

About the WFP_GMT school feeding programme roundtable



Photo: WFP Republic of Congo

In line with World Food Programme (WFP's) School Feeding Strategy (2020-2030) and its Southern Africa Regional Bureau (RBJ), SADC and government commitment to strengthen the implementation of school feeding programmes, WFP entered into an advocacy partnership with the Graça Machel Trust (GMT). Through this partnership, WFP will leverage GMT's expertise and experience on nutrition and the political capital of GMT's Founder, Mrs Graça Machel, to advocate for the integration of Nutrition into School Feeding Programmes and open doors for regional and national engagement to position School Feeding Programmes as a National priority which requires increase budgetary allocation and public investment. Joint efforts will also be made to push for an increased commitment to School Feeding Programme by the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Round Table discussion provided an opportunity for WFP and GMT at the management level to identify critical areas and issues for the envisaged collaborative advocacy actions. The round table discussion participants included WFP staff from Headquarters, Regional Beraux, and Country offices (Cos) and GMT staff.

Key speakers at the round table discussion included the following:

- Mrs Graça Machel, Founder and Board Chair, the Graça Machel Trust
- Mrs Lola Castro, Regional Director, WFP Southern Africa Regional Bureau (RBJ)
- Ms Carmen Burbano, Director, WFP School-based Programmes (SBP), Headquarters
- Dr Chris Toe, Senior Advisor, WFP Strategic Partnerships Division (STR), speaking as a moderator



Photo: Badre Bahaji

Opening Remarks (Lola Castro, WFP)

In her opening remarks, Mrs Lola Castro reiterated that WFP has been working to advance school feeding programming for many years, and with the recent roll-out of the regional and global School Feeding strategies, WFP has partnered with the GMT to support efforts around investment in school health and nutrition in the region. Through this partnership, WFP seeks to support COs by leading dialogues with regional stakeholders to position School Health and Nutrition as a priority with the Member States and the regional and continental economic entities such as African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The partnership is expected to help increase government participation and other stakeholders in ensuring the return of children back to School following COVID-19,

which has pushed millions of children out of school. School Meals is a powerful tool in bringing children back to school.

Lola also spoke about the importance of seizing the opportunity to leverage the entry point of the Food System Summit to bring together other players, such as the private sector retailing, food safety and crop selection, and vulnerable groups – women, youths, and children. All of which address objectives of equity, sustainability, and affordability.

Working with women Small Holder Farmers (SHF) in the region and linking them to School feeding also provides access to markets for smallholder farmers and empowering women through connecting them to markets offered by the schools.

She concluded by stating that the WFP regional teams are ready to work with GMT to coordinate and harmonise regional and continental dialogue on school health and nutrition under the leadership of SADC (and leveraging the MOU). Furthermore, to link with governments, SADC, and AU to expand school Feeding and ensure it becomes a priority around the region and the continent.

Global Update

Ms Carmen Burbano from WFP Headquarters provided a brief update on the state of school feeding worldwide:

- The impact of the pandemic on schoolchildren was catastrophic. 370 million children lost access to school meals in the middle of the pandemic. Currently, 200 million children still do not have access to meals.
- Before the pandemic hit, the expansion of school feeding programmes was historic. To the extent that in Africa alone, the number of children receiving school meals had almost doubled in the past ten years. 65.4 million children received school meals across Africa in 2019, a 71% increase from 38.4 million in 2013.
- Over the past decade, African Union member states have made significant efforts to increase their budget allocations and adopt rigorous policy frameworks for school feeding.
- In 2013 only 20% of African governments had School feeding policies, and just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number had increased to 80%.

School Meals is one of the most extensive social assistance safety nets programmes for children globally; therefore, losing access to the safety net has negatively impacted children worldwide.

- The education sector has embraced school feeding and school health and nutrition as a priority. WFP has been working with UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO, Global Partnership on Education, and Gordon Brown Education Commission to make school Feeding a priority moving forward.

Carmen mentioned two key forums where Mrs Graca Machel can advocate for school feeding investment as follows;



Photo: WFP Republic of Congo

1. On 29 April 2021, Mrs Graca Machel co-chaired the Global Education Forum with Gordon Brown. Prioritising School Feeding was discussed during the forum. Participants were challenged to scale up school feeding. This forum was an important advocacy tool that would appeal to donors.

2. Global Coalition for school feeding being formed – led by the governments of Finland and France (through President Macron). A global decision that all children should receive a healthy meal at school by 2030. Requested Mrs Machel's support in reaching out to African leaders to join the coalition and make school feeding a national priority. Already, this is a crucial priority for African Union. Member States were called to make the programmes a priority and join the coalition. Many commitments have been made already by governments in African regions such as Madagascar and Malawi. Therefore Madam Machel can help increase government engagement by bringing leaders on board.

Intervention by Chris Toe (WFP)

Dr Toe reassured Mrs Machel that at all levels of the organisation, from headquarters, regional, or country-level, is committed to advocating and implementing the decision of the African Union assembly to make Home Grown School feeding (HGSF) an essential program in Africa. The long-awaited African Union Biennial Report

on Home-Grown School Feeding (2019-2020) shows that African governments have demonstrated increased ownership, leadership and investment in School Feeding, but there is a need to do more. Follow up discussion on increasing political engagement and technical discussion to lay out the evidence on why HGSF is essential for economic growth and development and health, nutrition education, and a range of other development focus areas

Dialogue on the following questions to Mrs Machel

Graça Machel's speech was in response to the question:

From your perspective and based on your own experience, what do you see as the role and importance of HGSF to human capital development and Agriculture and a range of other economic development areas?

- Nutrition for young children before school is a question of **life and death**. A third of children's deaths are related to issues of malnutrition. Every government needs to prioritise nutrition in its national agenda.
- Particularly for children in School: A child with an empty stomach cannot concentrate nor learn. Health education and social outcomes are at stake when nutrition is not available.
- School feeding programs are suitable for children and their academic outcomes, for social change/transformation, particularly for girls, helps keep them in school and reduces child marriage. All of this adds up to a more significant impact of curbing poverty
- We need to articulate and package the message to government - show them graphically the impact School Feeding has not only on Human Capital development but also on economies, social development and reduction of extreme poverty.
- Allocation of national budgets is still lower

than the magnitude of the issue. Given the gains in many other sectors, there is a need to scale up federal investment in SF programs.

- Institutional frameworks in which these programs run lack attention. There is a need to strengthen the whole system, logistical, monitoring, and evaluating food quality.



African government must be more engaged in increasing investment. They need to be aware of the magnitude of the problems, how much they need to engage and be mindful of the multisectoral approach- water, infrastructure, agriculture and health. School feeding serves an entire ecosystem.

- The importance of engaging counties. While the resolutions at the continental level are essential, the real change happens at the country level - where the children are. There is a need to strengthen the focus at the national level for implementation to be efficient.
- Reconstruction after COVID-19: We need to re-group and find ways of bringing all the stakeholders together. People need to feel engaged. Our society gives value to the eye to eye discussion. Suggestion: in selected countries have a country-level conversation with national stakeholders (Ministers of Finance, Agriculture,



Education, Social movements, farmers and women groups. Remind people that progress made has been eroded and that now we have to take the opportunity of re-orienting resources.

- Stakeholders can deliberate and make pledges on how to handle this issue forward. With these multi-stakeholder dialogues, we can demand accountability to governments.

- Regional approach- Southern African region should articulate a regional strategy to detail how countries produce and distribute food to share with those affected by climate change and food insecurity. Plan to distribute food available to children and families in the region before thinking of other areas.
- Government have policies but no strategies. Scattered policies need to be tied in procedures to ensure implementation occurs; reviews of the same provides gains at the regional level are adequately woven.



ACTION: Select a few countries in which we can have these face-to-face debates on this subject.



Photo: Giulio dAdamo

What Can Graça Machel Trust do?

With the GMT as the coordinator, the east and southern Africa region has embraced a regional approach for joint advocacy for nutrition spearheaded by the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society alliances. Annual reports exist already for nine (9) countries. One of the critical collective advocacy agendas for the regional network has been advocating for domestic budget allocation to nutrition.



ACTION: This is a process that we can open up to talk about nutrition and production and sustainability of school feeding programmes. It will help build relationships with countries.

1. The recently launched East and Southern Africa budget analysis report's key findings show that countries are still not allocating enough resources for critical nutrition intervention. Mrs Machel noted the need to join hands to ensure that governments through their Ministries increase resources towards the financing of nutrition interventions. One of the silver bullets identified intervention is the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme.
2. Mrs Graça noting influencing the policy space at all the various levels of governance is vital. She made herself available to advocate for the issue. Identifying and using upcoming opportunities like the G7, G20, United Nations Food Systems Summit and the Nutrition for Growth Summit provide an avenue for securing commitments from countries and donors



ACTION: Suggest strategically important fora and events for Mrs Graça Machel to take this message forward.



Action points by Mrs Graça Machel

1. Nutrition is life and death, particularly for children, even before they enter school; there fore should be a government priority.
2. Children cannot learn on empty stomachs there is a need for investment in education, including nutrition and that investment is good not only for education and social outcomes but also for eliminating poverty.
3. Need to scale up and increase engagement in HGSF-invest in ecosystem infrastructure and strengthen institutional frameworks, including quality monitoring and evaluation and importation approach at national and country level.
4. Recognising the nutrition challenges that are just emerging and growing that are a health risk and address these, such as NCDs, should be prioritised, not just at the policy level but also implementation level.
5. Instead of using the general advocacy approaches, she noted the need to identify key advocacy issues regarding school feeding programmes and nutrition, develop concrete and targeted advocacy, and direct it to the relevant decision-makers,





Action points by Graça Machel

politicians, and policymakers at Continental Regional and National levels.

6. What her trust can do - improve messaging, use her participation in different forums, for example, Food systems and Tokyo Summit, to talk about food security and HGSF.
7. WFP will need to make strategic decisions on when and where to engage Mrs Graça Machel.
8. She called all decision-makers to take the opportunity on the reconstruction to invest in children.



Watch video of the roundtable here

Graça Machel Trust World Food Programme Roundtable 28 April, 2021



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1jbsXJv8dw>

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