



World Vision

SUFICIENTE

Dominican Republic:

**Our meals,
our voice**



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What's this about?

World Vision is leading the *School Meals Child-led Research* initiative, a unique effort that ensures children's voices are at the centre of shaping school meals programmes. Across 13 countries, children took the lead in asking questions, gathering stories, and sharing what matters most to them about school meals. They explored critical root causes, gaps and potential solutions, always through the lens of their lived experiences in schools.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys. The data collected by child researchers was analysed thematically, reflecting the priorities and perspectives of their peers.

In the Dominican Republic, this child-led research is part of World Vision's ENOUGH campaign (SUFICIENTE in Spanish), which amplifies children's voices in national, regional and global advocacy efforts. By listening to children and learning directly from their experiences, this initiative highlights not only the challenges faced by children in the Dominican Republic, but also their aspirations for a future where every child can thrive and enjoy nutritious meals at school.



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Who we are

We are a group of students from the Dominican Republic who wanted to understand how our classmates really feel about the food we eat at school every day. **School meals matter to us - they help us grow, study, and feel good at school. But for a long time, no one really asked us for our opinions.** So, we decided to do this research to share our experiences and ideas.

Seventy-five students, aged 12 to 17, took part in our research. Most were girls, but we heard from boys too. While all the participants were students, many came from vulnerable communities and were invited to take part in this research because of their interest in food, nutrition, and rights - as well as their past experience in similar projects.

This study is part of a wider global initiative led by children and World Vision, but in the Dominican Republic it has been integrated into World Vision's ongoing ENOUGH campaign on food security and nutrition.

Even students from private schools, who don't get school meals, joined in because they care about the experiences of others in their communities.



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What we found

When we asked students to rate their school meals, almost half said the meals were bad and 31% felt the meals were neither good nor bad - just average. Together, that means **78% are not really satisfied with what they eat at lunchtime**. Only a small group said the meals are good or very good.

Some students said the **food is repetitive and boring**. Many talked about poor hygiene, voicing concerns about the plates, cutlery, and even how the food is served. Others said the food just doesn't taste good or look appetising. Some students observed that the meals aren't suitable for everyone, especially for those with food intolerances.

One 12-year-old girl told us that since her school doesn't have a cafeteria, students eat in their classrooms, and the smell stays there all day. Another girl, aged 15, said she doesn't eat any school food because it makes her feel sick. Others mentioned **the portions are small** and sometimes the food combinations don't make sense.

But not everyone had bad things to say. Some students told us that **having a meal every day helps them feel good and fresh**. One 17-year-old boy said there is always something different and tasty on his plate. Another girl, also 17, said her school's food is nutritious, including salad, fruit, lentils, and eggs - and she likes that it doesn't have too much fat or seasoning. Some students feel lucky because they know that for many families, having a school meal every day makes a big difference.



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How the food is served

We didn't just ask about the food itself; we also asked how students feel about how it's served. Over half said the service is good or very good, which is better than how they rated the food. Some said they like how the lines are organised, even if they can feel long and boring. Others said that the way the food is served could be more practical, especially when it comes to handing out fruit.

However, there were also students who told us that sometimes the food arrives late, and that the plates and cutlery are not cleaned well. **Some felt that the way the food is served could be kinder, more respectful, and more careful**, so that everyone feels valued when receiving their meal. Seeing flies on the food was another thing that made some students feel uncomfortable.

Ideas for change

When we asked students how school meals could be improved, the answers were clear. **They want schools to ask for their opinions more often** - like through surveys to find out what they want to eat. Many want the menu to change more often and to include more vegetables and fruits. The food should look nice too, so it feels good to eat.

Students also want the people who prepare and serve the food to care about hygiene and respect. **Kitchens and utensils should be kept clean**, and there should be people who check that everything is done properly.



What we hope for

Not every school or meal is the same, but we believe all students deserve to enjoy meals that help us feel strong and ready to learn. We believe that if our schools listen to our ideas, we can help ensure that every student feels good about what they eat.

It's our health, our school day, and our lives. We want food that helps us to grow, learn, and feel strong. We want food that tastes good, looks good, and is served with care. Most of all, **we want our voices to count.** We hope this research helps adults to understand that when they listen to us, school meals really can change for the better.

Our voice matters. Our school meals matter. Our future matters.

- Child researchers from the Dominican Republic

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For more information about World Vision’s School Meals, visit the [ENOUGH School Meals](#) page.

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CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

World Vision ensured the safe and ethical participation of girls, boys adhering to World Vision’s Safeguarding policy and protocols on data collection and World Vision’s Code of Conduct.

Data collectors were trained on how to conduct interviews in an ethical and safe manner. Children were oriented on the possibility of withdrawing from the interview process at any moment. Informed consent was obtained for all photographs included in this report.



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