



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE:

Enhancing Educational Outcomes and Child Health through Increased Funding and Expansion of the School Feeding Programme in Zambia.

Policy Brief Paper for World Vision Zambia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, 733 million people suffered from hunger, and 2.3 billion faced severe or moderate food insecurity. Malnutrition, especially among children, remains a pressing global concern with significant implications for health, development, and overall well-being.

¹Globally, in 2022, 149 million children under five were estimated to be stunted, 45 million were estimated to be wasted, and 37 million were overweight or living with obesity². In Zambia, hunger and malnutrition, accompanied by widespread micronutrient deficiencies, are prevalent. One of the critical interventions to address hunger and malnutrition is school feeding.³

Since its inception, School feeding programs in Zambia have yielded significant benefits, including reducing hunger and malnutrition, improving educational outcomes, breaking cycles of generational poverty, lowering rates of child marriages and child labor, enhancing child health, and supporting rural economies. Additionally, the government's free education policy would become even more effective with increased funding and expansion of the school feeding programme, as this would encourage enrolment and help retain more children in school.

During the 2024–2025 period, the government made commendable strides by significantly increasing funding to the School Feeding Programme. The budget rose from K39.4 million in 2023 to K111.7 million in 2024. In response to the drought, a supplementary allocation of K392.2 million was approved, bringing the total budget for 2024 to K503.9 million. The 2025 national budget proposed an allocation of K534.4 million to the school feeding programme, marking a significant increase from the previous year.

Despite this substantial increase, a large number of vulnerable children remain excluded from the programme. To achieve nationwide coverage and long-term sustainability, further investment is essential. This brief recommends a strategic increase in government investment in school feeding to ensure long-term sustainability, nationwide coverage, and funding for school feeding to ensure universal access, improve education and health outcomes, combat child hunger and malnutrition, and align with Zambia's broader development goals.

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition is a global crisis that severely affects children's growth and development. Worldwide, millions of children suffer from hunger and undernutrition, conditions that are deeply interconnected. In 2024, at least 18.2 million children were born into hunger, with approximately 35 children entering the world hungry every minute.⁴

Around 181 million children under the age of 5 years are experiencing severe child food poverty,⁵ equivalent to 1 in 4 children globally. Nearly half of all deaths among children under five are linked to hunger. Additionally, about 148 million children are missing out on essential meals and health and nutrition services.⁵

Substantial evidence suggests that Zambia has not been spared from hunger and malnutrition. This is evident in the 2024 Global Hunger Index Report and the 2024 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey report, which indicate high national malnutrition levels (32%), wasting rates (3%), and widespread micronutrient deficiencies.

For school-aged children, hunger results in poor concentration, frequent absenteeism, increased dropout rates, vulnerability to diseases, and increases illiteracy levels. It also contributes to child marriages and child labour, as families facing food insecurity may resort to harmful coping mechanisms. Increasing funding for school meals and expanding the school feeding programme is a proven, cost-effective social safety net. It not only addresses hunger but also improves educational outcomes and child health, making it a critical investment in Zambia's future.

¹FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO State of Food Security and Nutrition World Report, 2024

²WHO Report 2023

³FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO State of Food Security and Nutrition World Report, 2024

⁴Save the Children Report 2024

⁵UNICEF Report 2024

⁶Action Against Hunger Report 2024

CONTEXT OF CHILD HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN ZAMBIA

Zambia is grappling with high rates of Child Hunger and Malnutrition. The 2024 State of Food Security and Nutrition World Report (SOFI 2024) highlights severe food insecurity in Zambia, with 5.8 million people projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3 or worse levels by March 2025⁷). This represents a significant increase from the previous year, driven by drought, high food prices, and low crop yields. The report also emphasises the urgent need for increased financing to address hunger and food insecurity.

In the 2024 Global Hunger Index, Zambia ranks 115th out of 127 countries, with a score of 30.7, indicating a serious level of hunger.⁸ Undernutrition remains a pressing concern, particularly for children under five. According to the 2024 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey:

32%
of children under
five are stunted.⁹

3%
are wasted.

**Widespread micronutrient
deficiencies persist among
children.**

Poverty exacerbates these issues. Rural poverty stands at 78.8%, compared to 31.9% in urban areas, resulting in disproportionate impacts on children in rural and peri-urban communities. Of Zambia's 19.7 million people, nearly nine million rural residents live below the poverty line.¹⁰

These statistics are particularly concerning given Zambia's commitments under:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2)
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- The SADC Protocol on Children's Rights
- The Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Commitments

Zambia must ensure every child has access to sufficient, nutritious food daily as a fundamental right.

**ZAMBIA MUST ENSURE EVERY CHILD HAS ACCESS
TO SUFFICIENT, NUTRITIOUS FOOD DAILY AS A
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT.**

SCHOOL FEEDING AS AN INTERVENTION TO END CHILD HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

As part of its efforts to end Child Hunger and Malnutrition and improve learning outcomes, the Ministry of Education in Zambia has planned to expand the school feeding programme. Currently, the school feeding programme benefits over 4.6 million school children across 106 districts. The program, implemented by the School, Health, and Nutrition Directorate, aims to enhance school attendance, improve learning outcomes, and improve the nutritional status of children.¹¹ According to a recent announcement, the Ministry plans to extend the program to all 116 districts by 2026. The School Feeding Programme is also a key component of the government's response to drought and other challenges affecting the education sector.

In the 2025 national budget, the government has allocated K534.4 million to the School Feeding Programme, an increase from K503.9 million. This funding aims to keep learners in school and improve learning outcomes.¹²

⁷FAO Report 2024

⁸GHIR 2024

⁹ZDHS 2024

¹⁰LCMS 2022

¹¹MOE Report 2024

¹²Parliament Report, 2024

In most districts where the school feeding programme is being implemented, the programme has achieved significant successes in increasing enrolments, retention, performance, and completion rates. For instance, in Chipili District, the introduction of the school feeding program led to a 40% increase in school enrollment and attendance.¹³ In this district, the program has facilitated the provision of one cooked meal to each vulnerable child daily, enticing most children to return to school without pressure.

However, despite evidence that school meals improve educational and health outcomes in children, school feeding is primarily extended to children in primary schools, leaving secondary school students out. The oversight exposes adolescents to heightened risks of school dropout, early marriage, and pregnancy. In low-income nations where the need is most acute, only 45% of programmes are funded by national budgets, significantly hampering coverage and quality.¹⁴ Moreover, donor funding cuts for nutrition are worrisome, as this puts pressure on national governments to source funds to support the implementation of the school meals programme.

SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES

The primary assumption of the School Feeding Programme is that education and learning depend on good nutrition. School health and nutrition also play a role in determining factors that keep children out of school and reduce their ability to learn effectively.¹⁵ SFP is designed to achieve the following results.

School meals increase attendance, enrolment, and retention, especially for vulnerable children. Nutrition enhances cognitive development, boosting learning outcomes and national human capital. Zambia faces high rates of child stunting (32%) and micronutrient deficiencies. Regular school meals that are nutrient-dense improve dietary diversity and nutrition among school-aged children. The HGSF model purchases food from local smallholder farmers, enhancing rural incomes and building resilient agricultural value chains. Studies by the World Bank and WFP show a return of up to \$9 for every \$1 invested in school feeding, through improved education, health, and productivity across various sectors, including health, education, social protection, and agriculture.¹⁶ Emphasis on the consumption of locally produced foods catalyses food systems, creates job opportunities, and contributes to livelihoods.¹⁷

The implementation of school meals supports Zambia's commitment to the 8th National Development Plan, Vision 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDGs 1, 2, and 4), as well as the Nutrition for Growth Summit Commitments for 2025. Providing nutritious school meals could help keep children in school and contribute to their health and nutrition wellbeing.

WVZ'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS ENDING CHILD HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

World Vision Zambia launched the Enough campaign in November 2024. The campaign envisions a world where every child has access to enough nutritious food and the opportunity to thrive. The campaign advocates for ensuring the right food for children in crisis, increasing funding for child nutrition, expanding school meals programs, strengthening nutrition policies and services, collecting data on child malnutrition, and regulating food and beverage marketing to children. In line with the campaign mandate, World Vision Zambia has continued to supplement Government efforts by implementing school feeding programmes in selected districts across the country and advocating for the government to increase its investment in school feeding and expand the programme.

During the period 2023-2025, World Vision supported school feeding programmes in 206 schools across Lusaka, Eastern, Central, Southern, and North-Western provinces, benefiting 110,655 learners. WVZ has implemented several other nutrition interventions through its technical programmes to end child hunger and malnutrition.

¹³ ZANIS NEWS 2024

¹⁴ WFP, The State of School Feeding Report, 2022

¹⁵ Save the Children, 2007

¹⁶ WFP, The State of School Feeding worldwide, 2022

¹⁷ Ibid

DURING THE PERIOD 2023 - 2025, WORLD VISION SUPPORTED SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES IN 206 SCHOOLS.

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CHALLENGES AND GAPS

- **Policy Problem:** Despite the expansion, a significant portion—approximately 60% — of eligible learners remain without access to the program due to funding constraints. Limited funding limits program quality, reach, and sustainability.
- **Dependency on External Support:** The program's sustainability is at risk due to its reliance on donor funding, which is not guaranteed in the long term, and the absence of a comprehensive national funding strategy.
- **Infrastructure Constraints:** Inadequate storage facilities, transportation challenges, and a lack of cooking equipment hinder the efficient delivery of meals.
- **Limited menu Diversification:** The school's menu heavily reliant on maize and beans limits dietary diversification.
- **Inactive Production Units in Schools:** One of the significant challenges being faced in most schools.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision Zambia stands alongside children in calling for the following;

1. **Increase National Budget Allocation:** Allocate at least 3% of the national education budget to the School Feeding Programme to ensure comprehensive coverage and sustainability.
2. **Develop a Multi-Year Funding Strategy:** Establish a national funding framework that gradually reduces dependency on external donors and ensures consistent allocation of resources.
3. **Promote climate-smart agriculture and resilient local food production**
4. **Enhance data collection and develop indicators to measure hunger and malnutrition in school-age children to enable targeted and effective interventions.**
5. **Support regular child participation in the production of environmentally friendly, organic, nutritious, and healthy food in school production units (School gardens**
6. **The government should implement its nutrition commitments pledged under the N4G Summit in Paris, France, in March 2025**
7. **The government should ensure that all schools have access to water and WASH facilities for promoting hygiene**
8. **A portion of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) should be committed to enhancing school feeding interventions.**
9. **Promote health and nutrition education, alongside the production training of indigenous, nutrient-dense foods, as integral components of the school meals initiative.**
10. **Ensure joint planning and implementation across the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Health, and Community Development.**
11. **Mobilize Community Involvement:** Provide capacity-building support to school management committees and parent-teacher associations for sustained local ownership.
12. **Support regular child participation in the production of environmentally friendly, organic, nutritious, and healthy food in school production units (School gardens)**
13. **The government should implement its nutrition commitments pledged under the N4G Summit in Paris, France, in March 2025.**
14. **The government should ensure that all schools have access to water and WASH facilities for promoting hygiene.**

CONCLUSION

The paper aims to stimulate a discussion around the school feeding programme and argues that investing in the School Feeding Programme is a strategic move towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of enhancing child education, health, and nutrition. By increasing budgetary allocation and addressing existing challenges, Zambia can ensure that all learners have access to nutritious meals, leading to improved educational outcomes and a healthier future generation. An increase in government funding for school feeding is not only a social protection measure, but also a vital investment in the future. Through nourishing learners today, the nation cultivates a healthier, more educated, and more productive workforce tomorrow. With the free education policy in place, providing school meals would significantly improve child health and learning outcomes, prevent child marriages and child labor, and break the cycle of generational poverty.

CITATIONS AND RESOURCES

1. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO "State of Food Security and Nutrition World Report, 2024
2. Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2024
3. WHO Annual Report 2023
4. Save the Children Report 2024
5. UNICEF Annual Report 2024
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8. Global Hunger Index Report 2024
9. Living Conditions Monitoring Survey 2022
10. Ministry of Education Report 2024
11. Parliament Report 2024
12. ZANIS NEWS 2024
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