

School Feeding Concepts

by

Mona H. Doss

FAO School Feeding Advisor, Ministry of Education, Seoul Korea

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Because of the observed results of food and nutrition as an integral part of the total education programme, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea is placing a high priority on school feeding for elementary school children. For this reason, during the past few months, an FAO Advisor has assisted the Office of School Feeding in the Ministry of Education, to prepare a plan for the implementation of a number of pilot school feeding projects, to be situated in representative rural areas of the Republic, in order to study the most effective and economic methods of establishing a country-wide programme of feeding in the elementary schools, and nutrition education throughout the school system. WFP food aid is being requested to assist this programme until the beginning of the 4th 5-year Economic Development Plan in 1977, when it is hoped that the programme can become largely self-supporting. During this interim period, after the training of personnel in food production and in the spread of nutrition education, and after due experimentation as mentioned above, the Ministry of Education will endeavour to establish a school feeding programme within the capabilities of each local school community.

School feeding has had a long history. School feeding programmes were established in a number of countries already industrialized, over a century ago. They were first initiated to relieve the hunger pains of pupils coming from low-income homes, but are today, in conjunction with nutrition education,

an important tool for improving food habits and achieving better health, growth and development of children.

While earlier the problem of developing countries was viewed essentially as a problem of producing wealth, it has now been widely acknowledged that the crucial factor was not production but rather the capacity to produce, which is inherent in people. Education in all its forms—along with health—is one of the main components of this capacity to create wealth. Most economists now consider that resources devoted to the eradication of illiteracy and to the improvement of general education represent an investment for the purpose of development, the results of which can be specifically identified, and which can, to some degree, be measured. Education benefits greatly from school feeding programmes through better attendance, less illness and absenteeism, and improved ability of the pupils to concentrate and learn. In this respect, they play a true role in manpower development.

Planning Feeding Programmes:

Sound policy and long-term planning are essential to the success of a feeding programme. Fact finding is often a tedious task but sound policy and plans must be based on facts. Both the initial cost of premises and equipment and the long-term subsidy essential to the sound operation of a feeding programme need to be determined in advance. Failure to plan carefully on the basis of

professional knowledge and experience can double these costs. Funding of the programme must be assured, for it cannot operate with success on a month to month basis.

The following questions suggest some of the points which require study and discussion:

- a) What are the nutritional needs of the group or groups to be fed?
- b) What local foods can be provided for the programme seasonally throughout the year? What will be the cost?
- c) What donated foods (if any) can be made available? Can these be replaced with local food supplies at a later date?
- d) Can safe and acceptable meals or snacks be prepared from these foods?
- e) How many participants are to be fed at the beginning of the programme? In one year, in five years?
- f) Where are the participants located, i.e. does each unit require a kitchen or would a central kitchen providing prepared foods to a number of units be practical? What would transport from a central kitchen cost?
- g) Which fuel is least expensive? Is there ample power and safe water for the operation?
- h) Is there a road and sufficient space for delivery vehicles? Is there an area for storage adjacent to the kitchen area?
- i) Who will finance the original kitchen and equipment and who will pay the running costs and subsidy? Will participants who can afford to pay be required to pay a part or all of the cost of the meal?
- j) Who will be responsible for the management and supervision of the feeding programme?
- k) How will a training programme for managers, supervisors and skilled workers be carried out?

Responsibilities of the Government:

The responsibilities of the Government toward

a school feeding programme include longterm planning and organization of the administrative and financial, as well as the technical and nutritional aspects of the programme. The guidance of persons who have had both training and experience in large-scale feeding is essential if sound decisions leading to successful programmes are to be made. Besides the decisions that have to be made concerning the type of meal, and measures to assure safety, sanitation and pest control, the Government will also have to decide on the division of responsibilities between national, regional, and local authorities for the financing and management of the programme.

Type of Programmes:

The financial and administrative resources available to governments and local authorities to operate school feeding programmes on a long-term basis help to determine the type of programme. The amount of food available locally to run feeding programmes or the foods required locally to supplement those from outside sources, e.g. World Food Programme or bilateral aid, will depend on funds for their purchase and the variety available.

The organizational structure of feeding programmes also differs widely. In some countries local parent-teacher or other voluntary groups, or home-economics teachers are recruited to prepare and serve the meal. In others, cooks are employed to work under the guidance of the school teacher. In certain national programmes foods are prepared centrally and distributed to the schools daily or periodically.

In urban areas, when transport and appropriate containers are available, a central kitchen system can provide meals of consistent quality and high standards of sanitation. Food, fuel, and labour can be used efficiently under professional supervision and the burden of meal preparation lifted from the individual schools. This system however req-

quires an initial investment in equipment and transport, technical supervision by trained personnel and continuing operating costs.

When the type of meal to be served and the numbers and locations of the participants have been determined, the type of kitchen or kitchens and the planning and tentative costing of the installation can be undertaken. If expansion of the programme is anticipated, allowance for this should be made in the initial plans in terms of space for additional equipment, workers, food storage, etc. This will greatly reduce the costs of eventual expansion. The size and type of equipment and numbers of staff required, is dependent on the meal prepared. The size and design of the kitchen and storage space is dependent on the equipment and the workers needed to do the job.

Locally designed and manufactured equipment is usually cheaper to repair and replace. Again, traditional local building materials should be used whenever possible in order to keep costs down. All of these points may appear to be elementary concepts, but gross overspending on the kitchen, frequently results when plans are drawn up before the exact requirements are clearly defined. The initial cost of the facilities for feeding programmes may prove difficult or impossible.

Personnel:

Group feeding programmes are costly because of the large number of beneficiaries usually involved. The efficiency in terms of cost/benefit with which these programmes operate, depends to a marked extent on the level of training of the people that design and manage them. It is therefore useful to provide in-service training courses to upgrade the technical knowledge of personnel involved in the planning, management, administration and execution of group feeding programmes. Two types of training are usually necessary:

- a) abroad for supervisory personnel: one or two

persons, for 3 to 12 months

- b) locally, through ad hoc courses (1 week minimum) for executive personnel: 1 supervisor for 1000 children and 1 teacher per school.

Technically trained management and supervisory personnel are, perhaps, the least understood and yet the greatest asset to any group feeding programme. The responsibility for providing safe, nutritious and acceptable food for large numbers of persons, handling tons of supplies and large sums of money, and managing a complex administrative and cost-accounting operation cannot be left to amateurs, however well-intentioned. Lack of training in the head of the programme may be a major cause of waste and loss, and has led to failure of a number of feeding programmes.

Technical schools and Universities in a number of countries offer this type of training and the numbers of trained personnel are growing rapidly. There is also a need for workers with training and skills in food preparation, including cooking and baking. This training, based on the needs of the programme should be provided under sound technical guidance wherever it is found necessary.

FAO and UNICEF can assist in the training of staff by the provision of fellowships, and by the organization of Seminars and training courses.

Such a regional training course was sponsored in the Middle East by FAO/WHO and UNICEF and was held for 4 weeks in Cairo in March 1972. Participants were invited from 7 Countries in the Region which have WFP/assisted school feeding programmes. The subjects taught were presented in 5 groupings, dealing with food, nutrition, planning, administration, evaluation. Each subject was introduced by a lecturer (with ample use of visual aids) and followed by a demonstration (laboratories, kitchens, calculations, etc), and visits to places related to the subjects presented (schools, factories, food control laboratory, etc).

Nutrition Education:

Nutrition education should be a component of all feeding programmes. Nutrition education for school children and their parents is a learning process which is greatly enhanced by the school feeding programme, for it needs no longer be an abstract lesson but can become a daily exercise in better nutrition for each child. The concept of learning by doing is a feature of many school feeding programmes. Through an understanding gained in the classroom of simple facts about familiar foods and some of their functions in the body, and by learning to eat a combination of foods which form a good diet, children learn improved food habits and appreciation of their importance to their growth and well-being. In rural programmes in developing regions, care of school gardens, poultry pens and fish ponds help to develop knowledge of how these foods can be produced at home. Emphasis is placed on local foods of low cost which can provide nutrients lacking in the diets normally consumed. Such programmes can play an important role in national development.

Multilateral, Bilateral and Private Aid:

In countries where the need for school feeding is greatest, the funds to initiate and operate such a programme are often lacking. Ever since World War II, food, equipment and technical assistance have been made available to governments by various agencies, to develop school feeding programmes. At the present time, the UN/FAO World Food Programme is supplying food for a large number of school feeding programmes of many different types.

However, food aid alone cannot solve all the problems which governments face in planning and implementing such programmes. Moreover, food aid carries with it additional administrative

and logistic requirements and local costs which can be particularly onerous for projects which include a number of education or training centres scattered over a large rural area.

Lack of foreign exchange to purchase essential equipment not locally available can be a major problem in establishing a school feeding programme. Assistance in providing equipment and transport may be requested from UNICEF. Another source of assistance is the Freedom from Hunger Campaign which will channel requests to interested donor groups.

Both bilateral aid programmes and FAO provide experts in school feeding and nutrition education to assist governments in planning and organizing programmes and in training personnel. WFP food aid, combined with technical assistance in the early stages of planning and implementation, together with provision for the essential equipment and transport, can result in satisfactory national programmes of school feeding.

Local Participation:

Different countries have employed different approaches to the problems of financing and implementing school feeding programmes. In all cases the Ministry of Education has provided a large share of the budget but in many instances costs have been shared with local Government and with the communities themselves.

In planning a school feeding programme the early participation of the parents and the community has many advantages. These groups frequently offer practical suggestions, and in addition, are far more likely to take responsibility for assisting and supporting a programme that they understand and have helped to plan. They should continue to advise and assist in the programme once it has been initiated. Below are some examples of how this has been done: In the Gambia, Africa, for instance the success of the school

feeding programme was due to community interest and participation. The children contributed funds according to the financial positions of their families, and also according to the time of year. Children who cannot contribute in cash help by bringing firewood, vegetables, peanuts, etc, or whatever their parents can afford. These contributions play a very important part in the organization of the school canteens because they allow for the purchase of all the necessary local supplies required to supplement WFP commodities in the preparation of nutritious meals, and helps to make both parents and children realize that they have a certain responsibility towards the school meal organization in their villages. This gives the project a better chance of continuity when foodstuffs and other UN and bilateral aid are withdrawn. All area council commissioners and executive officers and chiefs of villages collaborate and contribute very efficiently with the Education Department in the organization of school meals. They recruit and pay kitchen helpers and help purchase local equipment not supplied by UNICEF. PTA and sometimes the children themselves have helped to build facilities for storage and distribution shelters.

Another successful example has been that carried out in Togo which highlights many important aspects of the work. Its aim was to increase school attendance and improve the diet of school-children. An important reason for WFP's continued assistance to this project has been the willingness and action on the part of local communities to support the school canteens, so that they may continue to function after WFP assistance ends. Many of the schools and all of the canteen premises have been built or supplied by the community, with UNICEF supplying \$ 50 worth of cooking utensils per school.

The Programme is carried out on a voluntary basis with a minimum of simple equipment; no

one involved in the school-feeding programme receives a cash salary or premium. Headmasters and teachers participate willingly, in spite of the additional work load involved. Other than WFP commodities and the UNICEF contribution, the communities receive no further aid in cash or in kind for the feeding programme. Children and parents cultivate school gardens, raise poultry and rabbits, and work communal lands in order to raise funds for the schools or to harvest food crops directly for the canteens. In most schools, at least one meal per week is prepared with local produce. As a result of this gradual replacement of WFP assistance by local resources, the Government no longer needs maize flour for canteens which have been in operation for two years. In other words, WFP assistance is being requested on a diminishing basis.

Although it originally required some effort on the part of the Government to persuade local authorities to start the first four canteens, at this stage the Social Affairs Service is flooded with requests from villages which pledge increasing local support and request nothing more than initial assistance in the form of commodities. This project is an excellent example of how intelligent cooperation and enthusiastic self-help on the part of the beneficiaries have not merely contributed largely to the achievement of the objectives aimed at, but will also eventually enable WFP aid to be phased out and to cease completely at some future date.

A common approach, as just mentioned, to the problem of increasing local food production so as to be able to carry on feeding programmes at educational and training establishments after the termination of WFP aid is the setting up of school or college gardens or farms, which provide a basis for teaching modern agricultural practices and at the same time provide food for students and trainees.

This is being done, for example, in Lesotho, a small territory in southern Africa formerly known as Basutoland. It is a poor agricultural country with almost no industry and very few natural resources; at the best of times, it cannot produce enough food for its own population; frequent and severe droughts often wither the eagerly awaited harvests. Consequently, there is widespread malnutrition and many aid-giving organizations are providing assistance in various forms. FAO, WHO, and UNICEF have been helping the Government since 1962 with a school-feeding and nutrition education programme. They provide help mainly in the form of expert advice and equipment; in 1965, WFP assumed the responsibility of providing food for the Government's programme. Throughout the country, about 100,000 children in 700 different schools are receiving cooked meals prepared in open-air kitchens, sometimes by the parents themselves, who also help to provide the kitchen equipment and utensils. Parents contribute with a school garden scheme which produces vegetables and fruit to supplement WFP supplies. Here as elsewhere, the gardening scheme has an educational value for both parents and children, teaching them how to grow fresh food for their families. With these combined efforts, a balanced diet has been provided for well

over half the school population of the country, with the result that attendance has improved and children are livelier and happier.

Summary:

Organized feeding programmes can contribute to the health and well-being of students. All such programmes must be planned carefully, taking into account the nutritional needs of the group to be fed, available food supplies, facilities for food preparation and distribution, and available funds.

In most instances provision must be made for training staff to operate large-scale feeding programmes. Nutrition education should be an important aspect of all feeding programmes, and should provide simple clear information on food and nutrition in relation to health. The early participation of parents and the local community in the programme, particularly through the production of local low-cost foods of high nutritional value will help to insure continuity after external aid has ceased.

Programmes should be evaluated in order to measure the benefits obtained in relation to the cost of the operation. Anthropometric data, absenteeism and scholastic achievement may serve as indicators in school feeding programmes.