

## Wimpfheimer-Guggenheim Essays Competition

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### **Global Child Nutrition Forum: A Catalyst for School Feeding**

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#### **Introduction**

Globally more than 350 million school-aged children are severely hungry and over 115 million of them do not attend school. The number continues to grow exacerbated by recent food and economic conditions. More must be done to expand school feeding programs that serve as lifelines to millions of disadvantaged children throughout the world.

*Rethinking School Feeding: School Feeding, Social Safety Nets and the Education Sector* positions school feeding globally as an essential and high priority health and education program. Today it includes meals, clean water, safe food, deworming latrines, take home rations for vulnerable families and markets for local farm production.

The [George McGovern – Robert Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program](#) has been recognized for the namesakes' leadership in promoting international school feeding programs and increasing school attendance especially for girls. In many cases children are only able to attend and stay in school when food is provided. The success of the McGovern-Dole Program has led to increased support internationally. The United Nations now considers school feeding programs as vital to the advancement of developing nations and one of the key recommendations for meeting their [Millennium Development Goals](#).

#### **The Global Child Nutrition Foundation**

In 2006 the [School Nutrition Association \(SNA\)](#) established the [Global Child Nutrition Foundation \(GCNF\)](#) as its international arm. The Foundation has "the mission and vision and expertise to do one thing exceptionally well: help the nations of the world nurture young bodies and advance young minds through the time-tested practice of school-based nutrition, one community at a time."

The Foundation is a volunteer driven organization and its business is conducted by an international Board of Directors. It "does not offer money, clothing, or food but assists country leaders to develop policy and build capacity for self directed training, technical assistance and

network building targeted to achieve sustainable school feeding programs." Realizing childhood hunger cannot be resolved by only one organization or individual the Foundation has established partnerships with governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations who share their vision. These include the [United Nations World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#), [Joint Aid Management\(JAM\)](#), [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#), [Africare](#), [USDA Foreign Agricultural Service](#), Solae and Tetra Pak. In turn the Foundation is being asked to participate in joint projects in China, Mozambique and Angola.

## **The Global Child Nutrition Forum**

The Global Child Nutrition Forum is the Foundation's flagship program. The annual Forum assists leaders in developing countries to start or expand school feeding programs by building technical capacity. In the past decade, the Forum has brought together over 200 government and non-government leaders from over 80 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. It provides the platform to discuss unique and common challenges, as well as possible resolutions. The delegates realize their country problems are similar: high rates of malnutrition, low rates of school environment, high drop-out rates and gender disparities.

In the past two years the Forum has been redesigned and gone international. The delegates are selected by GCNF partners meeting specific criteria such as country need and commitment to establish or expand sustainable school feeding programs and policies in their countries. The revised Forum platform has a three year technical assistance cycle to advance school feeding through problem solving and communication. Approximately thirty country leaders from about fifteen nations are selected to attend the annual Forum.

The delegates use the School Feeding Toolkit, co-authored by Penny E. McConnell, RD and Annette Bomar, LD to design a unique comprehensive country plan. This tested workbook, now in its third edition has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, French and Chinese to meet the needs of delegates from English Speaking other Language nations such as Mali, Bolivia, Mozambique and China.

At the conclusion of the Forums, the delegates have signed a Freedom From Hunger Resolution which states, "We, the Delegates of the Global Child Nutrition Forum, urge governments to accept the responsibility for reducing childhood hunger and malnutrition by promoting and supporting school feeding as an immediate priority. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to mobilize stakeholders and civil society allies to work in partnership with governments to promote nutritional well-being of all children."

## **Country Planning Process for Developing Sustainable School Feeding Programs**

A Forum committee member is assigned to each country delegation and walks them through the country planning process in a train the trainer format. The School Feeding Toolkit enables delegates to complete a needs assessment utilizing specific targets and indicators. Then they

prioritize actions needed to achieve government and community commitment and capacity; identify resources needed to implement their country plan; and share ideas on the establishment of national and international school feeding networks.

The School Feeding Toolkit is intended to be flexible and is adapted to country needs. It serves as a guide for feeding children in school; supporting agricultural development through school feeding programs; and targeting school feeding to improve girls' attendance in schools. The delegates complete the following five steps in developing their country plan for sustainable school feeding programs.

### **Step I: Country Goals and Objectives**

Country leaders define goals and objectives of their school feeding programs. By working in collaboration with stakeholders representing various groups, such as representatives from the Ministry of Education, Health, Agriculture, and other relevant government positions, as well as teachers, school food service providers, and parents.

### **Step II: Diagnostic Assessment**

The delegates analyze the current situation of school feeding by collecting diagnostic information, or an examination of the current situation, through a series of questions regarding the current status of nutrition, education, and school feeding.

### **Step III: Needs Assessment**

The needs assessment assists country team members to evaluate the capacity of the country to implement school feeding.

The School Feeding Toolkit Needs Assessment is broken down into five target areas:

- Government Commitment and Political Will (Page 28)
- Institutional Capacity (Pages 29-31)
- Community Commitment and Resource Utilization (Pages 32-33)
- Design and Implementation of School Feeding (Pages 34-36)
- Monitoring and Evaluation of School Feeding (Page 37)

Within each target there are indicators, or performance standards which represent conditions required for success in each target area.

### **Step IV: Country Plan**

Country Plan worksheets assist country leaders to plan the process of designing and implementing school feeding programs when they return home. They help leaders to identify people and groups of stakeholders who should be involved in the process and to indicate

actions, resources, and potential timelines for developing a school feeding plan that involves a diverse group of stakeholders.

The delegates' country plans shared with the Forum attendees provide the steps for new opportunities to:

- establish supportive government policy and funding,
- create effective, community based school feeding programs that respond to local needs and conditions,
- provide community acceptance and support for school feeding, and establish school feeding as an integral part of local agricultural production and poverty reduction strategies for the country.

Delegates' most common challenges are lack of political support, funding, community awareness and support, and coordinations between government, non-government and private entities.

### **Step V: Revising Country Plan**

Developing and implementing a school feeding program is an ongoing process. Once a plan is developed, it must continuously be revisited and reevaluated to reassess the plan in light of new national developments. The delegates' country plans are living documents and are evaluated annually in cooperation with their Forum committee member liaison.

Last year the Global Child Nutrition Forum held its first international meeting in Stellenbosch, South Africa. This action enabled more countries to attend. The theme focused on linking sustainable school feeding and local farm production. Guest speakers covered a variety of topics including global perspectives of school feeding, local farm production, nutrition and delegates designed their individual country plans. The 2010 Global Child Nutrition Forum will be held in Ghana. Selected delegates from the previous two years identified as Tier II and Tier III delegates will meet together to discuss successes and challenges. They will also assist the new Tier I delegates with their country plans. These lessons learned activities are invaluable to first time (Tier I) delegates. The Tier III delegates will become members of a "train the trainer" network to assist neighboring countries in designing country plans. This is the basis for the three year technical assistance cycle.

### **Global Child Nutrition Foundation Technical Assistance**

In response to requests to share its expertise and partner with others in global efforts the Foundation is developing a team of domestic and international Global School Nutrition Specialists who will provide long-distance technical assistance in school feeding policy and program implementation. It is also establishing a web-based Global School Nutrition Knowledge Center to gather and disseminate via GCNF's web site [www.gcnf.org](http://www.gcnf.org), critical research findings; information on best practices, resources, and initiatives concerning school feeding programs

worldwide. It will also facilitate dialogue, training, and building of supportive networks among those striving to advance school feeding. Throughout the year the progress of Forum delegates' country plan implementation is shared with their peers and the Global Child Nutrition Forum Committee via the "Delegate's Insider International" newsletter.

### **Formation of New School Food Association**

The early Forum network efforts of delegates planted the seeds for the formation of two school food service associations – Africa Network for School Feeding Programmes (ANSFEP) and Latin American School Feeding Network (LASFN). Forum delegates become members of a growing global alliance of school feeding and child nutrition advocates.

The African delegates to the 2006 Global Child Nutrition Forum pledged to cooperate and work with the Global Child Nutrition Foundation and other strategic partners in achieving common objectives; promote advocacy, development of policy, and regulatory framework monitoring and evaluation; and the provision of technical assistance to ensure sustainability of school feeding programs in African countries. Today ANSFEP membership represents eighteen countries and it will play an active role in the 2010 Forum in Accra, Ghana. ANSFEP's executive secretary serves on both the GCNF Board and the Forum Committee.

The Latin American School Feeding Network (LASFN) was officially launched in Santiago, Chile in 2004 at an International School Feeding Congress. It is a regional network striving to expand and improve school feeding in Latin America and the Caribbean. LASFN was established to help connect people across national borders, enabling members to learn from each other and promoting opportunities for collaboration. The association has hosted conferences in Santiago, Chile, Cancun, Mexico, Recife, Brazil and a GCNF member serves on its Board.

### **Conclusion**

School Feeding has proven to be a safeguard for children around the world. It brings benefits for the child and country. Benefits for the child include increased food security; increased school attendance by motivating parents to send their children to school; improved academic achievement and improved health significantly. Benefits for the country include support for social and economic development; development of a healthy and educated future work force; enhanced self sufficiency and reduced poverty and provide an on-going market for agricultural produce and industry products.

The documented success of annual Forums demonstrates the need for a permanent funding source. Members of the School Nutrition Association and School Nutrition Services Dietetic Practice Group are aware of childhood hunger and funds have been raised with the annual "End the World Hunger Walk", "Change Our World Campaign" and the designation of April as Global Child Nutrition Month. This involvement does not mean that their local, state and national mission is less important. It just means that members need to be willing to make a concerted

effort to ensure all children, worldwide, have the basic right to grow up healthy and to receive the best possible education.

As stated in the "Position of the American Dietetic Association: Addressing world hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity" nutrition professionals should get involved, on a long-term and short-term basis in the relief, development, and education activities in the developing world. The Global Child Nutrition Forum is an example of the benefits reaped by nutrition professional volunteers, country delegates, their communities and the variety of partners who share the common vision to develop the infrastructure necessary to sustain school feeding programs worldwide.

### **More Information**

- [Download Support Documents](#)