

# School Meals Enhance Human Capital



What we're learning from the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©



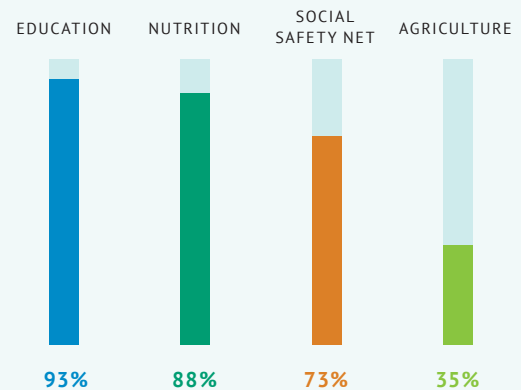
Through school feeding programs, countries are making transformative human capital investments in children's health and nutrition that multiply the return on investment in their education.



**Governments across the world must invest in grey matter infrastructure; the infrastructure that helps brains grow from better nutrition; the infrastructure that builds the healthy and productive workforce of the future.**

– Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank,  
2017 Gene White Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

GCNF conducted the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © to establish a comprehensive database of school meal programs. Responses were received from 103 countries. **Of the 85 countries that had large-scale programs, these were the most common program objectives:**



## HEALTHY AND NOURISHED CHILDREN LEARN BETTER

Investing beyond the first 1,000 days to every child's first 8,000 days of life is critical for establishing lifelong health and future potential.<sup>1</sup> **Of the school feeding programs surveyed:**



**91%**

PROVIDED NUTRITION EDUCATION.



**88%**

CITED IMPROVED NUTRITION AS AN OBJECTIVE.



**68%**

SERVED FORTIFIED FOODS.



**47%**

HAD NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS INTENDED TO ADDRESS OBESITY.

1. Bundy, D. A. P., N. de Silva, S. Horton, D. T. Jamison, and G. C. Patton 2018. Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies. Washington, DC: World Bank. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.

## THE LARGEST SOCIAL SAFETY NET IN THE WORLD

School meals incentivize school attendance, improve nutrition, and boost learning outcomes, yet the coverage of school meal programs is lowest in countries where the need is greatest.

**17%**

AVERAGE COVERAGE ACROSS LOW INCOME COUNTRIES



**37%**

AVERAGE COVERAGE ACROSS HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES



## EXPANDING LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND EMPOWERING WOMEN

By purchasing food locally, Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programs support local agricultural development, build resilience in supply chains, and encourage government investment. Most (76%) school feeding programs reported investing in local agriculture by purchasing at least some of the school food locally.

**By emphasizing fair wages and formalized employment, governments can meaningfully contribute to women's equitable economic empowerment:**



**31%**

OF PROGRAMS REPORTED THAT VERY FEW OR NO COOKS RECEIVED PAYMENT FOR THEIR WORK.



**78%**

OF PROGRAMS REPORTED THAT 75% OR MORE OF FOOD PREPARERS ARE WOMEN.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the Integrated Program for Sustainable School Canteens links canteens with micro-agricultural projects led by women's groups that benefit from **70%** production sold.

70%

## What's Next?

- Advocate with GCNF for the global development community to recognize school feeding as a high-return investment and as a strategy for human capital development.
- Advocate with GCNF to scale up school feeding programs as a human capital investment that improves child education and health outcomes, builds sustainable food systems, and empowers women and youth.
- Advocate with GCNF to improve both the recognition and accounting of the multiple avenues for strengthening human capital through school meal programs.



Reach out to us at [info@gcnf.org](mailto:info@gcnf.org) to discuss how we can advocate together!

*The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on school systems and deprived vulnerable children of a daily school meal. At the peak of school closures in April 2020, 1.5 billion children were out of school,<sup>1</sup> and 370 million were not receiving the school meals they depend on.<sup>2</sup> The upcoming 2021 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © aims to capture the impact of the pandemic for at least one full school year.*

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1. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>  
2. <https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/>