

Armenia Sustainable School Feeding Conference

25-26 May, 2011, Erebuni Plaza Business Centre
Yerevan, Republic of Armenia

WORKSHOP REPORT



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Foreword

The conference was put together in a strong collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia and the World Food Programme (WFP). WFP responded to the request of the Government of Armenia two years ago to assist in the development of a sustainable school feeding programme, strongly imbedded in national priorities and policy to ensure that all school children in Armenia have an opportunity to have a meal during the school day. This conference has been one in a series of events designed to help strengthen the ministry's capacity to administer school feeding and enable its successful implementation. The roadmap and recommendations, that are due to follow the workshop, form the bases of a transition strategy and work plan that will be elaborated and enforced by the Inter-ministerial school feeding committee and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science with support from WFP, part of the project hand over strategy.

A key message from the conference is that the transition to a sustainable national programme depends on solidifying and mainstreaming school feeding into national policies and plans, especially education sector plans. In the face of the high food prices and the protracted economic crisis in Armenia, we must now focus on how a school feeding programme can be designed and implemented in a cost-effective and sustainable way to benefit and protect those most in need of help today and in the future.

Together with development partners and NGOs, among them the Institute of Industrial and Social Feeding playing a major role, WFP is now assisting the Ministry of Education of Armenia to develop its national school feeding policy and strategy, in tune with the recommendations of the conference.

It is furthermore worthy to note that upon the request of the Ministry of Education of Armenia, the Russian Ministry of Agriculture is now looking at extending the Russian funding of the project with additional two years, to 2015 in order to assist the Government of Armenia in piloting the national school feeding programme that is currently being designed. The pilot would take place in one of the most vulnerable regions of Armenia.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the success of the *Sustainable School Feeding in Armenia Conference* to be the result of collaboration involving a wide range of organizations - from the central government to province administrations, UN Agencies, international organizations and donors.

We must, in the first place, acknowledge the financial support of the government of Israel which made the conference possible and thank Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV) through which the funding was received as well as experts provided. We were honored by the participation of Ambassador Ben-Matityahu Ephraim who the day before the Conference joined WFP and Rossotrudnichestvo in a visit to one of the schools in Gegharkunik Province where school feeding is implemented. Our special thanks go to Ms. Beth-Eden Kite, Director of Training and Capacity Building in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel who participated in the conference and offered MASHAV's further support to the Armenia school feeding initiative to enhance its success. Nutritionist from the Israeli Ministry of Health Ms. Hava Altman's presentation on school feeding in Israel stirred a lot of interest and engaged the participants in productive discussions. The participants learned that having terminated school feeding in the country in the 1970-ies due to reduced demand and some management issues, the Israeli government reinstated a targeted programme in 2004 to address increased poverty and food insecurity needs in Israel.

We wish to gratefully acknowledge the presence and participation of the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation, the Social and Industrial Feeding Institute (SIFI) and Rossotrudnichestvo. Both aspects of the ongoing school feeding project - work with the Government of Armenia on building its capacity to be able to take over the project from WFP and the funding for the feeding of 50,000 school children in the Republic of Armenia - are made possible owing to the generous contribution from the Government of the Russian Federation totaling US\$8 million over three school years 2010/2011-2012/13.

A comprehensive research on feeding and nutrition in schools in Russia conducted by SIFI between 2006 and 2009 provided the analytical basis for the ongoing reform of school feeding in Russia as well as the formulation of a broader government policy for the entire system of social nutrition. The presentation made by Mr. Timofei Fionov, SIFI's Executive Director, was a learning experience about the current mode of implementation of school feeding in Russia with which Armenia has a common past of school feeding during the soviet time.

Our whole-hearted thanks go to WFP Regional Director, for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Mr. Daly Belgasmi, who significantly contributed to the conference reaffirming WFP's commitment to the implementation and strengthening of school feeding in Armenia and ensuring its successful handover to the government as a nationally-owned project.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of all the other participants who engaged in active group discussions and well-organized presentations offering a framework for the way forward to a sustainable school feeding activity in the country.

Key note address by

Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia Armen Ashotyan

Dear participants, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Armenia, I am pleased to be here today and to extend warm welcome to all of you. It is my pleasure to formally open this conference which is indeed a very good opportunity to learn more about school feeding in Armenia and other countries, to reflect and question current practices and establish where we are, to learn from one another and to build a framework enabling us to look towards the future. The results of the Conference will have a formative significance for the national school feeding strategy, which will be elaborated in further collaboration with our partners.

School feeding began in October 2010 in the provinces of Tavush and Gegharkunik and will soon expand to cover 50,000 school children studying in primary grades. The project is important for children's education as well as for their health. Moreover, it encourages community participation and has the potential to stimulate local agricultural production.

An effective way of alleviating the burden of families, school feeding is bringing the lives of children from vulnerable families into a certain level of normalcy and stability. The project is helping schools to perform a serious role in the improvement of the overall health and nutrition of children, especially now that prices for food are continually growing in the world as well as in our country.

The representatives of Russia's Social and Industrial Feeding Institute and Israel's Agency of International Development Cooperation will present the experience of school feeding in their countries which will help the participants to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding of major issues, controversies, theories and ideas related to school feeding. Drawing on diversity of experiences and with a greater sense of the complexity and perspectives of school feeding, our experts will be in a much better position to develop a national school feeding strategy.

We sincerely thank the Government of Israel and MASHAV for funding this important event. The school feeding project itself is implemented through the quality financial and technical support the Russian Government has continually extended in support of our endeavours.

Introduction

A Partners' Conference on Sustainable School Feeding was held on 25-26 May 2011 in Yerevan to support the Government of Armenia in developing a strategy for a sustainable nationally-owned school feeding project embedded in national priorities, policy and budgets. The main idea highlighted throughout the conference was that children's health is directly dependent on how they are fed and that when children's food and nutrition needs are not met, their health and education are affected. School feeding was noted as a well-placed and powerful measure to influence the nutrition, health and education of children.

In his key note address, the Minister of Education and Science highlighted the direct link between school meals, health and education and encouraged the participants to keep an open mind to diverse and multiple perspectives and interpretations regarding school feeding. In her presentation, the Head of WFP Armenia Country Office stated that being among top 10 countries with the highest food prices, as is highlighted in a recent FAO report, food insecurity among the poor and vulnerable is of concern in Armenia. Aware of this, WFP's response to the Armenian government's request to continue assistance a few years ago at the height of the global financial crisis. WFP has been bolstering the government's safety nets through a school feeding project in order to protect and nurture those who need it most while also helping to build up a sustainable nationally-owned project. Coming with a reputable 45-year experience in school feeding, WFP is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Education and Science to guide and support the government in the transition from a WFP-administered school feeding project to a government-administered and nationally sourced school feeding programme.

The aim of the workshop was to outline a roadmap for the way forward toward the establishment of a national school feeding strategy and programme in Armenia.

The workshop had the following objectives:

1. Reach an agreement on the role of school feeding in Armenia among stakeholders;
2. Agree on a set of quality standards for a sustainable national school feeding programme in Armenia;
3. Achieve consensus on the status of school feeding against the quality standards;
4. Assess where Armenia is in the current school feeding project and where we are going;
5. Identify resources, capacities and gaps and the next steps by developing an initial road map for a sustainable school feeding programme in Armenia;
6. Identify well-suited project modalities using information and lessons learned in the current project and experiences in Israel and Russia;

7. Outline partnerships around school feeding including schools, communities, local and national governments and donors to ensure cohesive commitment to school feeding.

DAY 1

Session 1:

School feeding in Armenia administered by WFP, school feeding in the Russian Federation and Israel

The session gave an overview of school feeding activities in the three countries – Armenia, Israel and Russia – making it clear that school feeding, regardless of the level of a country's development, is well-placed to enhance children's health, nutrition and education. Emphasis was laid on the importance of school feeding for children coming from poor and vulnerable families. The presentations and the questions and answers that followed allowed the participants to compare experiences and evaluate school feeding in Armenia.

Ms. Maria Lukyanova, Head of WFP Armenia Country Office described the current school feeding project administered by WFP and highlighted its successes and complexities. For many children in the vulnerable areas of Armenia, the food they receive in school is the only nutritious meal they are certain to have during the day. Receiving all the right nutrients, children become more actively engaged in their studies and extra-curricular activities. Parents show a greater interest in sending their children to school every day. Owing to the project, they too become more active, go to their children's school more often and talk to the teachers and school management. In the past school year, WFP has helped some 15 schools to improve conditions in storage areas and kitchens and to pipe clean drinking water under infrastructure and livelihood improvement food-for-work (FFW) project that WFP administers in Armenia along with school feeding. In a number of other schools, the school management has, without WFP's help, installed piped water in their schools to become entitled to WFP's school feeding project from the next school year. Under FFW, WFP has helped some schools establish orchards and gardens to add fruits and vegetables to school feeding diets.

Ms. Lukyanova emphasized the importance of new and innovative partnerships for strengthening the project. These include MASHAV, SIFI, Open Society Foundation (OSF) and Save the Children. MASHAV has provided funding for capacity development as well as experts. With funding from OSF, WFP will develop a model of school feeding using fruit bars, fortified with iron, folic acid, group B vitamins and vitamin A for schools where kitchen and cafeteria facilities are lacking. Such projects will be administered through local food purchasing and local production. A pilot project using locally-produced fruit bars will be implemented in the coming school year. If successful, the modality will be proposed to the government as one option for the nationally-owned school feeding project. Save the Children will develop nutrition education materials for students and teachers, with WFP funding, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science. The materials on nutrition will be distributed to

first to fourth grade children in all the schools of Armenia. WFP and Save the Children are also combining efforts and resources to repair spaces in existing schools to take in pre-school children which is part of the government's ongoing school reform; pooled funding is also used to repair school canteens and sanitation facilities, improving overall hygiene.

A presentation was made by Mr. Timofei Fionov, Executive Director of Russia's Social and Industrial Food Services Institute (SIFI).

SIFI has been central to revamping the state of school feeding in the Russian Federation operating as an independent non-profit organization since 2006. It develops state-of-the-art technologies of organizing and managing non-commercial food service systems as integral elements of public infrastructure in Russia. SIFI works toward improving social nutrition systems and practical implementation on request from the Russian government. One specific area within SIFI's competence is the development and promotion of comprehensive school feeding programs by providing high-quality consultation and expertise. In Russia, SIFI is represented in a number of interagency groups such as the Working Group on the Protection of Child Health of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Working Group on Support to Experimental Projects on Students Nutrition under the Presidential Council of National Projects, among others.

Commissioned by a number of Government entities including the Department of Presidential Affairs of the Russian Federation, SIFI has developed a number of fundamental documents providing a sound basis for upgrading school feeding in Russia.

In October 2010, the Government of the Russian Federation endorsed the "Fundamentals of the State Policy in the Area of Healthy Feeding of the Population until the Year 2020". A Presidential Decree on food security in the Russian Federation, endorsed in January 2010, includes the concept of 'social feeding' aimed at supporting the most vulnerable groups of the population lacking access to healthy food as well as at organizing healthy feeding for pregnant and lactating women, children in their early years, pre-school and school-age children and healthy feeding in social institutions.

In a May 2011 meeting on children's health in Russia, the President of the Russian Federation stated that pilot projects using innovative approaches to school feeding during the past four years have shown improvement of children's health in all the 48 pilot regions of Russia. This highlights the benefits of introducing nutritious school feeding on a country-wide scale.

Mr. Fionov presented SIFI's plan of activities in Armenia aimed at helping Armenian experts to develop a school feeding strategy and eventually a sustainable national school feeding project. In particular, SIFI will undertake:

- ✓ Analysis of local production capacities for school feeding;
- ✓ Analysis of the existing Armenian legislation in the area of school feeding and development of recommendations for its improvement;

- ✓ Support in the creation of a tri-lingual (Armenian, English and Russian) website on school feeding for the purpose providing visibility and fundraising to the project;
- ✓ Analysis of the food preparation and food basket composition in view of its cost-effectiveness;
- ✓ Establishment of an information database and management system for monitoring and evaluation of the status of school feeding at local, province and central levels;
- ✓ Assessment of capacities for centralized and other forms of production of commodities and logistical arrangements for school feeding; assessment of infrastructure needs of schools and communities;
- ✓ Support in the formulation of a national school feeding project including recommended types of school feeding and systems including recommendations the size and nutrition composition of rations; and
- ✓ Support to WFP to develop a phase-out strategy and handover of competencies to the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia.

Ms. Hava Altman, expert from the Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Health of Israel began her presentation by saying that children and adults differ in their nutrition needs and that children's eating habits can be modified with proper intervention efforts. It is important to know that poor nutrition in childhood affects the state of health in adulthood and it is very difficult in later life to make up for missed nutritional intake from childhood. Shortage of food accessibility and availability may disturb children's ability to develop and reach their full physical and cognitive potential. School feeding is a method used worldwide to improve childhood nutrition. In needy environments, it is necessary to aim to provide food and meals in a manner and place that will reach needy populations paying attention to what children eat, with respect to the variety, quantity and safety of food.

Israel initiated a school feeding project in the 1950's that covered most schools. In the 1970's, the government stopped this program due to decreased demand and management problems. A new demand, however, emerged in 2004 as a result of growing levels of poverty and food insecurity. Therefore, Members of Parliament and experts in social affairs and economics worked toward changing the policy that existed at that time and changed it to the present legal framework which addresses issues of poverty and the needs of vulnerable populations.

The Israeli law on school feeding was launched in 2005 with a budget assigned to provide for the neediest population. The state contributes 66% of the budget while local municipalities and parents pay the rest. A cooked lunch with meat is served four times a week. However, it is also important to note that some parents and municipalities are not taking part in the project.

The aim of school feeding in Israel is to provide adequate meals for optimal functioning, growth and improvement of learning ability and environment, prevent anemia, overweight and obesity and to promote good nutrition education. The project covers 140,000 pupils in 300 schools, aged 6-11 years as well as 32,000 children aged 4-5 years in 1,200 nursery schools. The use of lean meat and poultry, iron rich foods, decreased use of processed foods, oil for cooking and salt (maximum 2 grams) per meal are considered optimal.

In Israel, the entity in charge of the program is the Ministry of Education while the Ministry of Health defines the nutritional needs and develops model menus for food preparation. An NGO manages, supervises, inspects and maintains the project countrywide.

The meals are prepared by 40 different catering companies. Each catering company must have a Food Production License and meet standards related to catering capacity, hygiene, production capacity and staffing. Each provider undergoes 2-4 inspection visits a month. Foods is packed in thermally insulated containers with cold foods and hot foods separated and moved in vehicles licensed for food transportation.

After a survey implemented in the second year of operation (2006), providers made improvements to the menus, modifying portion sizes and variety acceptable to children.

Starting two years ago, in about 30 of the schools, annual workshops are held and lectures given by dietitians dealing with reasonable nutrition and food served under the project. The role of dietitians as well as school feeding as tools for a nutritious and healthier life has been recognized and further solidified. The presented achievements of school feeding in Israel include:

- ✓ Higher child attendance on the days of project implementation (4 days a week);
- ✓ An increase in food variety accepted by children leading to better eating habits;
- ✓ A quieter atmosphere after lunch conducive to better learning results;
- ✓ Aware of the project success, municipalities and schools not classified as needy have asked to receive the same meals at full cost; and
- ✓ Parliament is considering making school feeding operational during summer vacation.

DAY 1

Session 2: National healthy school concept and action for child health and education

A presentation on “The National Healthy School Concept” was made by Ms. Nune Pashayan, Chief Specialist of the Mother and Child Health Division of the Ministry of Health of Armenia.

At present, some 43 countries including a wide range of countries, from Kazakhstan to Ireland including Armenia are members to the *Schools for Health in Europe-network (SHE-network)* which was established in 1992. The healthy school concept is to provide adequate safety and health protection to all teachers, staff, students and others in school as well as to build and maintain a close relationship with families and the community.

Ms. Pashayan defined the healthy school concept as follows, schools should focus not only on the students’ and teachers’ physical health but also on their mental, emotional and social health as well as integrate health education with curricula and all other school activities. The entire physical environment of the school is considered to be a factor directly impacting physical, mental and social health of the children. Schools should ensure secure environments for the school community (safe equipment, prevention of traumatism) including adequate sanitary conditions and adequate water supply. School feeding should operate based on policies including on healthy nutrition.

Another focus of the concept is the involvement of families and the community in school life. The school establishes links with the local community (participates in community events; school events are highlighted by local media).

The *Healthy Schools Project* was endorsed in 2010 by the joint order of the Ministers of Health and Education of Armenia. It now involves 3 pilot schools. Its expansion to all other schools is substantiated by the following:

- ✓ School children represent one sixth of the population in Armenia;
- ✓ They are the most active group in the population, are highly receptive to education, socializing and have high potential for creativity;
- ✓ Work with school children ensures a considerable level of influence on the families; and
- ✓ As *Life Skills* and *Healthy Lifestyle* are introduced in the country’s schools, prerequisites are in place for the introduction of this project.

The results of the 2005 Health Behavior in School-aged Children Survey related to feeding and nutrition promote the introduction of the healthy school project in all other schools:

- ✓ 8 children out of 10 do not have breakfast at home and prefer fast food or sweet foods;

- ✓ A large number of children who do not have breakfast at home, skip it also at school (Yerevan 55%, other cities 59% and 80.5% in villages);
- ✓ 3.6% of the children surveyed had been hungry during the preceding month due to the absence of food in the family (4.5% did not answer);
- ✓ Meat and milk products were used once a month or even more rarely, by 18% and 14% of the respondents respectively; and
- ✓ 30% were not satisfied with their body mass.

In view of the Government's ongoing budget constraints, it may take several years before the project is expanded. National school feeding will however, be able to address many of the critical issues.

Ms. Iren Sargsyan, Health Program Manager of Save the Children made a presentation on Save the Children's Action for Child Health and Education Project which is guided by the "Healthy to learn, learn to be healthy" understanding. The Project is trying to reinforce the idea that school health and nutrition is an essential element of quality education. Healthy children learn better, and people with adequate nutrition are more productive.

Ms. Sargsyan juxtaposed the outcomes of good and poor nutrition. Nourishing food makes a child healthier and emotionally more stable. It provides "fuel" for the brain and improves school performance. Good nutrition is the cornerstone of good health. Poor nutrition causes short attention span and difficulty in concentration as well as fatigue and irritability. Poor nutrition can lead to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to disease, impaired physical and mental development, and reduced productivity. Anemic children generally show low performance in math, reading, vocabulary and problem-solving.

The goal of *Action for Child Health and Education Project* is to ensure that children learn and develop their capacities to their full potential through quality early childhood development programmes and school-based health and nutrition services as well as practices and behaviors.

United under a strategic partnership, WFP and Save the Children collaborate to help communities to renovate school bathrooms and install new sanitary appliances as well as to construct drinking water systems in schools to ensure clean and uninterrupted water supply. The costs of such projects are shared equally by the two agencies.

Save the Children is working to activate school management and parent-teacher associations around school health and nutrition issues and to mobilize children for positive change in school environments.

DAY 2

Session 3: WFP School Feeding Policy and 8 Quality Standards of Programme Sustainability

WFP's vision of school feeding is to reduce hunger among schoolchildren so that it is not an obstacle to their development.

The fundamentals of the WFP school feeding policy were presented by Ms. Maria Lukyanova. An effective safety net, school feeding helps to protect vulnerable children during times of crises. WFP has 45 years of experience in school feeding and has helped millions of children become educated productive adults. Safeguarding nutrition, education and gender equality, school feeding provides a range of socio-economic benefits.

In order to attain sustainability school feeding programmes should strive towards meeting what WFP terms as 8 quality standards: sustainability; sound alignment with national policy frameworks; stable funding and budgeting; needs-based, cost-effective quality programme design; strong institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring and accountability; local production and sourcing where feasible; strong partnerships and inter-sector coordination as well as strong community participation and ownership. WFP assists governments in meeting these standards and fosters enhanced understanding among governments, donors and stakeholders of the benefits of school feeding as a safety net.

In cooperation with Russia's Social and Industrial Food Services Institute and MASHAV, WFP is helping the Armenian government in developing a national school feeding strategy, establish a working national coordination mechanism for school feeding, provide multi-sector technical assistance to design a quality and cost-effective programme, provide capacity development to ensure sustainability while at the same time support programme implementation.

The process of achieving sustainability takes time and school feeding programmes go through a number of stages. The transition to sustainable national programme requires school feeding to be mainstreamed in national strategies, policies and budgets. Along with the development of government capacity and ownership, the government is gradually assuming greater responsibility for the programme.

Ms. Lukyanova also elaborated on local purchase for school feeding as an important tool to ensure sustainability and transition. Linking the school feeding programme and locally produced food, including local capacity to mill and fortify, will benefit small holder farmers and boost the local economy. WFP will aim to create synergies between school feeding and other social and agricultural programmes to meet the growth, health and educational needs of children, while supporting agricultural and economic development.

Session 3: Break-out groups: Identifying and analyzing quality standards for school feeding in Armenia

In this session, all the participants had the opportunity to take part in discussions, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Education and Science Karine Harutyunyan. Based on the presentation of the 8 quality standards as a framework for sustainable school feeding, the participants worked in 5 groups:

- Group 1: Policy and funding
- Group 2: Needs-based cost-effective design, targeting
- Group 3: Institutional and implementation arrangements, M&E
- Group 4: Partnerships and coordination
- Group 5: Promotion of local production and community participation

The standards or preconditions identified as relevant for the Armenia context constituted the benchmarks against which the groups measured the situation in the country.

Group 1: Policy and funding

POLICY	
Guiding questions - Is there a specific national school feeding policy? Is it included in the Strategy for Sustainable Development, the social protection policy or any other macro-level policy papers?	
ASSESSMENT +/-	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
There is no specific national school feeding policy. School feeding is not included in the Strategy for Sustainable Development or the social protection policy. However, some closely-related aspects are included in documents jointly endorsed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. There is also the school feeding Development Programme Action Plan (DPAP) stipulating hand-over of the school feeding project to the Government.	WFP and the Ministry of Education need to work more closely with the Ministry of Health to ensure proper coordination of planning and implementation of activities.
Although there is a food security policy, it does not have strong nutritional links and Armenia does not have national nutrition standards. Measures to reduce malnutrition are non-existent in the context of national	A proper school feeding activity calls for national nutritional standards spelled out in a national nutrition policy which is necessary for Armenia to put in place. To this end, it is needed to have human resources adequately trained in food and nutrition. Lacking such human resources can be a major barrier to the formulation of a national nutrition policy and implementation.

development, although there is government commitment to the MDG's.	
FUNDING	
ASSESSMENT	
+/-	
Is school feeding included in the national planning process? Does the government have provisions in the national budget to allocate resources to school feeding? Do the provinces have the capacity to plan and budget their needs and request resources from the central level?	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Currently the government does not have provisions in the national budget to allocate resources to school feeding given ongoing financial constraints. Nor is school feeding included in the national planning process.</p> <p>The purpose of school feeding is to assist disadvantaged children in gaining maximum benefit from school education. At this stage all costs related to school feeding should not or cannot be borne by the Government alone. However, as has been agreed, next year a sum equivalent to the LTSH requirement will be included in the government budget.</p> <p>WFP will implement more than one model to identify the least costly and best-suited model.</p> <p>The provinces have the capacity to plan and budget their needs if there is funding for school feeding, agreed numbers of schools and students, menus and implementation instructions.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education and Science and WFP should continue working with the government to include school feeding in the national planning process and ultimately in the budget. One of the first critical actions is regularizing school feeding in the Armenian legal framework.</p> <p>As school feeding is rather costly, the government should be expected to contribute only part of the funds at all times. Parents, according to the level of their income, should contribute as appropriate and the government funding should be targeted with the aim to assisting disadvantaged children in gaining maximum benefit from school education.</p> <p>WFP and the Government should work together toward seeking alternative sources for funding, involving the private sector and individuals; resources should also be tapped through the Armenian Diaspora. Communication with partners and fundraising should be developed as part of the national school feeding strategy.</p> <p>It is crucial that the number of schools and students covered by school feeding be based on a calculated budget in order not to allow the quality and quantity of school meals to deteriorate. Care should be taken to ensure consistent provision of food of suitable quality and nutritional value, prepared and eaten in an appropriate environment.</p>

Group 2: Needs-based cost-effective design, targeting

NEEDS-BASED, COST-EFFECTIVE DESIGN	
<p>Guiding questions – Is the project needs-based that are reflected in the objectives? Is there a recommended food basket/menu corresponding to the context, i.e. children's nutrition needs, and the feasibility/cost of implementation? Does the project run efficiently with minimum resources required? What current nutritional deficiencies exist among schoolchildren? Does the project have appropriate school feeding models? Is the use of national farm produce being considered?</p>	
ASSESSMENT +/-	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The current WFP-assisted project responds to the overall food needs in the country. It uses an appropriate model where the food basket established and provided by WFP is complemented by voluntary parent contributions diversifying the children's diet. Some of the contributed food products come from their own farm products which makes it cost effective. However, the current model needs to further be strengthened and institutionalized to be suitable for a longer-term school feeding project.</p>	<p>As the project evolves into a national programme, the ration and mode/s of implementation need to be reviewed in order to introduce more formal catering arrangements and regulated parent contributions.</p>
<p>Anthropometry provides one of the most important indicators of children's nutritional status. According to the 2005 Armenia Demographic and Health Survey, 13% of children under 5 are stunted, 5% are wasted, and 4% are underweight. Given the impact of the current economic downturn and hiking food, fuel and utility prices, it is anticipated that a further worsening of these parameters is increasingly taking place.</p>	<p>A needs-based and nutritionally balanced food basket and menus should be introduced to address existing nutritional deficiencies among school-age children and improve their health and nutritional status.</p>
<p>Intestinal worms can contribute to both anemia and vitamin A deficiency. Children are likely to be infected from the time breast-feeding is stopped, and to be continually infected and re-infected during the rest of their lives. Being long-term and chronic, such infection can negatively affect all aspects of a child's development:</p>	<p>Part of its gradual take over, the Ministry of Education and Science should implement a pilot project in parallel with WFP (in a number of schools or maybe all the targeted schools in one province) to familiarize itself with planning, making arrangements and implementation to be better prepared to take over the entire project. This would allow building on lessons learned and success stories and spend minimum resources to a maximum effect.</p>
	<p>The project should be targeted and involve community participation in order to be cost effective.</p>
	<p>The national strategy should envisage introducing the use of fortified food in school feeding to address micronutrient deficiency as well as regular school-based</p>

<p>health, nutrition, cognitive development, learning and achievement.</p> <p>Regular deworming contributes to good health and nutrition for children of school age, which in turn leads to increased attendance and increased educational attainment. The most disadvantaged children often suffer most from ill health and malnutrition, and gain the most benefit from deworming.</p>	<p>de-worming to ensure a greater impact of the school meals. The strategy should also envisage capacity building for school cooks to enable them to prepare healthy food and be aware of hygiene requirements.</p> <p>The national strategy should envisage creating a stable demand for national farm produce by the school feeding project which will also make it considerably less costly.</p>
TARGETING	
<p>Guiding questions – Are there explicit targeting criteria and a methodology that are consistent with the programme objectives? Should the national project be targeted or universal?</p>	
ASSESSMENT	
+/-	
<p style="text-align: center;">KEY RESPONSES</p> <p>WFP has targeting criteria and a methodology that are consistent with the programme objectives.</p> <p>The government has an ambitious plan of introducing a national project that will reach all schoolchildren in the primary grades (1-4).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>When the project is taken over by the government, resource limitation should be taken into consideration.</p> <p>To improve the impact and penetration of school feeding, targeting communities and families that lack the means to adequately provide for their school-age children is a crucial element. Some students may be entitled to free meals if their families' incomes are below a certain level that will be established by the Government and later verified by schools and parent councils for each individual case. Some students will have to contribute. The difference in the required amounts will have to be covered by the Government. Targeting will be adjusted using updated assessment data.</p> <p>A formal targeting mechanism will have to be established.</p>

Group 3: Institutional and implementation arrangements, M&E

INSTITUTIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS, M&E	
Guiding questions – Is there a national institution mandated with implementing school feeding? Is there a specific unit in charge of the overall management of school feeding within the lead institution at the central and regional levels and in schools that have sufficient staff, resources and knowledge? Is there adequate infrastructure for implementation at school level? Is resource management done in a transparent manner? Is there a sound reporting system through M&E?	
ASSESSMENT +/-	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>WFP is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) as its key counterpart to put in place a national strategy for continued implementation of the project after WFP's withdrawal. Deputy Minister Karine Harutyunyan and focal point Andranik Hovhannisyan are closely involved in the process. At the regional level, there are focal points in the respective education departments who liaise between WFP and the schools. They also show commitment and have the required knowledge. School headmasters charged with implementation have the knowledge to take full responsibility. They are furthermore supported by the parent councils.</p> <p>The schools built in soviet times are housed in excessively large buildings of a typified design. Without repair they have deteriorated over the years and are now in dilapidated conditions. Schools lacking running water and other facilities to provide a hot meals service are not able to be covered by the ongoing school feeding project. The government has frozen most of its earlier planned school repair activities for an indefinite time. WFP supports repair of schools and school kitchens and cafeterias in the most vulnerable areas. Generally, some 15-20 schools are repaired in each food-for-work season.</p>	<p>There are several options for the administration of school feeding after WFP's withdrawal. It can either be done by a special unit in the Ministry or a stand-alone entity. Other forms of administration can be recommended by the developers of the national school feeding strategy and legislation.</p> <p>The situation could be improved through support from WFP, international organizations and private benefactors which would enable more schools to benefit from the WFP-supported school feeding project until the government is able to provide funding for school repair including for dining spaces and hand washing as well as toilet facilities for children.</p> <p>The national strategy should consider uniformity in project implementation and meals components.</p>

<p>While WFP is planning to implement various models to identify the best-suited model for the country, it is also a compelled measure due to lacking basic supplies and running water resulting in lack of uniformity in project implementation and meals components as well as irregularities in coverage.</p> <p>WFP is using a well-designed M&E process with formats developed for reporting by schools, data being consolidated at regional level and submitted to WFP. All of the information received is retained in a comprehensive data system in the WFP Country Office. M&E is implemented through the use of well-trained human resources, equipment and vehicles.</p> <p>Current resource management is done in a transparent manner involving school managements, teachers, parent councils, parents, and school feeding coordinators/ focal points at province level.</p>	<p>The national strategy should envisage putting in place a M&E framework as a crucial part of control whereby data are systematically collected, reported and used to make project decisions aimed at improving project quality and impact. Some M&E information can be posted on the Internet for access by various stakeholders and donors. This can be in the form of a link in the soon-to-be-prepared Armenia school feeding website.</p> <p>Retain the role of school managements, teachers and parent councils in the development of a national strategy and project implementation to ensure proper use of resources and transparency.</p> <p>An M&E process to monitor changes/ improvements in children's health status would be an ideal approach.</p>
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Group 4: Partnerships and coordination

PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION	
<p>Guiding questions – Is the project implemented in partnership with relevant sectors, international agencies, NGO's and businesses? Is school feeding linked with other complementary school-based health and nutrition interventions? Is there an inter-sector coordination mechanism?</p>	
ASSESSMENT	
+/-	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Malnutrition among children is impairing quality of life and health. School feeding is primarily meant to improve household food security by feeding children in school and thus freeing up food for other household members or decreasing household food expenses. But to make it more meaningful, the goals of school feeding should be extended to outcomes in health and</p>	<p>The composition of the existing inter-ministerial committee (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Territorial Administration, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy) should be reviewed to become a smaller representative group that can meet more regularly and work to produce concrete</p>

<p>nutrition, e.g. through fortification with iron and vitamins as well as de-worming, improved hygiene, access to running water, etc.</p> <p>To this end, WFP has started partnerships with the Ministry of Health as well as the Social and Industrial Food Services Institute/Russia, Save the Children, Open Society Institute and World Vision. Joint initiatives will further strengthen WFP partnerships and maximize the use of the potential of school feeding as an intervention to improve household food security, child nutrition and health, school attendance and educational outcomes.</p> <p>In some instances, lacking coordination has been noted resulting in information gaps at various levels.</p> <p>Project can benefit from an increase in school monitoring visits.</p>	<p>results and recommendations.</p> <p>The national strategy should prescribe to use school feeding as not just a stand-alone intervention but as one that will combine all the reasonable elements of a school feeding design contributing to social protection, health and education.</p> <p>School feeding should be regarded as an intervention forming part of public health.</p> <p>Relationship between the Ministry of Education and Science, the inter-ministerial committee, province authorities and the schools should be strengthened including in the area of information sharing and information management.</p> <p>Increased partnerships between the project and the Ministry of Agriculture will be necessary to ensure that local products are purchased for use by benefiting schools.</p> <p>Visits to schools should be increased by gradually added visits by WFP partners. Ministry of Education and Science should be gradually and increasingly trained and taking on monitoring and implementation.</p>
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Group 5: Promotion of local production and community participation

PROMOTION OF LOCAL PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	
<p>Guiding questions – Are there arrangements in place to ensure quality and safety of food? Is stability of the food supply taken into account? Are there any contingency measures in case of pipeline shortfalls? Do communities participate or contribute to the project? Is there communication between benefiting schools and their respective communities?</p>	
ASSESSMENT	
+/-	
KEY RESPONSES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Linkage of school feeding to local agriculture is insufficient but WFP is preparing to pilot a project utilizing locally produced vitamin-enriched fruit bars for schools that are unable to carry out ‘wet’</p>	<p>The linkage between school feeding and local agriculture should be further strengthened. The possibility of incorporating models that utilize local resources and farm products should be</p>

<p>feeding of hot meals which will be proposed to the government as one model of implementation.</p> <p>There is no strategy for coordination between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture.</p> <p>Communities are producing agricultural products appropriate for school feeding including pulses, vegetables and fruits. But staple food items including wheat flour and vegetable oil are lacking.</p> <p>There is no mechanism of purchasing agricultural products for school feeding.</p> <p>WFP has arrangements in place to ensure quality and safety of the food provided by the organization. However, the quality of and safety of the food provided by communities through parent councils are not checked.</p> <p>Stability of the food supply is ensured unless there is a force majeure situation. Contingency measures in case of pipeline shortfalls are managed by borrowings but strictly defined contingency measures in case of pipeline shortfall are not in place.</p> <p>WFP is encouraging establishment of orchards and gardens under its food-for-work scheme.</p> <p>A range of contributions (food and non-food) to WFP-supported school feeding representing some 20 % of the inputs are made by parents and community members without which the project cannot be implemented. In some communities, village administrations and community businesses contribute. Community businesses provide cash for food purchases or for the improvement of kitchens. The said 20% includes expenses for</p>	<p>taken into consideration as this would also contribute to more holistic community development.</p> <p>Possible linkages amongst communities to strengthen the project and the communities themselves should also be considered.</p> <p>Communities should not be kept aloof from the project. On the contrary, their participation in school feeding should be acknowledged as contributing to a diversified diet. Efforts should be made to strengthen community ownership.</p> <p>The Government, province authorities and NGOs should study food production capacities in provinces. The Government should develop a mechanism of purchasing agricultural products from small farmers for school feeding and create adequate infrastructures for such purchases. There should also be infrastructure to check the quality and safety of locally produced food products and farm products provided as community contributions.</p> <p>The Government should include a separate line for school feeding in the budgets of local administrations.</p> <p>Community interest toward school feeding can also be increased by creating opportunities for local employment (food producers, school cooks and programme administrators).</p> <p>The Programme should encourage establishment of orchards, vegetable gardens, small farms, bee-keeping, etc. to promote local production and ensure a diverse diet for children.</p>
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<p>complementary food, electricity consumption, detergents, kitchen and cooking utensils, plates/cups, etc.</p> <p>A greater variety of food is needed in school meals to ensure adequate nutrition which is currently taken care of by the parent councils. They are the link between the benefiting schools and their communities. They manage the project and establish the fees that are charged to families to help support the project. These are in the range of 200-300 Armenian drams (US\$0.55-US\$0.80) per month. Parents who cannot afford to pay are exempted from payment.</p> <p>The programme has increased the prominence of parent councils. The interest of parents toward school and activities in school has increased.</p>	
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The next step will be to develop a Transition Strategy and Work Plan as a roadmap to institute a sustainable school feeding project in Armenia. It can be tailored as time evolves and new needs arise or some achievements are attained. The most important thing is that the stakeholders take ownership of the Strategy and willing to put in the effort and resources to make it come to life.