Nutrition Report*, stunting is a form of “growth failure” that develops over time in children under five who have limited access to food, health, and care. Stunting is also referred to as chronic undernutrition, although stunting has other causes. The height-for-age nutritional index is used to measure stunting in children. Stunting is often associated with delayed motor development, impaired brain function, and poor school performance.¹⁰

Wasting

According to the *Global Nutrition Report*, wasting, or acute malnutrition, is when children are thin for their height because of acute food shortages or disease. It is characterized by a rapid deterioration in nutritional status over a short period of time in children under age five. Wasted children are at a higher risk of dying.¹¹

PUTTING AN END TO CHILD HUNGER

No child should go hungry. Yet tens of millions of children suffer from hunger, undernourishment, and food insecurity. The global community is off track to reach the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2—Zero Hunger—and those most at risk are our children. Ending child hunger and malnutrition is a moral imperative and a necessity to achieve shared prosperity and stability for all nations. This report provides a timely snapshot of the work of food banks in The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) to address the problem of child hunger in their communities, particularly for school-age children.

The scope of the problem

Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, 41 percent of children under the age of 15—605 million children worldwide—were at risk of hunger and food insecurity.¹² Moderate to severe food insecurity can cause debilitating or sometimes irreversible



damage to the child's physical and cognitive development. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's 2020 report, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, the prevalence of children under five who were stunted in 2019 was 21.3 percent, or 144 million children, and 6.9 percent of children under five, or 47 million children, were affected by wasting.¹³ The physical and cognitive damage caused by stunting, wasting, and low birth weight can be irreversible and have far-reaching consequences—from diminished learning and school performance to lower future earnings and productivity, which can ultimately lead to a continued cycle of poverty.¹⁴

As the COVID-19 health emergency spreads across the globe, the number of children facing hunger is expected to rise significantly. School closures have interrupted school meal programs, leaving many children who depended on those meals without a reliable daily meal. At the same time, parents and caregivers have suddenly lost incomes and the ability to purchase adequate food for their families. While the full scope and impact that COVID-19 will have on child hunger and food insecurity is not currently known, the United Nations forecasts an additional 83 to 132 million people will be undernourished, depending on the economic growth scenario.¹⁵ Economic decline has a major impact on poverty and food insecurity and disproportionately affects women and children. The impact of COVID-19 will undoubtedly be hard on the food security status of children.¹⁶

Child hunger and food insecurity not only threaten an individual child's future, but also harm families, communities, and nations. The World Bank estimates that the economic costs of undernutrition in terms of lost national productivity and econom-

ic growth range between 2 and 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on average.¹⁷ As a result, child hunger has a significant impact on the ability of communities and nations to develop, become resilient, and participate in the global economy.

Addressing child hunger

Targeting children in the first 1,000 days of life (from conception to a child's second birthday) is crucial, and research now shows that the first 8,000 days (throughout the school-age years) is also important to a child's physical and cognitive development.

Addressing the full 8,000 days of nutritional needs of children is essential to making progress toward the SDG of ending hunger by 2030 and several other SDGs related to poverty, health, education, and gender. The stakes are high, both to the child facing hunger and to society, which will one day need the productivity and creativity of that child as an adult. Research indicates that when children get the food they need



during their first 8,000 days, they will grow, perform better in school, and have a greater opportunity to build up their communities and societies. To reach this objective, many stakeholders have a role to play.

In thousands of communities around the world, including 44 countries in which GFN operates, food banks bring together government, business, and civil society stakeholders to address the food security needs of communities. Food banks' distinctive model is ideally suited to help in the fight against child hunger. Their local, multisector approach fills the gaps and extends the impact of government social safety net programs, which are the first line of defense.

School-based feeding programs are among the most cost-effective means of addressing child hunger throughout the school-age years, helping to reduce poverty, improve educational outcomes, and strengthen poor communities. Yet too many children from low-income families who could benefit from school meals do not have access to these programs. To address this, many food banks are operating targeted child hunger programs, including school feeding. Food banks often work collaboratively with their local school authorities to provide meals or offer nutrition assistance programs to complement school-based meals. However, more support is needed to implement and scale child hunger programs through food banks.

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In thousands of communities around the world, food banks bring together government, business, and civil society stakeholders to address the food security needs of communities.

Child hunger programs among GFN food banks

GFN strives to assist food banks in the establishment, development, and expansion of programs related to providing food and other services to children facing food insecurity. In late 2019 GFN surveyed food banks and national networks in 30 countries to learn more about the child hunger programs they implement. The results of this survey, the first of its kind, shine a light on the child feeding programs that exist among food banks in The Global FoodBanking Network as well as the challenges and opportunities to expand these programs.

Through their regular food distribution activities, the food banks that responded to the survey are serving an estimated 3.49 million school-age children (3 to 18 years old). Of the 80 survey respondents, 41 food banks in 18 countries report implementing targeted programs for school-age children in 2019, with food banks in seven

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The public and private sectors should invest in school-based feeding programs to promote a society's educational, employment, and economic success.

additional countries planning to implement a feeding program for school-age children in 2020.

The targeted programs implemented by food banks include:¹⁸

- School breakfast programs
- School lunch programs
- Backpack programs or weekend take-home rations
- Summer or holiday food programs
- Food and nutrition education programs

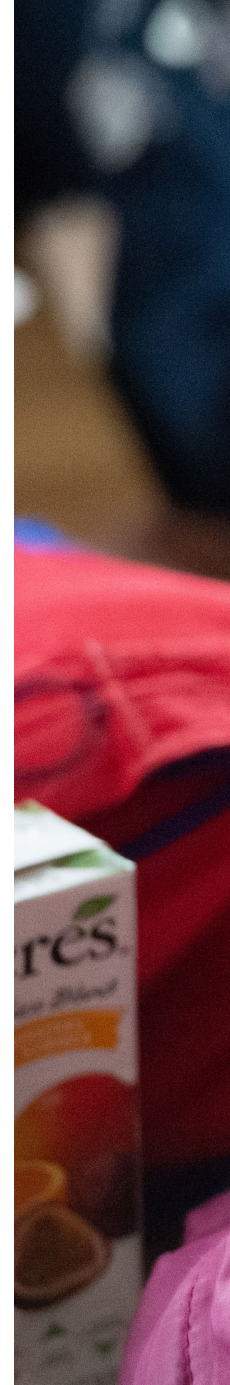
While food banks are well positioned to address child hunger and would like to continue or expand their programs, 74 percent of food banks report funding as a barrier. More than half (54 percent) of food banks report specific food procurement as an obstacle to establishing child feeding programs.

Call to action

There is an urgent need to act now—by government, the private sector, and civil society. Pre-COVID-19, an estimated 73 million vulnerable children were not being reached with food at school, and one in five school-age children—258 million—was not attending school in 2018.¹⁹ While schools have been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, some school feeding programs have found other ways to provide take-home rations for children. Yet there are still many children who are not receiving the food support they previously relied on. Targeted approaches to address the food security needs of mothers and children can profoundly impact society, breaking the cycle of poverty in communities, reducing healthcare costs, closing the gender gap, and building human capital and economic development for generations to come.

Strengthen government social support systems through school meals

The public and private sectors should make critical investments in school-based feeding programs as a means of promoting a society's educational, employment, and economic success. Many models for successful school-based programs exist and, when scaled, the potential to quickly and efficiently reach children who are vulnerable is huge.





Increase private-sector opportunities to invest in school meal access

In developing or transitioning market countries, food banks can support the ongoing development of civil society and food aid to vulnerable populations and can help secure public investments in social protection, health, education, and economic development. Food banking—with its accompanying partnership with government and industry—provides a model for preventing localized increases in hunger and serves as a catalyst for longer-term development.


Governments and food and beverage companies, including manufacturers and retailers, should remove obstacles to donating healthy surplus food to food banks. Governments should also foster policies that encourage food donations to engage the private sector in supporting government programs and investing in school meals.

HUNGER UNDERMINES THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

“Far too many of our children and young people are not getting the diets they need, which is undermining their capacity to grow, develop and learn to their full potential. That hurts not just individual children and young people, it hurts us all.”

—Henrietta H. Fore, executive director of UNICEF²⁰

After a decade of decline, hunger is once again on the rise. As of 2019—prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—nearly 690 million people were hungry, or 8.9 percent of the world population, up by 10 million in one year and nearly 60 million in five years, according to revised estimates.²¹ The number of people affected by severe food insecurity, another measure that approximates hunger, shows a similar upward trend.



In 2019 close to 750 million—or nearly 1 in 10 of all people in the world—were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity.²² The total number of people affected by moderate or severe food insecurity, or those who did not have regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food, was estimated at 2 billion in 2019.²³

Forty-one percent of children under the age of 15 lived in a household in which a respondent reported moderate or severe food insecurity. This means that 605 million children worldwide were at risk of hunger.²⁴ Of those 605 million, 260 million lived in a severely food-insecure household and were at risk of skipping meals or going an entire day without food.²⁵ Many children around the world suffer the “triple burden” of malnutrition—undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity. The triple burden of malnutrition is driven primarily by the poor quality of children’s diets, often a consequence of poverty and limited access to healthy food. Pre-COVID-19, UNICEF estimated that two out of every three children around the world were not fed the recommended diverse diet for healthy growth and development.²⁶ So serious are the health threats of malnutrition that the World Health Organization (WHO) considers hunger and malnutrition to be the greatest long-term threat to public health.²⁷

If these numbers were not already devastating enough, the COVID-19 global pandemic is causing a rapid increase in the number of people suffering from hunger, including children. The World Food Programme (WFP) projects that the number of people facing acute hunger will nearly double.²⁸ The impact on children will be profound. WFP estimates that an additional 42 to 66 million children could fall into extreme poverty,²⁹ an increase as much as 17 percent. School closures around the world are impacting 90 percent of the world’s student population,³⁰ not only jeopardizing learning and educational achievement but also access to the nutrition often provided through school-based feeding programs. Since up-to-date data on the precise impact of COVID-19 on the hunger situation is not currently available, this report will refer mainly to pre-COVID-19 data.

The effect of moderate to severe food insecurity can cause debilitating or sometimes irreversible damage to the child’s physical and cognitive development. Child hunger and food insecurity not only harm the child and threaten his or her future, but also harm families, communities, and nations. The educational, income, and productivity consequences reverberate beyond the food-insecure family to society at large, effectively slowing a nation’s development and productivity and perpetuating a cycle of intergenerational poverty. The World Bank estimates the economic costs of undernutrition in terms of lost national productivity and economic growth range between 2 and 3 percent of GDP on average and up to 11 percent of GDP in Africa and Asia



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GFN hopes to provide greater insight into the successes, the potential, and the needs of child hunger initiatives among food banks.

each year.³¹ Ending child hunger and malnutrition is a moral imperative and a necessity to achieve shared prosperity and stability.

While the primary obligation of serving the health and nutrition needs of children and other vulnerable people in society belongs to governments, food banks have emerged and developed as a community-based, local response to hunger that too often goes unmet in their communities. Across the world, food banks in 70 countries provide meals to those facing hunger through the recovery of surplus, whole-some food that is redirected to low-income, food-insecure people. Globally, more than 1,500 food banks support and provide food and grocery products to more than 150,000 local charitable agencies.³² Working with multiple stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, food banks build a network of support to serve their most vulnerable neighbors and strengthen their communities. They complement government social protection systems.

As community-based providers of nutrition assistance, food banks are especially well suited to extend public investments in child nutrition. Around the world, nearly 40 percent of all people served by food banks are children.³³ Yet while food banks can play an important role in reducing child hunger, 74 percent of food banks report funding to provide these services as a barrier. Furthermore, more than half (54 percent) of food banks report specific food procurement as an obstacle to establishing child feeding programs. Food banking's network of local, community-based support relies on multisector partners for food and grocery product donations, financial re-

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sources, and volunteer support to fill gaps in food assistance. Child feeding programs require particular resources, such as food that meets the nutritional needs of school-age children, logistics for providing meals consistently each day school is in session, and staff for overseeing meal distribution, all of which can strain the resources of these community-based organizations.

This report reviews how food banks help address the challenges of child hunger and provides the results of the first-ever survey of child feeding programs operated by food banks in The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) that reach school-age children (ages 3 to 18). The survey was conducted between September and December 2019 and reflects food bank programs implemented prior to COVID-19. As of the release of this report, the social and economic interruptions caused by the pandemic have required significant adjustments in child feeding programs in order to reach beneficiaries. The report provides information on the pre-COVID-19 programs, which are expected to resume when the global pandemic is over, though the impact COVID-19 will have on these programs is yet to be determined. It explores school breakfast programs that provide meals to low-income children, thus helping to ensure they start their day fed, nourished, and able to learn. It also looks at school lunch programs, weekend and summer/holiday programs when school meals are not available, and food and nutrition education programs. With this report, GFN hopes to provide greater insight into the successes, the potential, and the needs of child hunger initiatives among food banks and generate support among all sectors of society for these efforts.





AN INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN IS AN INVESTMENT IN OUR FUTURE

Hunger is rising. The recent FAO report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* declares that the world is “off course” to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger. The number of people affected by hunger in the world continues to increase, with the upward trend starting in 2014 and extending to the present COVID-19 pandemic. There are nearly 60 million more undernourished people now than in 2014.³⁴

While 690 million people worldwide are chronically hungry,³⁵ over 2 billion suffer from serious micronutrient deficiencies,³⁶ or what is sometimes referred to as “hidden hunger.”³⁷ Micronutrient deficiency is measured by a lack of regular access to the diet-based vitamin and mineral building blocks of the human body that promote health, growth, and well-being. Growing children and women, who have a greater reliance on micronutrients for health, maternity, and child development, are partic-



ularly vulnerable to hidden hunger, which can be hard to detect and can have devastating consequences.³⁸ In the global public health sphere, iron, iodine, and vitamin A are the most critical micronutrients. A deficiency of them represents a threat to the health and development of populations in low-income countries. Severe deficiencies in these micronutrients can have profound negative effects on children, resulting in blindness, low IQ, anemia, stillbirth, birth defects, and death. Micronutrient deficiencies are widespread around the globe, with approximately one-third of children under five in low- and middle-income countries suffering vitamin A deficiency.³⁹

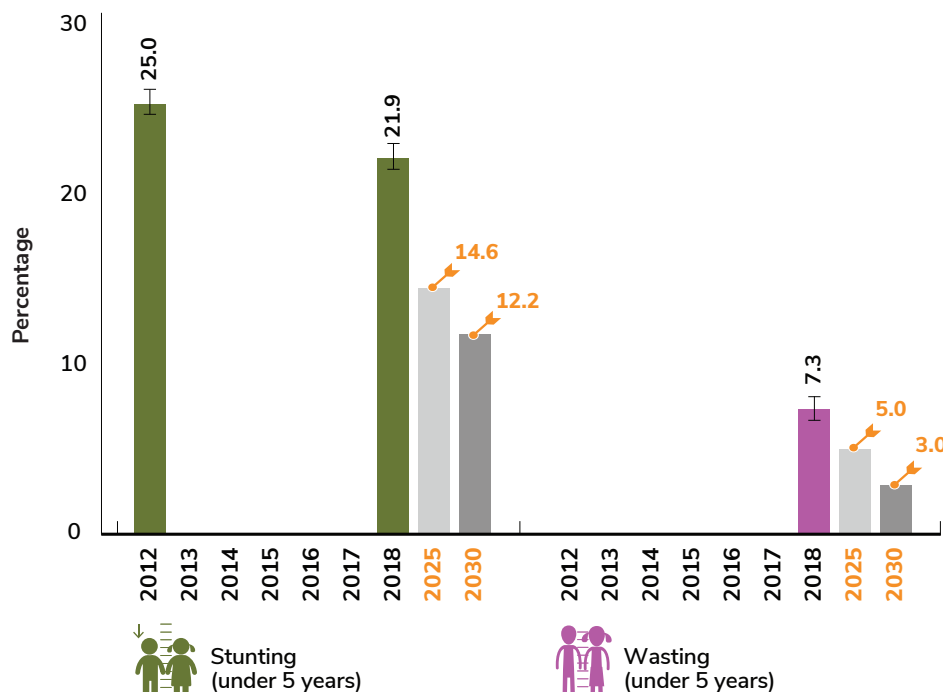
FAO's 2020 report notes that millions of children around the world suffer from hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition because their families cannot afford the cost of healthy diets. The lack of healthy diets due to cost is associated with all forms of malnutrition, including stunting, wasting, overweight, and obesity.⁴⁰ For the poor living at or below the international poverty line (established at US\$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP) per person per day), the cost of a healthy diet is out of reach. Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, the cost of a healthy diet exceeds average food expenditures for many households, with approximately 57 percent or more of the population unable to afford it.⁴¹

The first 1,000 days are the foundation

Poor nutrition early in a child's life has irreversible consequences. The 1,000-day window—from pregnancy to a child's second birthday—is the most critical period of a person's brain development.⁴² This period starts with the mother. A woman's nutritional status before and during pregnancy and while breastfeeding determines the

FIGURE 1

PERCENT OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 SUFFERING FROM STUNTING AND WASTING; 2025 AND 2030 TARGETS



Source: Data for stunting and wasting is based on UNICEF, WHO, and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.

nutritional status of her baby and young child.⁴³ Worldwide, 20.5 million babies—one in seven live births—suffered from low birthweight in 2015.⁴⁴ Furthermore, food-insecure mothers tend to exclusively breastfeed their infants for shorter periods than their food-secure counterparts, which can impact a child’s nutrition status.⁴⁵ Undernutrition causes 45 percent of all deaths among children ages zero to five, or 3 million deaths a year.⁴⁶ Undernourished girls have an increased likelihood of becoming undernourished mothers with low-birthweight babies, thereby perpetuating the cycle.⁴⁷ According to the most recent estimates, the global community is not on track to achieve the 2025 and 2030 targets for child stunting and low birthweight.

A child’s susceptibility to disease is also impacted during this vital period. Obesity, hypertension, and diabetes may be determined by nutritional status during the first years of life.⁴⁸ As of 2018, only 51 percent of children age 6 to 23 months received the recommended minimum number of meals.⁴⁹

As a result of poor nutrition, 149 million children under the age of five suffered from stunting, or “growth failure,” in 2019.⁵⁰ Stunting often correlates with cognitive impairments such as delayed motor development, impaired brain function, and poor school performance.⁵¹ Studies show that stunting in children under two years is associated with one year less of schooling compared to their nonstunted peers.⁵² Stunted

“Children who are poorly nourished, who are stunted, and who do not receive adequate parenting or stimulation before their fifth birthday are likely to learn less at school and earn less as adults, perpetuating the cycle of poverty across generations.”

—Jim Yong Kim, president, World Bank Group

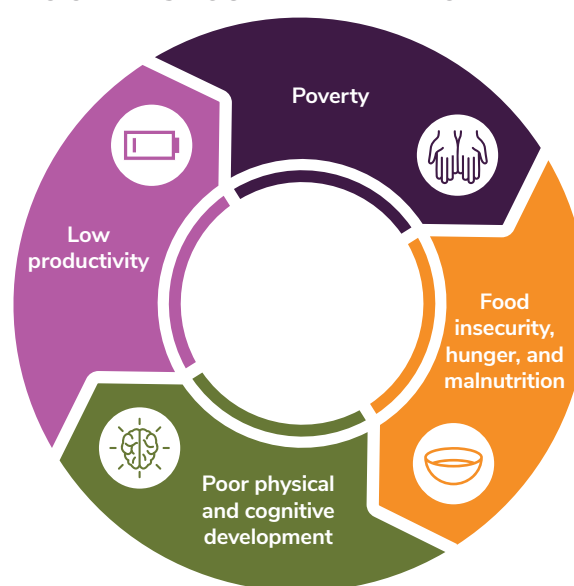
children are less likely to excel in school and more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.⁵³ The effects of stunting often last for a lifetime, meaning good nutrition after the first 1,000 days cannot reverse what was lost. The effects of stunting can also be multigenerational.⁵⁴ Reaching mothers and their children with adequate nutritional support from pregnancy through the first 1,000 days is essential.

Investments during the school-age years extend gains made in the first 1,000 days

It is well documented that a child’s 1,000-day window is crucial for a healthy and productive life. Research now also conclusively confirms the importance of the first two decades of a child’s life—the school-age years—or the first 8,000 days. The first 8,000 days present both a risk and an opportunity for children suffering from in-

FIGURE 2

THE CYCLE OF FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY



Source: GFN

adequate nutrition. If not addressed, child hunger and food insecurity during this time—the time it takes for a child to become a fully functioning adult—undermine a child’s future opportunities, the parent’s care for their children, and public-sector investments already made in health and well-being in a child’s first 1,000 days. Yet the course of a child’s life can be changed if nutritional deficiencies are sufficiently addressed.

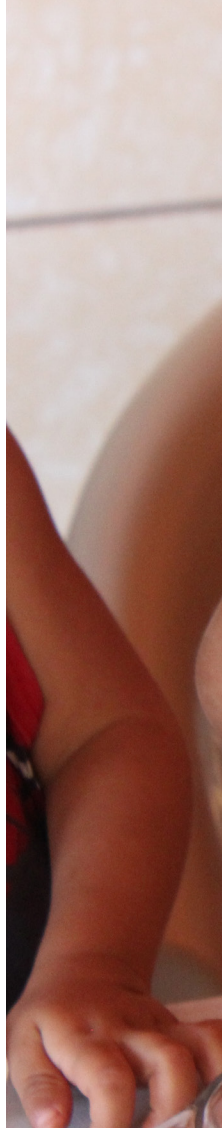
Addressing hunger and food security during this period would support investments in primary education now and in the future.⁵⁵ It would help children reach their developmental potential and secure the gains, or mitigate some deficiencies, made in the 1,000-day window. Research by WFP and the World Bank states, “The realization of human potential for development requires age-specific investment throughout the 8,000 days of childhood and adolescence” and the “focus on the first 1,000 days is an essential but insufficient investment.”⁵⁶

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Targeted approaches to the food security needs of mothers and children can profoundly impact society for generations to come, breaking the cycle of poverty in communities, reducing healthcare costs, closing the gender gap, and building human capital and economic development.

Research on the effects of undernutrition during school-age years of children now shows that mortality during this period is higher than previously thought, puberty and growth spurts require good health and diet, and behaviors are adopted that will carry on into later life.⁵⁷ This is an intense period of skeletal, bone mass, and height growth⁵⁸ as well as educational attainment. Good nutrition plays a key role in child and adolescent growth, brain maturation, education, and social emotional learning, while reducing the risk of illness or chronic disease.⁵⁹ Some amount of catch-up from earlier growth failure may be recouped with strong interventions during this period.⁶⁰

Progress toward ending hunger requires a renewed focus on school-age children (ages 5 to 19), whose nutritional needs are nearly as important as in early childhood. The stakes are high. An estimated 2 billion children and adolescents (school-age children) live around the world, and nearly 90 percent of those reside in low- and middle-income countries, according to the World Bank.⁶¹ With an estimated 346 million children missing out on school meals during the height of the pandemic and uncertainty about when many children will return to school, it is more important than ever to ensure that these children and adolescents receive healthy food during the pandemic and when schools begin to open again. This would prevent previous gains in food and nutrition security from being lost and allow children to reach their full developmental potential.⁶²





THE IMPACT OF ADDRESSING HUNGER IS EXPONENTIAL

“Children who are well-nourished learn more, and as adults they earn more and are more productive. That transformation carries through to the next generation with the improved health of their own children, creating a long-term cycle of economic growth and progress.”

—Bundy et al., *Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2018).

Targeted approaches to address the food security needs of mothers and children can profoundly impact society for generations to come, breaking the cycle of poverty in communities, reducing healthcare costs, closing the gender gap, and building human capital and economic development. These are all part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Making progress on hunger (SDG 2) is pivotal to progress on other goals, including SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 1 (No Poverty).

Education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and develop human capital. An estimated 171 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty if all children who began school left with basic reading skills—the equivalent of a 12 percent reduction of people living in extreme poverty.⁶³ Achieving basic, universal education and literacy is a powerful and proven vehicle for societal development. In the last 20 years, governments have progressed in achieving the target of universal primary education. According to the United Nations, the total enrollment rate in low- and middle-income countries reached 91 percent in 2015. The number of children out of school worldwide has dropped from 377.5 million in 2000 to 263 million in 2016.⁶⁴ Despite this progress, 258 million children, adolescents, and youth around the globe were out of school in 2018, representing approximately 13 percent of all school-age children.⁶⁵ When schools begin to reopen after the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be crucial for governments, schools, and private-sector partners to encourage and provide incentives for children, especially girls, to return to school.

The obligation of the government and the public sector to lead efforts to provide for the needs of the most vulnerable in their societies and to assure a basic level of education is now a universally accepted norm. But school attendance alone does

FIGURE 3

IMPORTANCE OF SDG 2 AND SDG 12 TO OTHER GOALS



Source: GFN

“When you start one of these programs, school lunch programs, in a country that heretofore had nothing of that kind, immediately school enrollment jumps dramatically. Girls and boys get to the classroom with the promise of a good meal once a day.”

—George McGovern

not equate with learning. Children facing hunger have a hard time learning.⁶⁶ Once that foundational need is met, other needs, including learning, can be effectively addressed. For educational investments to be realized and for the intergenerational cycle of poverty to be disrupted, children need to be *able* to learn.

School feeding programs are indispensable

To secure the benefits of public-sector educational investments, economists and policymakers have embraced school feeding programs. School-based feeding is one of the most cost-effective means of reducing poverty, improving educational outcomes, and strengthening poor communities. It is critical to the achievement of multiple SDGs.⁶⁷

Progress on SDG 2 creates positive synergies with other global goals that may not be achieved if progress on hunger is not addressed. Since children are the most vulnerable to the long-term consequences of hunger, focusing food and nutrition interventions on low-income children has a long-term, whole-life synergistic impact on other important societal and community objectives. Addressing the nutritional needs of school-age children is a “vital cross-cutting agenda contributing to achieving countries’ socioeconomic sustainable development goals.”⁶⁸ The 2017 and 2018 Global Child Nutrition Forums hosted by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation and the WFP Centre for Excellence against Hunger Brazil noted the important relationship school feeding has to influencing SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

School feeding programs have been highly effective policy tools to expand social safety net protections and target public investments in poor communities. In low- and middle-income countries, school meals may be the most expansive social safety net available to poor families. They provide a reliable source of nutrition and income support equivalent to approximately 10 percent of a family’s daily income.⁶⁹

Yet the benefits reach far beyond this. Research on school feeding programs conclusively shows that the benefits of school meals exceed simple income transfers to the poor and are, in fact, transformational investments in a community's and nation's future. Providing meals to low-income children in school improves attendance, overall academic achievement, health outcomes, and future earnings.⁷⁰

School feeding programs can be especially transformative for girls. In approximately one-third of nations around the world, almost exclusively in low-income nations in Africa and Asia, there is a significant disparity between girls' and boys' enrollment and continued attendance in schools. In those nations, approximately 77 girls enroll for every 100 boys.⁷¹ When school feeding programs are available, girls attend at higher rates, continuing their education and improving their health outcomes. They are also more likely to delay marriage and motherhood compared to their peers who do not receive school meals, which can speed progress toward SDG 5 (Gender Equity). This helps them break the cycle of poverty, which disproportionately affects women in adulthood.⁷²

School-based meals, including breakfast, lunch, and snacks, can change the narrative, with effects that are multigenerational.⁷³ According to WFP, there is a US\$10 return in education, health, and productivity for every US\$1 spent on school meals.

School meals are cost-effective and efficient due to their reliability and focus on children already aggregated in school settings. Families know their children are being educated and will receive a nutritious meal every day at school for the entire school year. This predictability allows families to free up household resources for other needs, affording the family the opportunity of social mobility.⁷⁴

Prior to the onset of COVID-19 and school closures around the world, an estimated 310 million children in low- and middle-income countries received a daily school meal.⁷⁵

Low- and middle-income countries invest approximately US\$210 billion each year in education, yet those same countries invest a fraction of that in children's nutrition.⁷⁶ The net effect is that nearly half of children in low- and middle-income countries do not get access to school meals. Since children who are hungry have a harder time learning, the results of the significant investments made in education by governments in low- and middle-income countries are limited.

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EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The link between school feeding programs and basic education is long-standing in some of the most comprehensive national programs. In the United States, for example, private child-welfare organizations instituted the first broadly available school meal programs for low-income children in government-supported schools.⁷⁷ Philanthropic organizations and charities provided balanced midday meals to address malnutrition among poorer children and to encourage school attendance over child labor. These private-sector efforts were, however, ad hoc and limited in scope. Attaining improved educational aims and improving the nutritional needs of low-income children served as the national policy for the establishment of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the United States as a “measure of national security” and to “safeguard the health and well-being of the nation’s children.”⁷⁸ Today, the NSLP—and related school feeding programs—operates in the majority of US schools (approximately 95 percent), providing meals to more than 30 million school-age children on an average day.⁷⁹

During the global financial crisis in 2008, many low- and middle-income countries significantly increased budgetary commitments to national school feeding programs at a time of fiscal challenge. In many instances, these investments were viewed as the most cost-effective nutrition-related interventions that could be made, with health, nutritional, educational, and social benefits. The trend among emerging market economies to invest in school feeding programs as a means to attain numerous societal aims is noted in the seminal 2018 report *Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies*, published by the World Bank Group. School feeding programs are effective income transfer and support mechanisms in the short term to help improve nutrition among poor children, but also serve long-term aims to advance a nation’s education goals, economic development, and societal cohesion leading to greater shared prosperity.⁸⁰

School meal program models respond to local needs

There is no single institutional design for school meal programs.⁸¹ As noted, school feeding programs operated by governments are most often designed as a social safety net. They aim toward broader, long-term societal goals: increased school attendance, improved educational outcomes, gender equity, and improved nutrition, especially for the most marginalized and poor children. To meet these objectives, governments and institutions like WFP promote initiatives such as Home-Grown School Feeding, where school feeding programs partner with local smallholder farmers, a core element of school meal programs in Brazil, Kenya, and other nations. Home-Grown School Feeding programs—like the school meals themselves—have a significant multiplier effect in poor communities by supporting smallholder farmers and food producers.

The Global Survey of School Meal Programs®,⁸² an ongoing and groundbreaking research project by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, catalogs the various types, program models, scope, and reach of school feeding programs on a country-by-country basis. This research focuses on national government ownership and involvement and will provide important information and insight on the various program models as well as agricultural and private-sector engagement.

Initiatives such as Home-Grown School Feeding programs, after-school programs, and week-end food ration programs are built around the school-based programs, but they rely on multiple stakeholders from the private and charitable sectors working collaboratively with governments to achieve policy aims. The Nigeria National Home Grown School Feeding Programme, for example, was developed to provide school meals and extend the broader social protection safety net, while strengthening the local agricultural sector and community economy.⁸³

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Home-Grown School Feeding programs have a significant multiplier effect in poor communities by supporting small-holder farmers and food producers.

Box 1: Global imperative of school meals

School meal programs positively affect poor and vulnerable children. Nonetheless, the cost of such public-sector investments can be prohibitive, especially in low- and lower middle-income countries. To aid countries in these long-term and worthwhile investments, several global and multilateral organizations have developed programs.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the global leader in reducing hunger and expanding school meal programs. It provides financial support and technical assistance, facilitates country-to-country knowledge exchanges, and shares best practices. WFP directly supports more than 87 million people through programs identified as social protection, including school meal programs, food access, malnutrition prevention programs, and cash-based transfers.⁸⁴ WFP promotes school

meals as an essential element of the public-sector social safety net and helps governments in low- and middle-income countries develop domestic school feeding programs. In 2017 WFP supported 65 governments to establish and improve their domestic school meal programs, helping to feed an additional 39 million children in those nations.^{85,86} The WFP's Centres of Excellence further facilitate cooperation such as the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger Brazil, which provided technical visits to 10 countries in 2019 to strengthen school feeding programs.⁸⁷ The WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger Brazil helps governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America establish school feeding programs and other solutions to achieve zero hunger by providing technical assistance and capacity building.



Increasingly, private-sector partnerships are crucial areas for financial support, technical assistance, and innovation in programs serving school-age children.⁸⁸ The programs with multiple stakeholders—including businesses, agriculture and farms, civil society, food banks, charities, and community involvement—are often the strongest, most sustainable programs and are able to extend public expenditures on school feeding to strengthen poorer communities and build resilience.

Food banks have played an important role in the development of innovative programs that complement school feeding programs. In the United States, long-standing, private-sector programs have extended public-sector program aims and filled gaps in the safety net. For example, Kids Cafe, a program of US food bank network Feeding America, provides snacks and meals to low-income children during after-school hours. Food banks administer Kids Cafes in conjunction with local schools and community organizations. Kids Cafes provided more than 27 million meals at 6,500 sites in 2016.⁸⁹ In Australia, Foodbank Western Australia complements the School Breakfast Program with a nutrition education component that teaches children basic nutrition principles with hands-on cooking classes.



In Canada, an estimated 300,000 school-age children are food insecure, and their families struggle to get enough food each month. Food Banks Canada offers After the Bell, “a multifaceted program that focuses on addressing the immediate needs of children experiencing hunger while building towards lifelong skills on nutrition literacy.”⁹⁰ Working with school administrators, teachers, local parent clubs, and businesses, food banks in the United States, Mexico, South Korea, and other countries offer Backpack Programs. These programs provide food for low-income children and their families over the weekend when there is no access to school meals. An estimated 450,000 US students each week access the Backpack Program through local schools and food banks.⁹¹

Multisector partnerships are critical

Research on the efficacy of school feeding programs calls for even greater multisector partnerships to scale up these crucial benefits efficiently and rapidly attain all the advantages school feeding investments can make. In the commercial/business sector, programs that encourage local sources of food to supply school meals, like Home-Grown School Feeding, are highly effective and economically significant to local economies. The transfer of food to low-income families through school feeding programs increases the purchase of food from local farmers. Indeed, it increases overall economic activity—raising incomes, spending, and labor participation—and supports a stable market for commodities. Furthermore, linking local production to school meals helps reduce poverty in rural communities where food insecurity is often higher. In many countries that link has direct benefits for women and mothers, who represent 20 percent of the farmers and agricultural workforce in Latin America and nearly 50 percent in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The private sector—business and civil society—extends and complements government-sponsored school feeding programs. When government and businesses partner with community-based organizations like food banks to build, expand, and organize school feeding programs, the public investment multiplies, significantly increasing access, scale, and impact.

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Private-sector partnerships are crucial areas for financial support, technical assistance, and innovation in programs serving school-age children.



THE ROLE FOR FOOD BANKS: THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

While more than 2 billion people worldwide suffer from moderate or severe food insecurity,⁹² lacking consistent access to enough nutritious food to lead a healthy, active life, 1.3 billion tons of edible food is lost or wasted at all levels of the supply chain.⁹³ Hunger isn't a matter of food scarcity but of distribution and logistics. FAO estimates that one-third of all food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted each year, which accounts for more than one-fourth of calories—enough to feed 1.9 billion people an adequate diet for a healthy life.⁹⁴

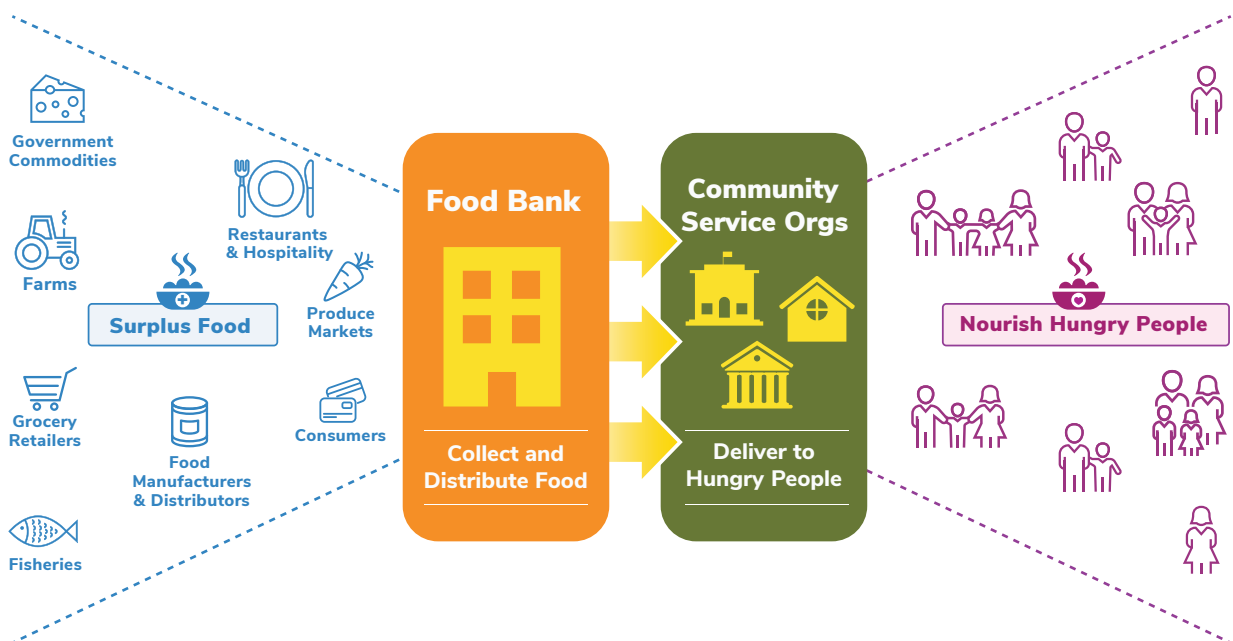
The food bank model is a distinctive solution to feeding undernourished people globally. Food banks help make up for a lack of social service programs, fill gaps where income supports do not exist, and respond quickly and effectively to economic downturns or natural disasters. Food banks also divert food from landfills, thereby eliminating environmental and economic costs at the production, processing, and retail levels. Food manufacturers, farmers, and retailers view food banks as a valuable business-to-business solution in managing food that would otherwise be wasted and the costs of throwing food away while also creating a social impact.

Food banks, by marshalling multisector stakeholders from the private and public sectors, help civil society focus on the needs of vulnerable people. They strengthen their communities and provide tangible nutrition assistance to people who lack ac-



FIGURE 4

HOW FOOD BANKING WORKS



Source: GFN

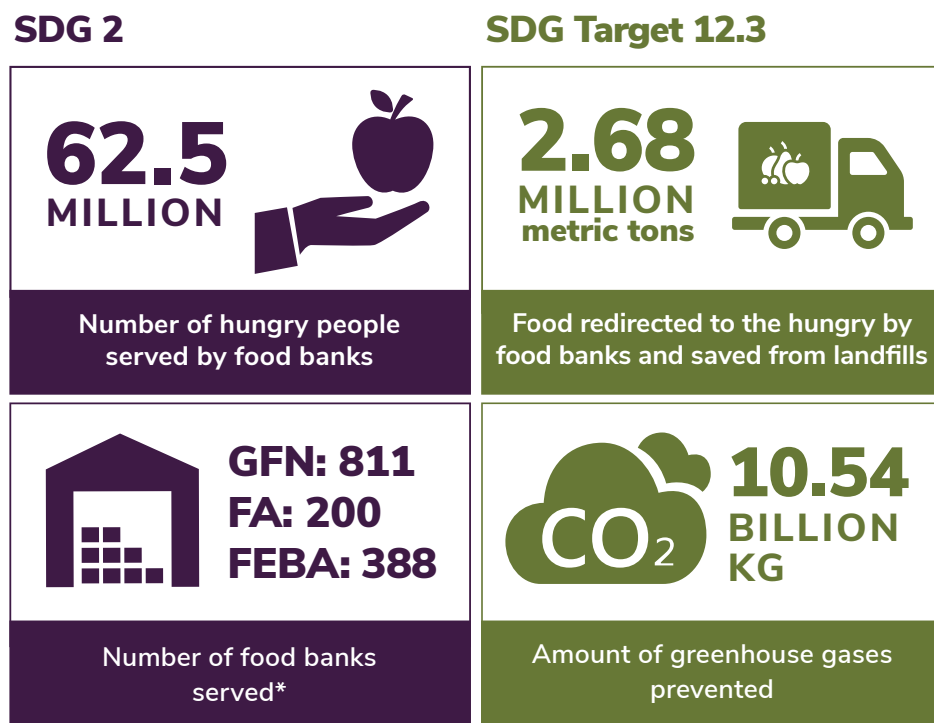
cess to food. Because they are locally operated, food banks can address specific food insecurity challenges faced by their communities and deploy customized solutions in support of broader social protection programs. Community-based food programs supported by food banks such as breakfast programs before school, midday meal programs, after-school meal and healthy snack programs, and weekend food rations aimed at school-age children leverage often already substantial public investment in education and can facilitate better outcomes.

Through food assistance, nutrition education, and other direct services to low-income school-age children, food banks around the world are helping advance the SDGs. SDG 2, “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture,” is foundational. This is crucial to influence and advance the other 16 SDGs, including poverty reduction, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, economic growth, sustainable communities, responsible consumption, and climate action.⁹⁵

By the very nature of how food banks operate, they occupy a space in the community at the nexus of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG Target 12.3 (Reduction of Food Loss and Waste). The food bank model is a “green” hunger relief solution engaged in sophisticated, environmentally beneficial surplus recovery—identifying and recov-

FIGURE 5

GLOBAL FOOD BANK IMPACT (2018)



*Not inclusive of food banks that are independent or not affiliated with GFN, FA, or FEBA

Source: GFN, FEBA, and Feeding America



ering surplus food throughout the supply chain, from the farm to the consumer. It then redirects these potential food losses for societal good (see GFN's 2019 report *Waste Not, Want Not—Toward Zero Hunger: Food Banks as a Green Solution to Hunger* for more information about food banking's environmental impact). In short, food banks are a complementary and efficient model of local action aligned to global aims, resulting in improvements in food security status, nutrient intake, health outcomes, and community development.⁹⁶

Through the work of GFN and its global partners, the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) and Feeding America, food banks around the world collectively served 62.5 million people in 2018.⁹⁷ Of those, an estimated 10 million were served by GFN food banks, primarily in emerging market economies. The potential to continue scaling this model is huge, especially in low- and middle-income countries where social protections may not be as comprehensive and where multisector partners can collaborate, creating even more positive economic, social, and environmental impacts around the world.



GFN'S MISSION, VISION, AND PARTNERS

GFN is an international nonprofit organization founded in 2006 by four of the world's leading national food bank networks—Red Argentina de Bancos de Alimentos, Food Banks Canada, Bancos de Alimentos de México, and Feeding America—to nourish the world's hungry through uniting and advancing food banks. GFN currently has members with operations in more than 40 countries. Since its founding, GFN has partnered with local leaders to support and launch food banking organizations throughout the world in varied socioeconomic and cultural contexts, providing access to food and empowering communities to support those who suffer from hunger and poor nutrition.

GFN focuses on combating hunger and preventing food waste by providing expertise, directing resources, sharing knowledge, and developing connections that increase efficiency, ensure food safety, and help food banks reach more people facing hunger. In 2019, 949 GFN food banks sourced and distributed over 919 million kilograms of food and grocery product and redirected it to feed 16.9 million people through a network of more than 56,000 social service and community-based organizations. Recognizing the ability of food banks to partner with and marshal multisector actors to strengthen communities and improve the lives of poor and vulnerable people, GFN has set an ambitious objective to reach 50 million low-income people facing hunger by 2030, enabling them to reliably access nutritious meals through a thriving network of food banks.



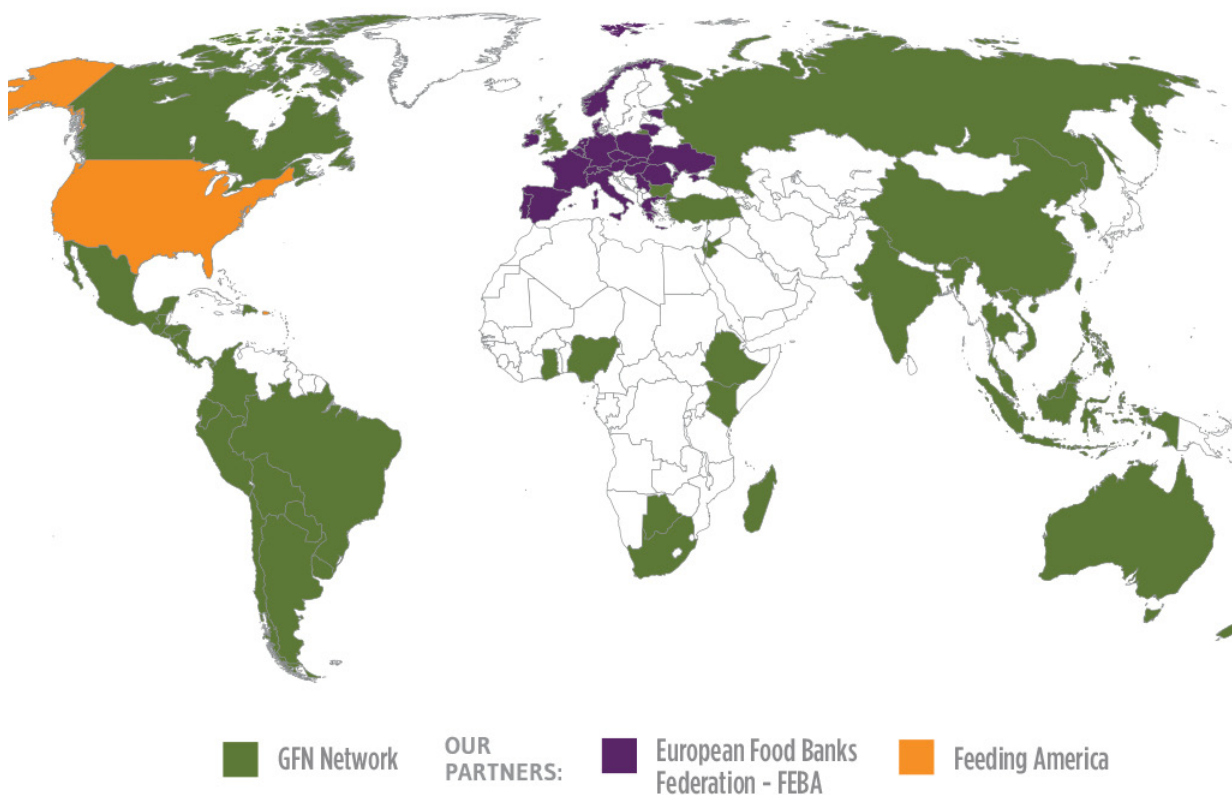
Promoting the food banking model

GFN promotes the food banking model as a tested, effective, and trusted means of feeding people around the globe. It serves as a platform for local food bank leaders everywhere to connect, develop, and implement new ideas that will impact their communities. GFN supports and fosters a network of food bank leaders and their partners that inspires collaboration, mentoring, and the meaningful exchange of best practices. Through coaching, training, and technical assistance, GFN helps food banks increase the distribution of healthy food for the hungry, expand access to fresh fruit and vegetables, expand the number of beneficiary agencies in their regions, and develop meaningful partnerships with donor businesses across the value chain.

GFN’s robust certification process ensures that member food banks achieve the highest levels of operational efficiency, transparency, safety, and accountability. It confirms that members comply with legal, governmental, food safety and hygiene, and operational standards. GFN provides technical assistance and expertise as

FIGURE 6

GFN MAP AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



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GFN focuses on combating hunger and preventing food waste by providing expertise, directing resources, sharing knowledge, and developing connections that increase efficiency, ensure food safety, and help food banks reach more people facing hunger.

well as global knowledge sharing through digital platforms, regional meetings, and the GFN Food Bank Leadership Institute. GFN's Strategic Grants Program provides food banking organizations with the financial assets necessary to establish new food banking operations, improve and expand service delivery, and develop programming targeting key populations. In FY2020 GFN awarded more than US\$11 million in grants to food banks in 51 countries, supporting food bank projects prior to the onset of COVID-19 as well as food banks' response to the crisis brought on by the pandemic.

Food banks can play an important role in reducing child hunger. Yet 74 percent of food banks report funding as a barrier. More than half (54 percent) of food banks report specific food procurement as an obstacle to establishing child feeding programs. GFN, in collaboration with global businesses and nongovernmental partners, strives to help member food banks serve more children and increase the quantity and nutritional quality of meals served to families with children. But to end hunger, governments, the private sector, and civil society must act together to overcome the challenges that stand in the way. The next section offers suggestions on how this can be done. Part II of this report then shines a light on the feeding programs for children that exist among GFN food banks, offering insight into the needs and opportunities of further developing and scaling these programs.

44

COUNTRIES



**949 FOOD BANKS
IN NETWORK**

16.9M

**PEOPLE
SERVED**

Source: "GFN Network Activity Report" survey of 44 countries

Box 2: How GFN helps build child hunger programs

The food security needs of children in each community and the capabilities of the food banks and their partner agencies vary from country to country. Therefore, GFN considers customized approaches to specific needs and capabilities. GFN works with food banks to:

- Conduct assessments to identify the at-risk child population;
- Collaboratively develop specific recommendations for interventions targeting child nutrition;
- Implement or expand existing child food and nutrition assistance programs (such as expansion of existing breakfast, after-school meal programs, backpack and weekend ration programs); and
- Assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and, if effective, work to scale the programs and share case studies across borders and regions with other food banks.



**6.2 MILLION
CHILDREN SERVED**

56K

**BENEFICIARY
ORGANIZATIONS**



**919M KILOS
DISTRIBUTED**



THE NEED TO ACT IS URGENT

Because children are still developing throughout their school-age years (through age 18), they are particularly vulnerable to hunger's impacts. Short-term effects of hunger include impaired cognition, decreased concentration, and poor academic performance.⁹⁸ Long-term effects include nutrition-related disease and key vitamin deficiencies, weakness, growth delays, increased susceptibility to disease, and death.⁹⁹ In a world of substantial abundance of food, there is not just a moral obligation to ensure that children have sufficient access to the healthy, safe, and varied diets they need to be their best but a common sense one as well: Children are the foundation of all human development, future innovation, and a just and productive society.

The first 1,000 days, or the time between conception and a child's second birthday, is the most critical developmental stage in a child's cognitive and physical development. Adequate nutrition for the mother and child during this time can profoundly impact a child's physical growth and cognitive development. The nutritional and health needs of a child up to age two are a high priority for attention, but a window of opportunity exists in the next 7,000 days of middle childhood—the school-age years—to improve child health outcomes and development. These interventions can support and extend investments made in the critical first 1,000 days.

Health and nutrition interventions over the full 8,000 days of childhood and adolescence have significant developmental benefits for growth and cognitive development. Providing adequate nutrition for low-income children throughout childhood and adolescence helps break intergenerational cycles of poverty and has long-term



effects on adult earnings and productivity.¹⁰⁰ Better addressing the nutritional needs of school-age children can profoundly impact the futures of children and disadvantaged communities affected by hunger and poverty.

School feeding programs have been embraced as a necessary long-term investment to advance a nation's education goals, economic development, and societal cohesion leading to greater shared prosperity. More than a decade of research has led to a fact-based, deeper appreciation and reassessment of school meals by development agencies, NGOs, policymakers, and governments in support of expanding those programs. As a health and nutrition intervention for children ages 3 to 19, school meals effectively reduce hunger and the ancillary health effects of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

The economic and human capital development return on investment of school feeding builds further evidence for the need to intervene and accelerate programs in low- and middle-income countries. FAO estimates the adoption of healthy diets is projected to lead to a reduction of up to 97 percent in direct and indirect health costs, not including the economic and productivity gains that arise from adequate school nutrition programs.

While the experience of high-income countries shows that child feeding programs work well and are effective, they do not guarantee that all poor children can access the benefits. Even the governments of high-income countries do not commit enough resources to adequately address the problem of child hunger in their populations.

Promoting and fostering multisector stakeholders—a range of actors and institutions from throughout the private sector and civil society—in support of public-sec-



The world's children desperately need this chance to break out of the chains of poverty and hunger and change their lives for the better.

tor-sponsored school meal programs effectively reduces child hunger and advances broader societal aims. When schools lack the resources to provide school breakfast for needy children, for example, food banks and their local agency partners can fill the gap, as is happening in Ecuador, Guatemala, India, South Africa, and other countries. Even in high-income countries like Canada and the United Kingdom, food banks play a crucial role in filling service gaps in feeding programs for low-income children. These efforts do not replace highly effective public-sector programs. Rather, they complement those efforts, thereby more fully extending the investment and promise of nutrition assistance for children facing hunger.

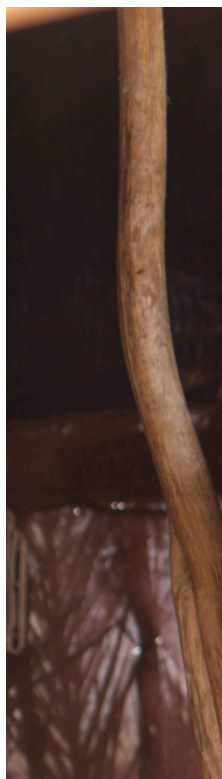
There is an urgent need to act now—by government, the private sector, and civil society. An estimated 66 million poor children go to school hungry, 73 million vulnerable children aren't being reached with food at school, and one in eight school-age children—258 million—was not attending school in 2018.¹⁰¹ The world's children desperately need this chance to break out of the chains of poverty and hunger and change their lives for the better, bringing their families, communities, nations, and the world along with them.

Strengthen government social support systems through school meals

Government programs are the foundation of a strong social protection safety net. Targeted approaches to the food security needs of mothers and children can profoundly impact society—breaking the cycle of poverty in communities, reducing healthcare costs, closing the gender gap, and building human capital and economic development—for generations to come.

The public and private sectors should make critical investments in school-based feeding programs as a means of promoting a society's educational, employment, and economic success. Many models for successful school-based programs exist and, when scaled, the potential to quickly and efficiently reach vulnerable children is huge.

While schools are closed during the COVID-19 crisis, it is crucial for governments to ensure that children continue to receive much needed meals through a variety of adapted modalities, such as home delivery and school/community pick-up points. When schools reopen, the public sector will play a key role in encouraging children to go back to school and should ensure that school meal programs are ready to be implemented as soon as schools open. The economic effects of COVID-19 and the respective lockdowns will be felt in poor communities long after the health crisis is over; governments should consider how they can further bolster school meal programs, such as by working with food banks and other private-sector partners to provide additional food assistance to the families of the children who depend on school meals.



Strengthen the role of food banks and other private-sector actors

In emerging market economies or transitioning low- and middle-income countries, the need for hunger relief and nutrition assistance can be substantial, as public-sector social protection programs are too often insufficient or nonexistent. In developing or transitioning market countries, food banks can support the ongoing development of civil society and food aid to vulnerable populations and can help secure public investments in social protection, health, education, and economic development. Food banking—with its accompanying partnership with government and industry—provides a model for preventing localized increases in hunger and serves as a catalyst for longer-term development.

Children are already among the beneficiaries of food banks' work. Food banks bolster and extend the benefits that the social safety net extends to public schools in all countries. Even in high-income countries—Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—food banks operate private charitable-sector programs to bolster existing school feeding programs or fill gaps in program service.

Because many programs rely on food donation in addition to what they purchase, governments and food and beverage companies, including manufacturers and retailers, should remove obstacles to donating healthy surplus food to food banks. Governments should foster policies that encourage food donations to engage the private sector in supporting government and food bank programs and investing in feeding programs for school-age children. This holistic, multisector, multi-actor approach can return significant benefits to communities. These investments will lead to improved health, education, and economic returns while fostering social stability and opportunity for poor communities and low-income families.





THE POTENTIAL IS ENORMOUS

Food banks have long made nutritional investments in the lives of children. Nearly 40 percent of the people served by food banks in The Global FoodBanking Network are children under the age of 18. GFN works with food banks to establish, develop, and expand programs that provide food and other services to food-insecure children. GFN will continue to provide global resources and share best practices, implementation guidelines, and strategies to empower food banks to reach this critical population. To further inform GFN's child program offerings, GFN administered a survey in late 2019 to gather information about existing network programs and their scope, history, efficacy, and plans for the future.

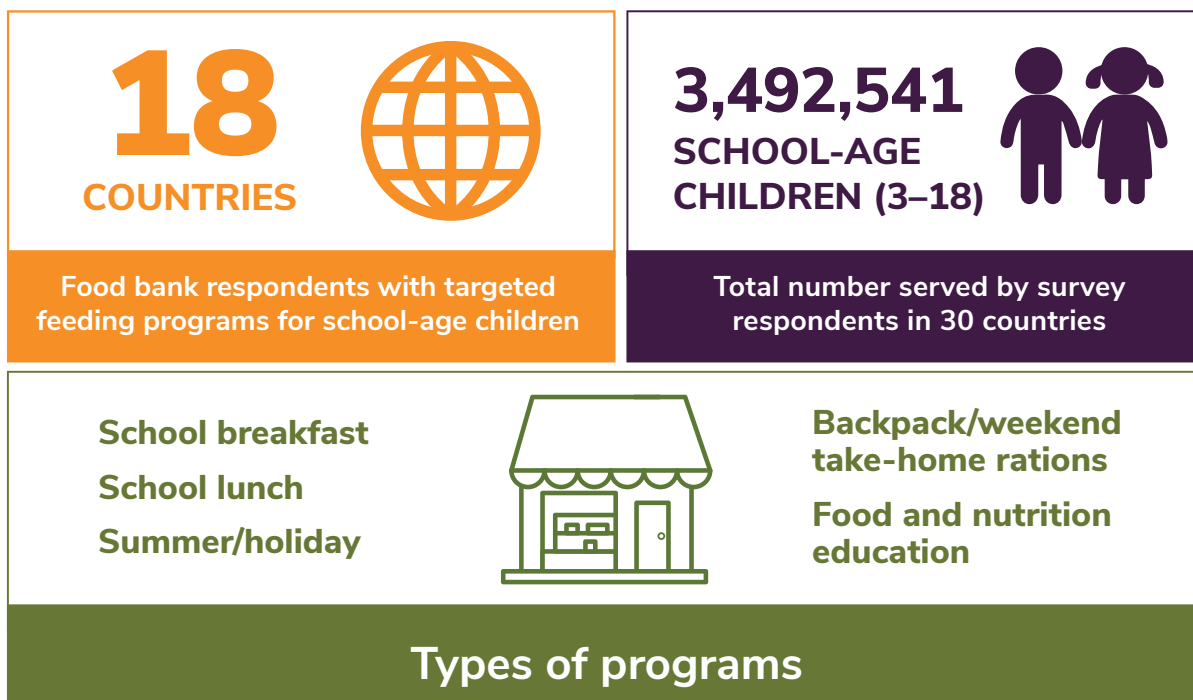
In 2019, as reported by the survey respondents in 30 countries, GFN food banks served an estimated 3.49 million school-age children (3 to 18 years old) through collaboration with schools and local social service organizations.

In addition to providing food and grocery products to children through their networks, many food banks also implement programs targeted to a certain age group or subset of the population. Of the 80 survey respondents, 41 food banks in 18 countries reported implementing targeted programs for school-age children in 2019. Of the food banks in 12 countries that did not implement child hunger programs in 2019, food banks in seven of these countries planned to implement a feeding program for school-age children in 2020, although it is yet to be determined how the effects of COVID-19 will impact programmatic decisions.



FIGURE 7

FOOD BANK CHILD HUNGER PROGRAMS (2019)



Source: GFN Child Hunger Program Survey 2019

FIGURE 8

NUMBER OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN SERVED BY FOOD BANKS IN THE GLOBAL FOODBANKING NETWORK BY AGE, COHORT, AND GENDER*

AGE COHORT	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
PREPRIMARY (3–5)	340,375	336,652	677,027
PRIMARY (6–11)	690,491	685,179	1,375,670
LOWER SECONDARY (12–14)	323,840	314,673	638,513
UPPER SECONDARY (15–18)	404,743	396,588	801,331
TOTAL	1,759,449	1,733,092	3,492,541

*These numbers are estimates based on available data from the survey respondents as well as GFN's annual network survey 2018. Many food banks use different age ranges than those specified in the survey, and many food banks do not keep records of beneficiaries by gender. Therefore, the numbers provided are best estimates based on calculations performed by GFN.

Food banks are committed to providing wholesome, safe food in their child feeding programs. Children are offered a diverse array of healthy food that meets a range of dietary needs, including macro- and micronutrients. To determine nutrition standards for their programs, food banks consult guidelines provided by the World Health Organization, their country's Ministry of Health, and private organizations. Additionally, many food banks have nutritionists on staff who ensure that children are provided with appropriate amounts and types of food for their age.

Survey methodology

From September to December 2019, GFN administered the survey on child hunger programs to food banks and national networks in 30 countries in the GFN network. The survey can be found in Appendix B. Eighty food banks responded, including a mix of national networks and individual food banks. For the sake of simplicity, this section will refer to “food banks” regardless of status as an individual food bank or national network.

All data presented in this section is self-reported by the food banks. It is worth noting that there are more than likely other food banks implementing child hunger programs than what is reported here. Only a sample of food banks within the various national networks responded to the survey. Therefore, this section presents a snapshot of GFN network activity and is not meant to be a complete representation of the entire network.

SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

Countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, Panama, Russia, South Africa, United Kingdom

For families who are not able to provide their children breakfast in the morning, a school breakfast program (SBP) can make all the difference in ensuring that the child is ready to learn. Children who do not have enough to eat suffer from impaired cognition, decreased concentration, and poor academic performance.¹⁰² Even short-term nutrient restrictions due to missed breakfast are enough to affect brain function.¹⁰³ School meal programs provide an opportunity to manage and sometimes reverse various forms of undernutrition experienced in early life, helping children catch up from nutritional deficiencies. They also contribute to improved educational outcomes for children from low-income families where food may be scarce.¹⁰⁴ By ensuring that children start off their day with a healthy breakfast, SBPs provide children with a better chance at learning and engaging with their peers.

Twenty-three food banks in 13 countries reported implementing SBPs in 2019. Respondents were asked to select the main objectives of their SBP from a predetermined list. Eighty-three percent cited meeting nutrition and/or health goals as one of the main objectives of the program. More than 50 percent cited providing food support to school-age children because there is no government-sponsored program and meeting educational goals as two of their main objectives.

Of the respondents, Foodbank Western Australia (Foodbank WA) has the oldest SBP in The Global FoodBanking Network, with its program starting in 2001. The remaining food banks began their programs in 2013 or later. Food bank-sponsored SBPs range greatly in size, from serving fewer than 100 children to more than 30,000 in the most recent school year.

Of the respondents who provided data on the amount of food distributed, food banks provided more than 1.1 million kilograms of food to serve more than 6.5 million breakfasts to more than 61,000 children in 2019. The majority of SBPs serve breakfast five days a week. Sixty-four percent of the programs run only during the school year, and 36 percent of them run both during the school year and during school breaks. On average, an SBP runs for 41 weeks of the year.

As reported in the survey, 88 percent of food banks implementing an SBP provide at least two of the following food groups for the breakfasts: fruit and vegetables, cereals and cereal derivatives, and dairy. Twelve percent of food banks provide eggs, 18 per-



cent provide meat/poultry/fish, and 12 percent provide legumes. Of the food banks that specify a meal size for breakfast, the average meal is 325 grams.

In addition to providing food, many of the SBPs offer complementary programs. More than 60 percent provide food and nutrition education, 44 percent provide health and hygiene education, and 38 percent provide deworming. As a result of the SBPs supported by food banks, schools have seen improved attendance, a decrease in school dropout, an increase in concentration, and improved nutrition status of the children.

All of the SBP respondents would like to continue or expand their programs, though 40 percent of the food banks state that funding was not adequate to achieve program targets in the most recent program year.

SOUTH AFRICA

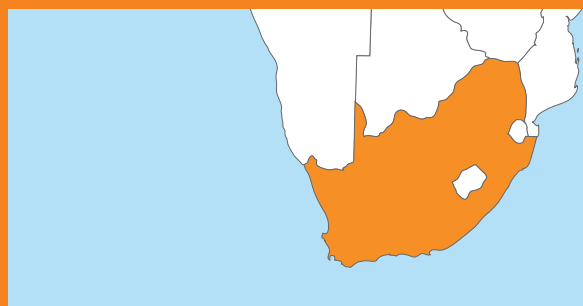
FoodForward South Africa's Breakfasts for Better Days

As of 2019, 51 percent of the population of South Africa suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity¹⁰⁵ and 14 million people faced hunger.¹⁰⁶ Like too many places in the world, children are hit the hardest: More than 3 million children in South Africa experience chronic hunger.¹⁰⁷

FoodForward South Africa (FFSA), established in 2009, works to decrease hunger in South Africa and reduce food loss and waste. In 2019, through a network of 580 beneficiary organizations and with local, community-based resources, FFSA extended the social safety net, ultimately serving 201,000 vulnerable people daily. Since 2013 FFSA has partnered with Kellogg's South Africa to provide breakfast for thousands of children each school day. In 2019 FFSA distributed cereals and long-life milk to primary and secondary schools in areas of high poverty and unemployment in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Port Elizabeth. Each day, 30,035 students at 47 schools received a nutritious breakfast through the Breakfasts for Better Days program.

Healthy breakfasts benefit students and the classroom. A report by the South African Department of Basic Education found that school meals promote school enrollment, punctuality, and attendance.¹⁰⁸

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as schools closed nationally for four months and have gone through a cycle of partial reopening, closing again, and fully reopening, the children of poor households that depend on daily wages are suffering. FFSA works with beneficiary organizations around the country to ensure that children and their families receive food parcels, especially when schools are closed. Through FFSA's Mobile Rural Depot model, food banks deliver large quantities of food to one beneficiary organization in a rural area where other beneficiary organizations can come and pick up their allotment. This model is key to providing service to children in rural, hard-to-reach areas. From March to May 2020, FFSA almost doubled the number of beneficiary organizations to which it provides food assistance.



ECUADOR

Banco de Alimentos Diakonía's Breakfasts for Better Days

In Ecuador, as of 2019, 23.3 percent of the population was moderately or severely food insecure and the prevalence of undernourishment was 7.9 percent.¹⁰⁹ Rates of stunting among children under age five are alarmingly high—23.9 percent—which is more than three times the rate of South America as a whole and nearly 9 percentage points higher than the next rated country on the continent.¹¹⁰ In Guayaquil, where Banco de Alimentos Diakonía (Diakonía) is located, 20 percent of children in the city suffer from malnutrition.¹¹¹ In 2019 Diakonía, the first fully established food bank in Ecuador, worked with 82 beneficiary organizations to reach more than 30,000 people in its service area, about 80 percent of whom are children, and offered a variety of programs, including a medicine bank, fruit and vegetable rescue program, and community garden promotion.

In 2019 Diakonía worked with three schools to administer the Breakfasts for Better Days Program, which provided 427 preprimary and primary school children, including 23 disabled children in inclusive classrooms, with a balanced breakfast of cereal, a dairy drink, and fruit for 24 weeks. The program also included a nutrition education and food management and preparation component for the mothers of the children. Assessments of the children helped to recognize unusual patterns of allergies and intolerances among the population served and found the program to be successful in addressing the participants' nutrition status and promoting healthy consumption patterns.

At its inception, this program was unique in Ecuador because it was the first nongovernmental program of its kind to be developed. The program responds quickly to changing circumstances, often providing varied menu options to alleviate boredom, introducing new fruits, instituting clear channels of communication with teachers and school administrators, and reprogramming activities. The program enables food banks to collaborate with new and varied partners and share best practices.

Since March 2020, Guayaquil has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Diakonía has dramatically scaled up its food assistance by increasing the number of beneficiary organizations it supports. It now reaches more than 1 million people, a more than 30-fold increase compared to 2019. While schools are closed, Diakonía distributes emergency food boxes to families with children who previously benefited from the school breakfast program.



SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS (MIDDAY MEAL)

Countries: Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Israel, Mexico, South Korea

School lunch, or midday meal, programs are the typical public-sector school feeding program offered around the globe. The evidence across all regions and socioeconomic conditions shows school-based food and nutrition interventions can help children better learn, enroll, and stay in school and result in greater access to education and social mobility, especially for girls and other at-risk populations where initial indicators of school participation are low.¹¹² School lunches are an excellent investment. They are cost-effective and have positive impacts on individuals and communities, including health, agriculture, social protection, and education.¹¹³ Low-income families receive a direct economic benefit: The value of meals in school is equivalent to about 10 percent of a household's income.¹¹⁴ Therefore, school meals free up additional resources for other essential needs.

Eight food banks in six countries implemented school lunch programs in 2019. The most common objective of the programs is to meet nutrition and/or health goals (cited by 75 percent of respondents), followed by providing a social safety net (63 percent) and providing food support to school-age children because no government-sponsored program exists (50 percent).

Of the six food groups asked about in the survey (fruit/vegetables, cereals and cereal derivatives, dairy products, eggs, meat/poultry/fish, and legumes/nuts/seeds), the lunch programs on average provide products from five of them.

Lunches are provided at schools and at beneficiary organizations. On average, the school lunch programs run 39 weeks out of the year.

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School-based food and nutrition interventions can help children better learn, enroll, and stay in school.



COLOMBIA

Fundación SACIAR's dining temples are the heart of a community

While Colombia is a high middle-income country, there are still high rates of inequality, poverty, and food insecurity. The most recent statistics in 2019 show that 4.6 percent of the population was undernourished¹¹⁵ and 1 in 10 children suffered from chronic malnutrition.¹¹⁶

Fundación SACIAR, a food bank located in Medellín, Colombia and a member of Asociación de Bancos de Alimentos de Colombia (the national network of food banks in Colombia), has run a program to provide meals to children facing food insecurity since 2002. In 2019 these *templos comedores*, or “dining temples,” provided nutritious lunches daily to 1,500 children at 14 sites in and outside of Medellín. Some dining temples also serve breakfast, although the need for this service has decreased with the expansion of the national government's school breakfast program. A food bank nutritionist helps develop the menus for the dining temples. The lunches provide 35 percent of a child's energy and nutrition requirements for healthy development. The lunch program requires community participation: Mothers and other family members take turns preparing the lunches for the children. While the lunches are free of charge to the children, the support of the family members to cook the meals is a way for them to contribute to the program and the health of their children.

The dining temples serve as more than just kitchens—they are community centers. In addition to food, SACIAR and its partners provide food education, health and hygiene education, psychosocial care, and training to children and their families. Some dining temples include community rooms, sports courts, gardens, and libraries. On weekends, they serve as churches, an important piece of community infrastructure for the neighborhoods.

The dining temple lunch programs improve nutrition and health outcomes among the children they serve. They also improve participants' eating habits. When children first arrive at a dining temple, they often do not want to eat the vegetables and meat served in the lunch. However, after continued participation in the program, the children begin to eat all of the fresh food provided. They learn how to use utensils and get along with other children. SACIAR also reports seeing changes in attitudes and values of the mothers and families who participate in the programming provided.



BACKPACK PROGRAMS OR WEEKEND TAKE-HOME RATIONS

Countries: Canada, Mexico, South Korea

Children who count on receiving the majority of their food intake at school can suffer during the weekends. Simply put, children who are well nourished learn more and learn better.¹¹⁷ Backpack Programs or similar programs run by food banks, schools, and charity partners provide weekend take-home rations and deliver crucial support to children and their families. This helps ensure children get enough to eat over the weekend. Research shows that the US-based Backpack Program has a positive effect on the food security status of participants and Friday school attendance¹¹⁸ as well as test scores, self-esteem, and school behavior.¹¹⁹

Four respondents in three countries implemented Backpack Programs or other programs with weekend take-home rations for school-age children in 2019. The most common objectives of the program are to provide a social safety net and to meet nutrition and/or health goals.

The products most commonly provided include cereal and cereal derivatives and dairy products. One food bank also provides meat/poultry/fish and legumes. In addition to food, the Korea Foodbank also provides personal hygiene products like hand soap and toothpaste. Feedback from its beneficiary organizations indicates that the children enjoy receiving and using these products.

The Backpack Programs provide anywhere from 2.7 to 6.2 kilograms of food each time a backpack is given to a child, either weekly or biweekly. One program only distributes during the summer months, whereas another program runs for all 45 weeks of the school year.



MEXICO

Weekend feeding – Alimento para Todos Backpack Program

Mexico City is the population and economic center of Mexico. However, many of its residents live below the poverty line. As of 2018, just over 25 percent of households in Mexico City were severely food insecure, and another 25 percent were mildly or moderately food insecure.¹²⁰ Households facing food insecurity have less diverse diets and purchase more processed, calorie-dense foods instead of vegetables and fruits.

Mexico's government runs a nationwide school breakfast program for approximately 95 percent of school-age children who are enrolled in school.¹²¹ On weekends, however, some students do not receive steady meals at home or must resort to eating unbalanced meals. These children return to school hungry, which causes school performance to suffer.

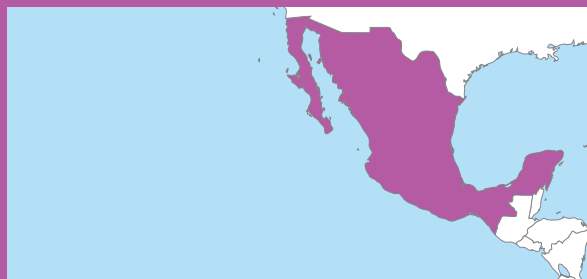
Alimento para Todos (APT), an urban food bank in Mexico City and a member of Bancos de Alimentos de México (the national network of food banks in Mexico), has provided food assistance for over 25 years. APT developed a program aimed at bridging the meal gap on weekends. The Backpack Program, which fills backpacks with healthy foods each weekend during the school year, aims to improve the nutrition status of children and empower them to do better in school and lead healthy lives.

The backpacks contain rice, beans, milk, canned tuna, fruits, and occasional treats like cookies and school supplies. The food in the backpacks provides approximately four meals for the child and three additional family

members over the weekend. Over the 2018–19 school year, the Backpack Program fed 402 children and their families. The program was expanded in the 2019–20 school year to reach 452 children.

In addition to food packs, the program provides other benefits. The food bank conducts nutritional and health assessments for the children enrolled in the program to identify any child who might be nutritionally at risk and in need of special attention or follow-up. APT also provides 18 training sessions a year for parents, caretakers, children, and staff at beneficiary organizations on topics like nutrition, hygiene standards and proper food preparation, and the importance of physical activity.

Due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, APT began working with community groups to distribute backpacks to the children and their families. APT provides backpacks to leaders of the community group and these leaders work with mothers and caretakers to distribute them to the families. APT has had to suspend all training sessions while quarantine and movement restrictions are in place.



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The food bank conducts nutritional and health assessments for the children enrolled in the program to identify any child who might be nutritionally at risk and in need of special attention or follow-up.

SUMMER OR HOLIDAY FOOD PROGRAMS

Countries: Brazil, Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, United Kingdom

School breaks and summer vacation are usually an exciting time for children, but for those who do not have enough to eat at home, they can be a source of anxiety. During school breaks, children who benefit from free school breakfasts and lunches lose access to an important source of healthy meals. A child's nutrition needs do not change when the seasons do, and summer continues to be a period of growth and development. In the United Kingdom, holiday clubs positively impact food intake, diet variability, and behavior¹²² and mitigate food insecurity.¹²³ Food banks also take on this burgeoning need: They distribute supplementary food during holidays to social service and community-based organizations that provide a safe place for children to come for a meal and spend their free time with peers.



As reported in GFN's survey, nine respondents from five countries implemented summer or holiday feeding programs for school-age children in 2019. The most commonly cited objectives of the programs are to meet health and/or nutrition goals and to provide a social safety net, followed by providing food support to school-age children because no government-sponsored program exists.

Most of the food banks provide products from the majority of the six specified food groups except eggs. Programs range from providing one food pack to participants at the beginning of the summer to providing weekly packs to children throughout the summer. One

program that provides one pack at the beginning of the summer gives approximately seven kilograms of food per child, with an additional 14 kilograms to support two additional family members. Another program that provides weekly food packs to children distributes an average of 1.8 kilograms per child each week, though it varies depending on the variety and availability of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The majority of food for the summer and holiday programs is from regular donations received by the food bank from the private or public sectors and/or donations solicited from the private sector specifically for the program. Only one respondent mentioned purchasing food at a discount for its program.

Complementary programs are not as common with the summer or holiday programs. One respondent cited providing food and nutrition education, health and hygiene education, and psychosocial support in addition to the food provision.

UNITED KINGDOM

FareShare serves up meals during school holidays

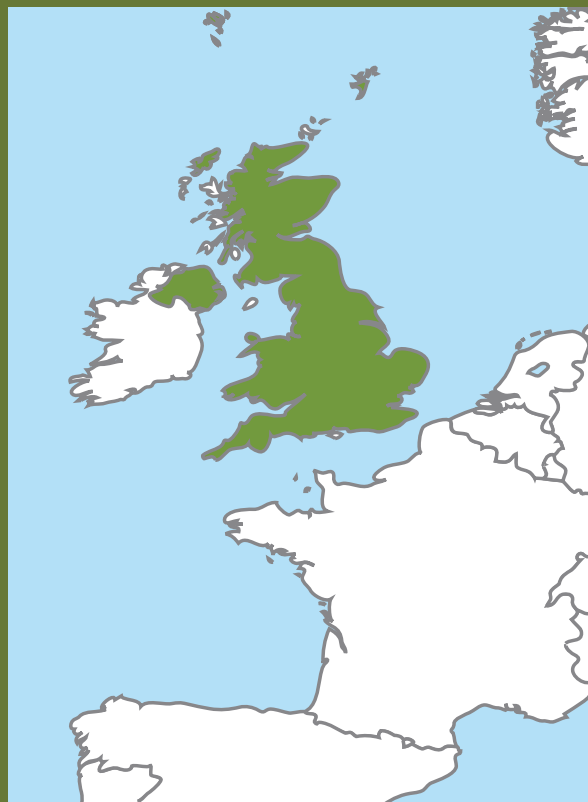
In the United Kingdom, approximately 3.7 million children live in households that are likely unable to afford a healthy diet.¹²⁴ For many children, school meals may be the only meals that provide access to healthy and nutritious foods. In 2014, recognizing the importance of school meals for many children and families, the UK government implemented universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) for children ages four to seven and provided funding for free school breakfast programs in some of the more vulnerable communities.¹²⁵ However, these programs are only available to children during the school year. The United Kingdom does not have any universal school holiday feeding programs.

FareShare, the United Kingdom's longest-running food redistribution charity, works to alleviate child hunger during school breaks. It provides nutritious food packs to holiday hunger programs throughout the United Kingdom. During the summer of 2016, FareShare distributed food to 19 summer holiday food programs in Derbyshire. FareShare also worked with each organization to ensure its facilities met certain standards, including proper food handling. They ensured that at least one staff member or volunteer reached Level 2 Food Hygiene standards. The impact of the holiday hunger feeding programs went beyond the children and parents. Local families in the community received surplus food from some of the programs.¹²⁶

FareShare's #ActiveAte campaign brings awareness to the issues of holiday hunger. Children who do not have access to adequate meals during school holidays return to school malnourished and have greater difficulty learning and succeeding in school. Holiday hunger can also impact families. The difficulties of providing extra meals at home can add financial and physical stress on parents and caretakers. Launched in June 2018, #ActiveAte

calls on the food industry to provide healthy, child-friendly food to children and support summer activities for children out of school. In 2019 #ActiveAte supplied food to over 400 holiday projects during the summer, nourishing approximately 50,000 children.

One organization that benefits from FareShare food packs is the New Parks Play Association (NPPA), which supports 120 children between the ages of 4 and 16 during school holidays and breaks. FareShare distributes sandwiches, dairy, cooked meat, fruits, snacks, and drinks to NPPA. Bethan Lloyd, a staff member at NPPA, said, "The food from FareShare made a huge difference to our organization. Many of the children would just go hungry if we were not able to feed them."



CANADA

Food Banks Canada's After the Bell program provides summer meals

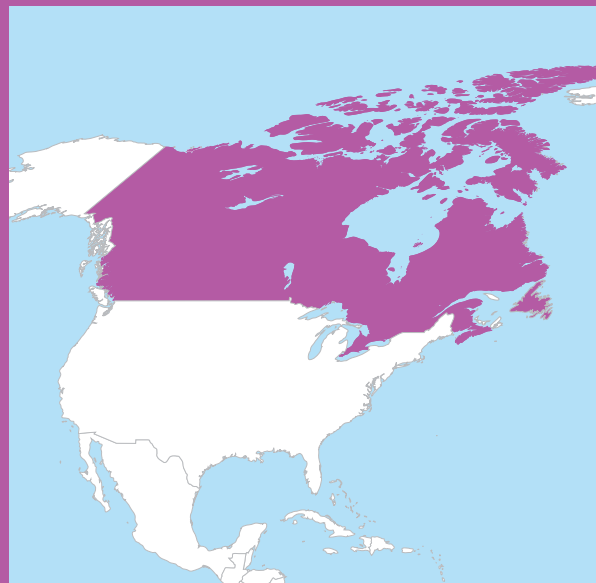
During the summer months, children who benefit from free school breakfasts and lunches lose access to an important source of healthy meals. Food Banks Canada's After the Bell program works to address childhood hunger during the summer months. Started in 2015, the program has grown each year, from 700 food packs distributed in its first year to 100,000 food packs distributed in 2019.¹²⁷ A dietician helps design the food pack to ensure the healthfulness of its contents, which typically include items like milk, oatmeal, raisins, hummus, crackers, and cereal. Food Banks Canada (FBC) also provides the food banks with a CAD\$2 donation per food pack to help food banks supplement fresh fruits and vegetables in each food pack.

In 2019 food banks in 10 provinces and two territories throughout the country received food packs, reaching more than 100 communities. Each recipient food bank determines the best distribution method, either through the food banks themselves or through beneficiary organizations like summer camps. Depending on need, some children may receive a food pack once during the summer, whereas others may receive a pack every week. Danielle McIntyre, executive director of Interfaith Food Bank Society, commented on the After the Bell program: "Having a bundle of healthy, nutritious snacks—just for them—has created a sense of excitement for children coming to visit the food bank and a sense of relief for their parents in knowing their children are looking forward to eating fresh fruits and vegetables and other snacks from their packs."

The After the Bell program also includes nutrition and education activities. Its Food Explorers Cooking Club program provides educational programming for children ages 9 through 11. The curriculum includes teaching children to understand how food affects the body and how to make healthy eating choices. At the Newmarket Food Pantry in Newmarket, Ontario, which participated in the Food Explorers program during the fall of 2019,

children learned about where food grows, how to make good food choices, and what was considered a healthy snack. During the final class, children shared what they had learned by preparing a meal to share with their families.¹²⁸ FBC intends to expand this program to empower more children to make healthy eating choices and develop kitchen skills.

With schools closed in Canada due to the COVID-19 crisis, children need food support more than ever. Knowing that both families and the food banks that serve them are going to be stretched for quite a while, FBC has adapted the After the Bell program and is distributing 130,000 food packs to children in need across the country. FBC extended the time period during which food banks can distribute food packs. Since schools were closed long before the school year would have normally ended, FBC sent food packs out earlier and food banks are able to distribute them as they see fit during the remaining "school year months" and throughout the summer. Food banks are coming up with new ways to reach children and their families since many of the summer programs they typically partner with, such as summer camps, are closed.





FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Israel, Mexico, Taiwan

Focusing on food security alone isn't enough to improve diets, health, or food systems.¹²⁹ Nutrition education initiatives can kick-start longer-term changes in nutrition status, public health, and community sustainability.¹³⁰

In addition to providing direct food assistance, many food banks also administer Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) programs to school-age children. Especially during their early years, children develop eating habits and are excited to learn about food. FNE programs combine theoretical elements about different types of foods, what the body needs to grow and function well, and the social and cultural aspects of food and eating. Cooking and tasting new foods provide important opportunities for children to absorb information about making good choices around their dietary habits and behaviors. FAO's literature review shows that nutrition education efforts of all kinds—including at schools and in community settings—can change behaviors and instill positive habits.¹³¹

Twelve food banks in seven countries implemented FNE programs for school-age children in 2019. A majority of respondents (83 percent) said one of the main objectives of the FNE program was to meet nutrition and/or health goals. Other common



objectives are to prevent or mitigate overweight and/or obesity (67 percent) and to meet educational goals (58 percent). Additionally, some FNE programs seek to instill the time-honored value of eating together as a family, which studies show positively affect various factors related to children's overall health and well-being.¹³²

The longest running FNE program among the survey respondents was started by Mesa Brasil Sesc in 2003, followed by Foodbank Western Australia in 2007. The remaining food banks started their programs in 2014 or later. In 2019 FNE programs reached more than 31,000 children. In some cases, the children's parents or other family members participated as well.

Most FNE programs do not provide food directly to participants. Instead, they run in conjunction with other programs such as school breakfast programs or summer feeding programs that do provide food. Some FNE programs include a hands-on cooking component where the children cook the recipes they learn about and then eat the meal together. Many FNE programs do not only focus on healthy eating habits and behaviors. They also use and discuss foods that are culturally appropriate and financially accessible for the participants based on their regional and socioeconomic conditions.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents use nutrition standards from one or more of the following sources: WHO guidelines, their country's Ministry of Health (or similar agency/department) guidelines, nutritionist on the food bank staff, and external dietitians/nutritionists. The remaining food banks did not respond to the question asking how they determined the nutrition standards for their FNE program.

Programs range from being a one-time class at school to a seven-week cooking class. Programs are provided at schools, beneficiary organizations, and directly in rural communities. In addition to specific instruction about food and diet, 58 percent of the FNE programs also include health and hygiene education in their lessons, and 33 percent monitor the nutritional status of the participating children.

Through these programs, food banks help children develop independence, confidence, and healthy eating habits. Additionally, FNE programs positively impact participants by improving body mass index scores, preventing malnutrition, reducing cases of severe anemia, and imparting the value of traditional foods and cultural practices.

All of the food bank respondents stated that they would like to expand their FNE programs to reach more children in need, though financial constraints are a barrier to expansion.

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Especially during their early years, children develop eating habits and are excited to learn about food.



AUSTRALIA

Foodbank Western Australia provides more than a good breakfast

Five million Australians are food insecure. At least once a week, 3 in 10 of those Australians go a whole day without eating.¹³³ Foodbank Australia is the nation's largest food relief organization. In 2019 it provided necessary food and grocery items to over 815,000 people each month through its network of charity partners.¹³⁴ The majority of those charity partners rank Foodbank Australia as the most important supplier for their operations.¹³⁵

Rates of food insecurity among children are higher than among adults, and Foodbank Australia's research shows that more than 25 percent of those seeking charitable food assistance are children.¹³⁶ Established in 2001 with 17 participating schools, Foodbank Western Australia (FBWA, a member of Foodbank Australia) developed the first School Breakfast Program (SBP) run by a food bank in The Global FoodBanking Network. In 2019, 490 schools participated in the SBP. The program directly reached over 21,500 children, serving more than 69,900 breakfasts each week. FBWA prioritizes schools that rank in the lower half of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). In 2019, 86 percent of the schools served were disadvantaged and the other 14 percent catered to subgroups of students at educational risk. FBWA provides nutritious breakfast staples at no cost to the participating schools throughout the entire state, including harder-to-reach nonmetropolitan areas where 56 percent of the participating schools are located.¹³⁷ The remote areas are in high need and may often be impossible to reach during extreme weather, in which case FBWA ensures deliveries in advance. Core breakfast products include canned fruit, wheat biscuits, oats, canned spaghetti, baked beans, reduced fat UHT milk, and vegemite.

Food Sensations® for Schools is a practical nutrition education and cooking program that has been developed for school students from kindergarten to year 12 throughout metropolitan and regional Western Australia. Delivered by

university-qualified nutritionists and dieticians, Food Sensations® for Schools uses interactive activities linked to the Australian National Curriculum to teach basic nutrition principles and includes hands-on cooking. Nutrition education sessions incorporate FBWA's Superhero Foods® initiative, which uses cartoon characters to promote healthy eating in a fun, engaging way. The cooking component of the session teaches students key skills in food preparation, food and kitchen safety, and implementation of the Australian Dietary Guidelines. It also provides an opportunity to try new and possibly unfamiliar foods in a safe environment.

The comprehensive sessions introduce food literacy and show that eating healthy foods can be budget friendly, fun, and delicious. The class structure and regularity can accommodate the resources, needs, and cultures of the schools and students. For example, in regional and remote communities, recipes cooked in the session are selected based on the availability of the ingredients in the area. Tinned and frozen produce and shelf-stable items are utilized when fresh items may not be readily available.

Food Sensations® for Schools is available to schools registered with FBWA's SBP, thus targeting children in low-socioeconomic areas who may be at risk of experiencing social or economic disadvantage.



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An independent assessment found positive impacts, including on teaching and learning, transitioning between home and school, reducing disruptive behavior, increasing mood and sense of calm, attending school, and being punctual.

An independent, three-year assessment of the FBWA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Programs found positive impacts, including on teaching and learning, transitioning between home and school, reducing disruptive behavior, increasing mood and sense of calm, attending school, and being punctual. Some evidence shows that more frequent and consistent participation in the program is more beneficial than occasional participation. The Food Sensations® for Schools program promotes the idea that healthy meals are easy to prepare and inspires confidence among students that they can prepare them.¹³⁸ Students gain the ability to identify healthy foods, read food labels, and be knowledgeable and aware of kitchen safety procedures.

The future aim of the School Breakfast Program and Food Sensations® for Schools is to continue to provide evidence-based programs in schools across Western Australia. Past evaluations of the program support the need for these programs and their positive impact on those involved. FBWA continues to be a national leader in implementing these programs and will continue to develop and improve them based on stakeholder feedback, evaluation outcomes, and emerging evidence in the literature. This is essential to ensure that the programs continue to meet the changing needs of vulnerable students and communities into the future.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, on-site delivery of the Food Sensations® for Schools program in schools across Western Australia has been suspended. While the majority of schools have remained open during the pandemic and are able to provide breakfast to students, schools have restricted unessential services to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission. While unable to deliver the nutrition education program in its usual capacity, the FBWA team

has redirected its focus to support schools through online content. In addition to the Superhero Foods HQ website, FBWA developed the Quarantine Quisine Facebook group, which provides a range of nutrition education videos, discussions, and evidence-based information. FBWA is also developing video adaptations of its nutrition education activities that will be available to all schools and provide a way to teach students about nutrition and healthy eating while ensuring social distancing and other government restrictions are abided by.



CONCLUSION

Targeted programs that improve a school-age child's access to the basic nutrition necessary for health and well-being have an equally profound impact on a society's health and well-being. Development agencies, NGOs, and governments must work in concert to ensure that programs for school-age children are expansive and efficient, effectively reducing hunger and the subsidiary effects of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

Food banks are a critical part of this solution. Food banks represent an integral part of most national social safety nets, attending to the unmet food needs of vulnerable populations under normal societal conditions. During periods of disaster like the current COVID-19 health and humanitarian crises, food banks are uniquely positioned to aid those who are suffering. Food banks rapidly distribute food assistance to affected communities, support and coordinate response activities, and serve as an important resource and trusted institution in disadvantaged communities that may be disproportionately affected by disaster. Food banks do this work because of their rooted community ties, strong partnerships, agility, and flexibility. They have shown that they can adapt to changing conditions and implement new methods of service delivery, especially for vulnerable children affected by school closures and economic shutdowns.

Strengthening the operational continuity and capabilities of food banks to address local needs and prepare and respond to crises not simply in the short term but over the long term can enable low-income people and communities to recover from crises more quickly while laying the groundwork for long-term development and resilience to future crises. When scaled and resourced, food banks can drastically alter a community's social fabric, ensuring that children reach their fullest potential.

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Strengthening the operational continuity and capabilities of food banks to address local needs and prepare and respond to crises can enable low-income communities to recover from crises more quickly while laying the groundwork for long-term development and resilience to future crises.



APPENDIX A

ENSURING FOOD ASSISTANCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR CHILDREN WHO TYPICALLY RELY ON SCHOOL MEALS

1. Creative distribution methods to reach children in need

Transitioning to take-home rations on a pick-up or delivery basis

School meal implementers are transitioning to take-home rations as school meal programs are interrupted by COVID-19 school closures. Many school meal programs carried out by food banks, governments, and other implementing partners (such as JAM International, Nascent Solutions, Catholic Relief Services, and WFP) are developing take-home ration distribution plans to ensure children from vulnerable households do not remain hungry during school closures.

- *Distribution channels:* Communicate clearly who qualifies and where/how/when the food is distributed.
 - Food banks distribute food through community agencies or through organized community groups.
 - Food banks or schools serve as a pick-up point for parents/families to pick up take-home rations. Elementary schools are often good pick-up points since elementary schools are usually close in proximity to the beneficiaries.
 - Other access points (bus stops, locations where open-air markets normally would operate, churches/places of worship) are identified that are easily accessible to children's homes. Ensure a team of trusted neighborhood/local leaders/volunteers/staff are present to supervise the distribution and ensure the food is going to targeted families/children.
 - Food banks or schools deliver take-home rations directly to households. Work with school staff to map out the home addresses of the students. The local municipality or local volunteer groups may be able to help food bank/school staff with the delivery of food packs.
- *Social distancing:* Nascent Solutions Cameroon uses a rations distribution roster to limit the number of parents who are on campus to receive food at a given time to ensure social distancing measures required by the CDC.

- *COVID-19 prevention awareness and training:* JAM South Africa undertook an immediate distribution of take-home rations to children accompanied by hand washing and hygiene training in an effort to limit COVID-19 spread. A second distribution of nonperishable food products, including a corn-soya blend (CSB), also included essential sanitation and hygiene products as well as prevention awareness and training.

Cash and food vouchers

- When food is locally available but distribution through schools, food banks, or other agencies is not possible, cash and food vouchers can support households and the local economy. JAM South Africa and WFP are also exploring food and cash vouchers to support local groceries and retailers.

Government coordination

- Contacting your local/regional/national government is recommended to coordinate relief efforts.
 - In some countries, school food stocks are being transferred to coordinating government agencies that are distributing food and supplies through local government officials and the military to households that live below the poverty line and work in the informal sector.

2. Considerations to take into account when providing take-home rations for children

Gender equality

- Food distribution during the pandemic is focused on meeting the food needs of households quickly and equitably. However, the COVID-19 pandemic may have different impacts on women, men, and the changing household dynamics, especially with shelter-in-place restrictions in many communities. It is important to understand the gender implications (e.g., power dynamics, food access, effective targeting) when designing emergency food distributions.
- School feeding programs often incentivize households to send girls to school through the promise of a nutritious meal and a protective environment. Many of the girls who attend schools in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, and South Sudan where JAM International provides school meals are vulnerable to sexual abuse and early pregnancy. With school closures, girls are likely to drop out of school for the long term. Governments and partners should plan for a targeted effort to ensure girls return to school when schools reopen.

- Please refer to the [IASC Gender Handbook: Gender and Food Distribution in Emergencies](#) to support gender mainstreaming in your food distribution operations.

Considerations for ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups

- Similar to the discussion of gender above, biases and power dynamics linked to ethnicity, caste, economic status, and/or other considerations can increase the vulnerability of specific groups of children and their families. These factors should also be taken into account when designing emergency food distributions.

Food sharing/equitable distribution of food aid

- Consider including positive messaging and communication about interhousehold allocation of food resources in the food packs provided to families. Ensure that young children, sick or malnourished family members, pregnant and lactating women, and other vulnerable groups are given priority for feeding.

Ready-to-use foods

- In countries where global acute malnutrition (wasting and stunting) rates are high, an effort to address nutrition in emergencies is important. Food banks can support partners like UNICEF who can conduct nutrition assessments, identify and treat children, and provide fortified foods and supplements like ready-to-use-supplemental foods (RUSF) and ready-to use-therapeutic foods (RUTF) to prevent nutrient deficiencies.
- Products like [NutriSchool](#) have also been developed to provide appropriate supplementation to school-age children. Food banks could include these products in their food packs when applicable.

3. Guidelines for safe school operations and school meals when schools reopen

For schools that remain open during the COVID-19 emergency or for schools that begin to reopen as lockdown measures are removed, it is important to ensure that proper protocols are followed for both general school operations and school meal programs to keep children safe.

- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with UNICEF and WHO, issued guidance to protect children and ensure safe school operations.
 - [Joint Statement](#)
 - [Guidance Document](#)

4. Links to resources

- Global Child Nutrition Foundation: [COVID-19 Resource page](#) with examples of what is happening around the globe
- WFP, UNICEF, and FAO: [Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren](#)
- UN Policy Brief: [The Impact of COVID-19 on children](#)
- WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger: [School feeding in times of COVID-19](#)

For more information or further assistance with your child feeding programs, please contact Monica Dykas at mdykas@foodbanking.org.

APPENDIX B

GFN CHILD HUNGER PROGRAM SURVEY 2019

General information

1. Food Bank/National Network: *
2. Name of person filling out survey: *
3. Email of person filling out survey: *
4. Title of person filling out survey: *
5. Does your food bank/national network have a staff person who dedicates 50% or more of his/her time to child hunger programming?
 - a. Name of person
 - b. Email of person
 - c. Title of person

General food bank information

In this section, we would like to know about overall food bank operations, not program specific.

1. How many school-age children (3-18 years old) are served by your food bank/national network in total? *If you do not have the breakdown of children, please enter 0 in each of the boxes below and then provide an explanation in the comment box.**
 - a. Preprimary/preschool (approximately 3-5 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - b. Primary (approximately 6-11 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - c. Lower Secondary (approximately 12-14 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - d. Upper Secondary (approximately 15-18 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - e. If you cannot provide the breakdown of children served by age and gender, please explain how your food banks counts people served.

2. Does your food bank/national network work differently with beneficiary institutions primarily serving children as compared to other beneficiary institutions? If yes, explain how.
3. Which of the following child feeding programs does your food bank/national network implement for school-age children? *Select all that apply.**
 - a. School breakfast/breakfast clubs
 - b. School lunch/midday meals
 - c. After school snacks/dinner
 - d. Backpack programs/weekend take-home rations
 - e. Weekend in-person feeding programs at school or other community center/agency
 - f. Summer/holiday program
 - g. Congregate meal programs for children not at school, such as homeless children
 - h. Food and nutrition education for children
 - i. Other, please specify: _____
 - j. None (If none, Survey Monkey will skip questions 6-35)
4. (If none on previous question) Do you plan to implement any feeding program for school-age children in the next year? For example, school breakfast or lunch, after school snacks, backpack or weekend programs, summer or holiday programs, nutrition education for children, etc.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

While this survey is focused on programs for school-age children, GFN would also like to ask you two questions on maternal and early childhood programs.

5. Maternal Programs: Which of the following programs does your food bank/national network implement for pregnant or lactating women? *Select all that apply.*
 - a. Provision of food for women who are of child-bearing age (before conceiving)
 - b. Provision of prenatal micronutrients (vitamins and/or minerals)
 - c. Promotion of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months
 - d. Promotion of complementary breastfeeding up to 2 years or more
 - e. Provision of supplementary food for pregnant women (food packages or prepared food)
 - f. Provision of supplementary food for lactating women (food packages or prepared food)
 - g. Provision of supplementary food of high nutritional value (distinct from ready-to-use foods)
 - h. Provision of ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSF)
 - i. Provision of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF)
 - j. Food and nutrition education

- k. Promotion of healthy habits
 - l. Other, please specify:
 - m. None
6. Early Childhood Programs: Which of the following programs does your food bank/national network implement for **children ages 2 and under**? *Select all that apply.*
- a. Provision of micronutrients (vitamins and/or minerals) for children
 - b. Provision of supplementary foods for children (food packages or prepared food)
 - c. Provision of supplementary food of high nutritional value (distinct from ready-to-use foods)
 - d. Provision of ready-to-use supplementary foods (RUSF)
 - e. Provision of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF)
 - f. Food and nutrition education
 - g. Promotion of healthy habits
 - h. Other, please specify: _____
 - i. None

Detailed information on each school-age child feeding program

In this section, we would like to know specific information about the child feeding program that the food bank implements.

For each program that the food bank implements (per question 3), the following questions should be answered:

7. What are the main objectives of the program? *Select all that apply.**
- a. Provide food support to supplement government-sponsored program
 - b. Provide food support to school-age children because there is no government-sponsored program
 - c. To meet educational goals
 - d. To provide a social safety net
 - e. To meet nutrition and/or health goals
 - f. To prevent or mitigate overweight and/or obesity
 - g. To meet agricultural goals
 - h. Other, please specify: _____
8. Does the food bank/national network administer the program/set guidelines for the beneficiary institution or is the beneficiary institution treated just like any other beneficiary institution of the food bank?*

Definitions:

- *Food bank/national network administered program: The food bank sets program guidelines and processes that the beneficiary institutions must follow (for example, determining the time that breakfast must be served, the quantity and composition of the meals, training/education components, etc.).*

- *Regular food bank distribution: The food bank provides food to a beneficiary institution that serves children in the same way as providing food to any beneficiary institution without providing specific guidelines or adapting the products provided.*
 - a. Food bank administers/sets guidelines
 - b. Part of regular food bank distribution (*If this is the answer, Survey Monkey will skip questions 8-35*)
9. In what year did your food bank/national network begin this program?*
 10. How many children (3-18 years old) are served by this specific program? If you don't know, please provide your best estimate.*
 11. How many children by age and gender are served by this specific program?
 - a. Preprimary/preschool (approximately 3-5 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - b. Primary (approximately 6-11 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - c. Lower Secondary (approximately 12-14 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 - d. Upper Secondary (approximately 15-18 years old):
 - i. Girls: _____
 - ii. Boys: _____
 12. What food is provided? *Select all that apply.**
 - a. Fruit and vegetables (including fungi, roots and tubers)
 - b. Cereals and cereal derivatives (bread, breakfast cereal, rice, pasta, oats, etc.)
 - c. Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.)
 - d. Eggs
 - e. Meat, poultry, or fish
 - f. Legumes (beans, lentils, garbanzos, etc.), nuts, or seeds
 - g. Other, please specify: _____
 13. How many grams of food is provided per child per meal or per each "service interaction"? If you have the data easily accessible, please provide how many grams of each food type/food group is provided per child per meal.*
 14. How many kilograms of food are provided in total through this program in 1 year?*
 15. If applicable, how many meals are provided in total through the program in 1 year?
 16. What nutrition considerations are taken into account for the food provided?
 17. If you have a goal of providing a certain percentage of daily recommended caloric/nutrient intake per child, please describe it here.

18. How did you determine the nutrition standards? *Select all that apply.*
- a. Guidelines from the World Health Organization (or other international organization)
 - b. Guidelines from your country's Ministry of Health (or similar agency/department)
 - c. Food bank/national network nutritionist
 - d. Food bank/national network staff (not a nutritionist)
 - e. Guidelines or technical documents established by a private organization
 - f. Other, please specify: _____
19. How often is the food provided to the children?*
- a. 7 times per week
 - b. 6 times per week
 - c. 5 times per week
 - d. 4 times per week
 - e. 3 times per week
 - f. 2 times per week
 - g. 1 time per week
 - h. Biweekly
 - i. Monthly
 - j. Other, please specify: _____
20. What time of day is the food provided to the children?
- a. Morning
 - b. Midday/afternoon
 - c. After school/evening
 - d. Weekend
 - e. Irregular
 - f. Other, please specify: _____
21. We are interested in knowing where the food is served, whether at school, beneficiary institutions, or if packs of food are given to the beneficiaries to take home. What percent of the meals are served:*
- a. At school: ____%
 - b. At beneficiary institutions/agencies: ____%
 - c. Take-home rations: ____%
 - d. Other, please specify - ____: ____%
22. During which portion of the year was food provided to the children?
- a. Only during the school year
 - b. Only outside the school year (holidays, school breaks, summer)
 - c. Both during the school year and outside the school year
 - d. Other, please specify: _____
23. How many weeks throughout the year does this program run?
24. Does this program serve 100% of the children in the participating schools/agencies?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

25. What complementary programs are included in addition to food provision? These can be provided directly by the food bank or through partner organizations. *Select all that apply.*
- a. Food and nutrition education
 - b. Health and hygiene education
 - c. Improvements to sanitation facilities
 - d. Deworming
 - e. Vaccination
 - f. Monitoring of nutritional status (height and weight measurements)
 - g. Psychosocial care
 - h. Other, please specify: _____
 - i. None
26. How do you monitor the program? Please explain how your food bank tracks the program outcomes, such as school attendance, anthropometric measurements, behavior change, anecdotal evidence, etc.
27. What impacts are achieved through the program?*
28. How do you measure these impacts?
29. How is the food obtained? *Select all that apply.**
- a. Donated (from private sector) – regular donations received by the food bank
 - b. Donated (from private sector) – food donations solicited specifically for use in this program
 - c. Donated (from public sector) – regular donations received by the food bank
 - d. Donated (from public sector) – food donations solicited specifically for use in this program
 - e. Purchased – at full price
 - f. Purchased – at discount
30. If applicable, please list the 5 top product donors for this program.
31. How much does it cost to run this program on an annual basis (in your local currency)? Consider total operating cost (staff, transport, storage, training, materials, food purchase, monitoring, marketing, etc.).*
32. If applicable, who are your top 5 financial donors/supporters for this program?
33. In the most recent program year, was the funding adequate to achieve program targets?*
- a. Yes
 - b. No
34. If applicable, what NGO or government partners do you work with for implementation of the program?
35. Please describe at least three strengths of this program.
36. Do you plan to continue or expand this program in future years? If yes, what are your plans? If not, why not?

Concluding questions

37. What are the greatest challenges you face related to implementing child feeding programs? *Select all that apply.**
- a. Financial
 - b. Food procurement
 - c. Access – reaching children in need
 - d. Transportation
 - e. Human resources
 - f. Other, please specify: _____
38. What can GFN do to best support your food bank to expand current child feeding programs or begin new programs?*
39. Additional comments (optional)

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