



World
Food
Programme

Programa
Mundial de
Alimentos

Programme
Alimentaire
Mondial

برنامج
الغذية
العالمي

**TESTIMONY OF CATHERINE BERTINI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME**

**FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM**

9:00a.m., 216 Hart Building, JULY 27, 2000

A World School Feeding Initiative

There is a small school outside Quetta, a remote desert area in Pakistan. As schools go, it is not much. But local parents sponsored it when the World Food Programme (WFP) offered them a simple exchange – we will give you cooking oil if you send your children – especially the girls – to school. And it worked. The parents' response has been overwhelming. Enrollment of girls has doubled. The demand has been so strong that the school has even had to hold classes outdoors.

Children, Hunger and Education

Educating children is the best investment any nation can make in its future.

In rich and poor countries alike, basic education is critical to promoting economic growth and reducing poverty. It is a key building block for stable, democratic and productive societies. It releases individual talent and empowers people and their communities. This is why the world community committed itself to Education for All.*

The benefits of education, especially the education of girls, are far reaching. Women who have had at least a few years of education have higher earnings, tend to marry later, and are likely to have fewer children. They will seek medical care for their children and will ensure that they too attend school. And the benefits of basic education go beyond the family to society as a whole, for its citizens are more productive, able to earn a better living, empowered and more capable of absorbing knowledge throughout life. The social and economic benefits are obvious.

These benefits are still beyond the reach of tens of millions of children. Almost one child in three in the developing world fails to complete four or five years of primary education, a minimum required for basic literacy. About 130 million children were out of school in 1995; if current trends persist, that number will climb to 165 million by the year 2015.

Here in the United States, 27 million children are fed every day through the federal lunch and breakfast programs, encouraging regular attendance, improving nutritional well-being and improving academic performance. In the developing world, the impact is even greater. In families struggling to make ends meet, a school feeding program can make the difference between sending children to school or relying on their labor, often in dangerous and unhealthy situations, to supplement the meager family income.

Studies have confirmed what parents have always known: a meal early in the day not only encourages attendance but it helps children to learn, because they are better able to remain alert and concentrate. Time after time, teachers have told WFP that a morning meal or mid-morning snack has made a striking difference in the alertness and learning of their students, who often walk long distances on an empty stomach just to get to school.

* *World Declaration on Education for All*, Jomtien, 1990.

The needs for school feeding around the world are enormous. The benefits are confirmed by research and evaluations. Nor is feasibility an issue; we know how to deliver effective school feeding schemes. And in the United States we have an abundance of food commodities well suited to school feeding...wheat, edible oil, corn, and milk powder. Senator McGovern's vision challenges us to use these resources in support of the ideal of Education for All. The World School Feeding Initiative embodies the same humanity and sweeping vision that Senator McGovern showed in creating the World Food Programme thirty-seven years ago.

A World School Feeding Initiative (WSFI): WFP's proposal

Food aid

To make the vision a reality, we need to encourage governments to build school feeding programs...not projects here and there, but effective, sustainable programs that are national in scope. Some countries will need to initiate school feeding programs. Others will need to expand the scope or geographic coverage of existing schemes so that they become nation wide programs.

One component of a national school program is likely to be a hot, nutritious meal at lunch time. Time and again, school lunches have been effective in enabling poor children in developing countries to attend school. The opportunity for a full, nutritious meal is an incentive for parents to send the child to school instead of keeping her home to work; I say "her" because it is most often girls that are denied basic education when the family is poor. And school feeding supplements the meager food supply available to a food insecure family.

A slightly different approach...that of providing breakfast or a mid-morning snack...is particularly helpful to children who come to school without a morning meal; by mid-morning their alertness and concentration drops off sharply, hindering their ability to learn. This was one of the reasons that Congress created the school breakfast program here in the United States.

In recent years WFP has pioneered a third type of feeding program designed to encourage parents to send their daughters, as well as their sons, to school. In several countries, WFP provides "take home" food to a family for every month that a girl attends school regularly. The results have been dramatic. In Niger girls' attendance rose by 75 percent and by 100 percent in Morocco. And this has happened in traditional societies. In Baluchistan province of Pakistan, for example, where enrollments rose by almost 200 percent it was almost unheard of for a girl to attend school. And WFP has done more than make a lasting investment in the health and productivity of these girls, and their future families; a review of these WFP-supported projects has shown a significant change in community attitudes toward the education of girls as well. WFP believes that this approach can make a significant contribution to Education for All, especially in countries where girls are traditionally kept out of school, or where there are large numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans. A number of nations, especially in hard hit areas of Africa, will be faced with the need to provide for millions of AIDS orphans in the years ahead. Targeted school feeding for these

children will help prevent governments and communities with limited resources from being overwhelmed by this growing problem.

Any of these approaches, or more likely a carefully planned combination, can be the basis of an effective program of school feeding. Whatever the specifics of the feeding scheme, particular attention should be given to the situation of girls, and measures taken to ensure that school feeding will encourage the attendance of girls as well as boys.

A Truly Global Initiative

A school feeding program is desirable in any country where children are either not attending school or where they are attending school hungry – from the poorest, least developed country through the richest, industrialized country. Almost any country that understands the benefits of school feeding could be part of this Initiative in some way, depending upon their relative need:

- OECD countries could participate in the Initiative by sharing technical expertise as well as by contributing food commodities or cash. A number of developing countries also have pertinent lessons to share. We saw this a few months ago, for example, when WFP and the Ministry of Education of Colombia sponsored a Ministerial-level meeting in Medellin at which South American countries exchanged the lessons of their experience with school feeding and established a network for further exchange of views.
- Relatively well off developing countries would normally receive only technical assistance related to the planning and management of their school feeding schemes, and this help should be time limited. This would claim a very small share of Initiative resources.
- Middle income countries and economies in transition should be expected to provide a significant amount of food and other resources for their school feeding program from the beginning. WSFI could provide some food commodities and perhaps some equipment and technical assistance; this should be time limited. The recipient government should be expected to include in its budget provision for full government support for the program within an agreed period.
- Lower income countries frequently cannot finance school feeding programmes without some external support. In such countries, the Initiative could provide most or all of the food commodities, technical assistance and equipment. Especially in these lower income countries, it will be important to be realistic and not overestimate the capacity of the government; starting in a limited geographic area may be advisable, for example. If WSFI resources are available, if communities are involved and contributing, and the government demonstrates commitment by assuming increasing responsibility for financing of its school feeding program, then WSFI could consider support for as long as 5-10 years.

Whatever the income level of the country, no amount of external support can substitute for the will of national governments to provide nutritious food to its needy school children. The commitment of requesting governments to contribute in

accordance with their financial capacity must be a determining factor in the allocation of WSFI resources. In requesting assistance from the WSFI, governments would have to demonstrate:

Political commitment to the Education for All objective of ensuring that all children, with special emphasis on girls and including working children and children with special needs, complete a good quality primary education by 2015.

In line with this commitment, practical measures to ensure the *sustainability* of school feeding supported through the Initiative, for example by:

- making a budget allocation for school feeding, in line with their financial capacity
- developing a realistic plan for developing national technical and management capacity for school feeding
- educating communities and parents' associations about the benefits of school feeding, so communities become involved and contribute
- developing a realistic plan for gradual assumption of financial and management responsibility for school feeding from national and community resources

Need, meaning that food commodities should be limited to countries which:

- are current or recent recipients of food aid, and/or
- have recently experienced a significant downturn in economic circumstances

A track record of *respecting agreements with donors*, especially with respect to the use of food aid (serious diversions or losses of food aid, for example, would disqualify a country)

Capacity to off-load, transport and store significant quantities of imported food.

Agreement to the *monitoring ,reporting and evaluation* requirements established by donors to the Initiative.

Technical Assistance

Food alone is not enough to make school feeding effective. Expertise is needed as well. And in the United States there is an abundance of specialist knowledge and experience which can be used to help other countries develop or strengthen their capacity to plan and implement school feeding programs. A relatively small investment in technical advice and support can contribute a great deal to the effectiveness and sustainability of a national school feeding program, and WFP would make provision for this in the WSFI..

Technical support can be provided in a number of ways including:

- workshops for national decision-makers, to convey an understanding of the benefits that school feeding can bring, and make them aware of key design and management issues;
- training for key personnel;
- development of manuals and guidelines;

- “twinning” of specialized institutions; or
- periodic visits to work with national personnel to build capacity and sustainability.
- brief field missions by technical experts to assess problems and provide advice;
- exchanges or missions to share experience among countries;

Why the World Food Programme?

A global program needs to be managed by a global organization. WFP is that organization. As the food aid arm of the United Nations, WFP is uniquely qualified to manage this international Initiative. WFP is capable of taking responsibility for the large resources the WSFI will involve and being accountable for their effective use.

WFP experience with food aid programs is unparalleled. For more than 30 years WFP has helped over 70 developing countries to establish and implement school feeding for poor children.

Every year, WFP manages large quantities of food commodities. Last year, for example, we brought help to 89 million beneficiaries, using 3 million metric tons of food and a budget of \$1.5 billion. At any one time about 30 ships are on the sea carrying WFP food. Our capacity to transport food to the most difficult imaginable situations is well known; this is a service we offer to our non-governmental and United Nations partners as well. We operate hundreds of emergency and development activities in more than 80 countries and work with more than 1200 non-governmental organizations. In short, WFP is the single largest provider of food aid in the world today. This is the reach and capability you need to make this Initiative a success.

WFP can bring to the management of the WSFI all that is needed to underpin effectiveness and accountability:

- The confidence of both donor and recipient countries, based on nearly four decades of working together;
- Established structures for interacting with donors, on virtually a daily basis;
- Experience in working in partnership with more than 1200 non-governmental organizations world wide, as well as with national governments;
- A capacity to rapidly expand our operations in response to changing situations;
- Logistics capacity to manage, subcontract or advise on the storage, handling and transport of large quantities of commodities;
- Proven systems of financial management and reporting
- Links to experts in the field of school feeding and nutrition
- In-house expertise in nutrition, education, project design, vulnerability mapping
- Monitoring and evaluation capacity
- A track record of accountability to donors

Managing the World School Feeding Initiative

WFP is the right organization to take responsibility for overall management of the WSFI, and be held accountable for it. But national governments will actually carry out the school feeding. The challenge for the WSFI is to help countries launch and sustain programs that are national in scope. Only governments can do this. Individual school feeding projects can help specific communities, but they will not be enough to reach Senator McGovern's goal of providing food to school children around the world. And it is reasonable to expect that nation-wide programs will benefit from economies of scale, compared to a piecemeal approach.

WFP will appoint a senior staff member to oversee its management of the Initiative. That person will be supported by a small staff which will include experienced WFP staff members as well as specialists in school feeding on loan from other organizations with expertise in this field. We have made tentative approaches to the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) and the United States Department of Agriculture, and been pleased by their positive reactions. As the funding for the Initiative diversifies and grows, we would wish to include in the Unit staff members drawn from stakeholders in the private sector and other donor governments.

WFP will manage the Initiative, will involve other organizations in important ways. To take one example, the school feeding experts in the Unit will be able to engage in dialogue with governments and provide technical advice only to a very limited degree. When recipient governments need technical expertise to supplement their own capacity, it will normally be sought from PVOs from the United States or other donor countries, national NGOs, universities, government agencies in donor countries or developing countries with relevant experience, other expert organizations, or individual specialists. The role of the Unit will not be to provide the technical support itself, but rather to identify what is needed, know where it can be found, and manage an appropriate package of support provided by others.

Take monitoring as another example. WFP will be accountable for putting in place monitoring arrangements meeting the requirements of the WSFI donors. But the monitoring will sometimes be contracted from one of the groups mentioned above. At the same time, the Initiative will be able to draw upon the full range of WFP expertise and service capacity.

We will also engage with a number of other organizations who are contributing to the goals of Education for All in a different way than WFP. The World Bank will be providing substantial funds to the education sector in coming years, and UNICEF also has much experience in bringing education to poor children. UNESCO, which provides WFP with specialist advice for its current feeding activities, is another logical partner. We intend to seek advice from nutrition experts at the United Nations University as well. In addition, there are many PVOs and Foundations which support the education sector in a variety of ways; we anticipate many opportunities to complement each other's efforts to maximize impact of our collective efforts.

Funding the World School Feeding Initiative

Food commodities will form the great majority of contributions. A major U.S. government food contribution over a number of years will be required if the Initiative is to have substantial scope and impact.

In addition, WFP foresees substantial private sector, philanthropic interest for the WSFI. The Initiative would be well placed to attract contributions from some of the major U.S. foundations. Contributions from the U.S. private sector will be sought through the “Friends of WFP”, a not-for-profit 501C(3) organization based here in Washington. Private contributors will have the option of giving food, goods (e.g., kitchen equipment), cash to purchase food or equipment, or technical advice.

While the Initiative will be launched with U.S. resources, the intent is to seek contributions in other countries as well. A firm U.S. government commitment will serve as a springboard for contributions from other donor countries.

Launching the World School Feeding Initiative

WFP is ready to move immediately on the establishment of the WSFI. We have already entered into discussions with a number of governments concerning the early expansion of existing school feeding schemes into nation wide programs. We are also exploring early opportunities to support the launching of new school feeding schemes. The “down payment” on this Initiative will soon be helping many more families to replace child labor with basic education .

Educating children is the best investment any nation can make in its future. The food aid announced this past weekend by the Administration will help them do it. This is a strong endorsement and support for a lofty goal of global importance. But school feeding needs more than a year to bring its benefits. A longer term United States commitment will be needed to make the vision of a school meal for every child who needs it a reality.