

Summary of Side Event 3: How COVID-19 affected school feeding programmes and how to strengthen them post-COVID, including through home-grown school meals.

The panel, moderated by WFP, brought together school feeding practitioners to discuss what has been learned from implementing school feeding programmes around the world throughout the pandemic, and why they remain essential for children's education, health, nutrition, and for communities. As the world faces the COVID crisis, it is vital that school feeding programmes are built back and that the use of locally purchased commodities is used, alongside in-kind contributions.

A call to action by Finland's Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Trade, Ville Skinnari, committing to be a Global School Feeding Champion alongside WFP set the initial tone. The Government of Brazil highlighted how its well-established school feeding programme maneuvered the pandemic and the importance that south-south cooperation had in ensuring continuity. The Government of Rwanda's recent commitment to scale its home-grown school feeding programme re-affirmed its importance and highlighted the spillover effects the programme has on communities, and smallholder farmers specifically.

The United States Department of Agriculture highlighted its McGovern-Dole program which has supported governments, including Rwanda through WFP, to implement, scale and build capacity for national school feeding programmes. USDA and its implementers' quick actions ensured that, despite closures, children and community members benefitted from its programmes.

Quotes:

Finnish Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Trade, H.E. Ville Skinnari:

Nutritious food provided in the school is among the best investments for the future. Evidence demonstrates that school meals produce high returns in terms of education results, gender equality, health, social protection and economic and agricultural development.

USDA McGovern-Dole Director, Lindsay Carter:

While the McGovern-Dole program was able to adapt activities and shift to take-home rations to reach over 2 million beneficiaries, many more children went without and there is a renewed need to strengthen and expand national school feeding programs around the world.

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Samuel Mulindwa:

In 2020, [the] government adopted a school feeding policy to scale up school feeding programmes across all levels of basic education (pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels). [...] We are delighted to say that the government took the decision. Having a meal in schools is a right to every child within the government of Rwanda.