



World Vision

ENOUGH

Sri Lanka:

**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 Sri Lanka, this child-led research is part of World Vision's ENOUGH campaign, 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 Sri Lanka, 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 Sri Lanka who wanted to share our views on the food served in our schools. In total, 149 of us took part in this research - 69 primary school students, aged 6 to 10, who receive school meals, and 80 older students, aged 11 to 18, who don't currently benefit from the programme. We used fun and simple tools like smiley faces, rating scales, and open questions to explore what we think about school meals and how they could be improved.

This research is part of a global child-led project that gives students like us a chance to speak up.

We know that what we eat affects our health, our energy, and how well we learn - and we believe our opinions should count.

What we think about school meals

Most of us in primary school said we like our school meals. **The food is warm, filling, and helps us feel ready to learn.** For many children, it's the first and most important meal of the day, especially if there isn't enough food at home. **Some of us said the meals help us feel full and happy, and that eating with friends makes school feel like a welcoming place.**

We also discussed how eating together with classmates brings us closer as friends and makes school feel like a happy place. **Having a meal that is clean and healthy shows us that someone cares.**

But not everything is perfect. Some of us said the meals can be boring or too plain - with the same food served again and again. **A lot of us wished there were a greater selection of tasty options, like rice and different varieties of curries, chickpeas, porridge, and fruits.** We also noticed that the quality and size of the meals can vary from one school to another. Even though we are grateful, we think small changes could make a big difference.

What older students think

Although students in secondary school don't receive government-funded school meals in Sri Lanka, those of us in secondary school still had a lot to say on the topic. **Many of us argued that the school meals programme should be continued for younger students and that it should be extended to older students.**

Some secondary school students come to school without having eaten. School meals are very important because getting a proper meal helps us to stay awake, focus in class, and not feel faint. **For those of us from families who can't afford enough food, a school meal may be the only time we eat well during the day.**

We also said that when children eat well, they get sick less often, attend school more regularly, and do better in their lessons. **We said that when we eat well, it's easier to concentrate, remember things, and feel happier at school.**

But there are problems too. We discussed how **some schools don't have enough space to prepare food**, while others don't have enough staff to cook and serve food or sufficient money to buy ingredients. This means that even children who are supposed to get meals sometimes miss out.

We believe that every child, in primary or secondary school, should get a nutritious meal at school. Not just because it helps us grow, but because it makes school a better place to be.



What we'd like to see change

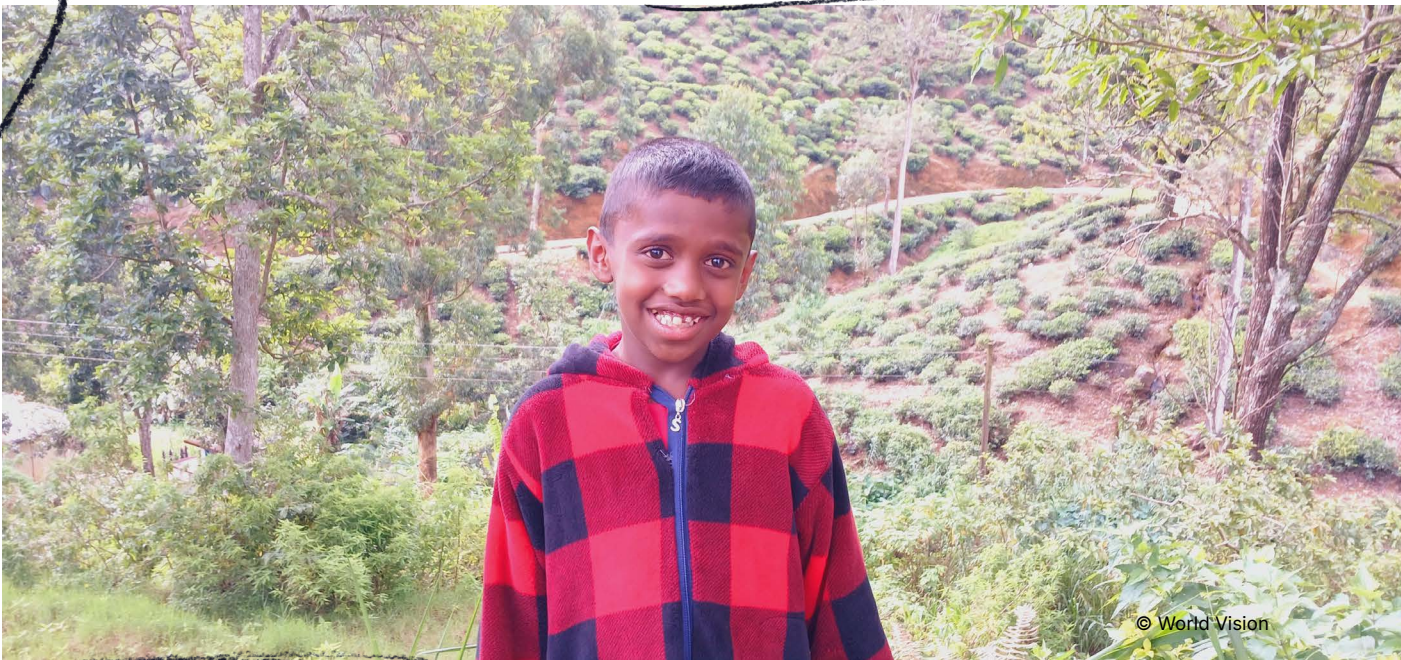
When we discussed our ideas to make things better, we had a lot to say. Some of us in primary school wished for more variety - not just the same food every day, but dishes we know and love from home, with more fruit and vegetables too. **We think meals should be tasty and healthy, and it would be great if children could help choose what's served.**

Older students said they think **school meals should be available to everyone, not just the youngest children.** We all agreed that food does more than satisfy hunger - it supports learning, health, and confidence. **When children eat well, they can focus better, stay in school, and feel included.**

We also talked about the schools themselves. Not all schools have enough space or staff to cook and serve food safely. If school meals are going to help every child, schools need proper support.



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Why school meals matter

We believe school meals should be varied and familiar, with fruit, vegetables, and foods we enjoy. Children should be asked what we like and what helps us feel healthy and happy. We'd also like to learn more about how food helps our bodies and brains grow. Most of all, we believe every child - no matter their age - should get a meal at school, and every school should have the support it needs to make that happen.

Because for us, school meals aren't just food. They mean energy to learn, a fair chance to succeed, and the feeling that someone cares. **We want our schools to be places where every child is supported - and that starts with a good meal.**

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

- Child researchers from Sri Lanka

Acknowledgements

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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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