

CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUNDS (CDF): A LOCALISED STRATEGY TO SCALE-UP SCHOOL FEEDING AND IMPROVE CHILD HEALTH AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1 Executive Summary

Child hunger and malnutrition continue to be urgent issues in many African countries, affecting health and education. Like any other country, Zambia is compounded with high child hunger and malnutrition levels.

As highlighted by the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey Report (2024), about 32% of children under five are stunted, and 3% suffer from wasting.

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Micronutrient deficiencies are also common in children and women of reproductive age. For instance,

28% of children under five are affected by anaemia, while 21% of women of reproductive age are also affected by anaemia.²

Other statistics indicate that

only 22% of children aged 6-23 months meet the minimum dietary diversity requirements.³

A related 2024 report on child food poverty found that

24% of children under five are experiencing severe food poverty, meaning they are fed only two or fewer food groups per day.⁴

Constituency Development Funds (CDF) offer a unique opportunity to allocate resources to local communities, enabling targeted interventions.

This report explores how utilizing CDF can effectively combat child hunger and malnutrition through local school feeding programs, thereby improving both child health and educational outcomes. By drawing on best practices from across Africa, the analysis emphasizes policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and recommendations to maximize impact. The findings highlight that community-led, CDF-supported initiatives can lead to sustainable improvements in child well-being, ultimately fostering broader social and economic development. Malnutrition negatively impacts cognitive and physical development, reduces school attendance, lowers learning outcomes, and imposes long-term costs on health and productivity.

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF), recently strengthened under the 2024 Act, provides a legal, fiscal, and decentralised mechanism for funding community-level development projects.⁵ There is currently under-utilisation, governance challenges, and a lack of targeted applications of CDF toward nutrition and education synergies.⁶

This brief argues that by intentionally directing CDF allocations and improving implementation in nutrition-sensitive education interventions (e.g., school feeding, water, sanitation, hygiene, micronutrient programs), Zambia can substantially improve child health and education outcomes.

¹ ZDHS 2024

² Ibid.,

³ Ibid.,

⁴ UNICEF-Child food poverty: Nutrition Deprivation in early childhood, 2024

⁵ Parliament of Zambia

⁶ Tizambia.org.zm

2|Introduction

Child malnutrition and hunger continue to be major barriers to development in Africa, significantly affecting health, cognitive growth, and education. Malnutrition during early childhood can have lifelong effects, impacting physical development, the immune system, and learning capacity. Despite efforts by governments and development partners, gaps remain, especially in communities where local conditions and needs vary.

Constituency Development Funds (CDF) have become an effective tool for empowering local communities to address their specific challenges. By allowing communities to directly allocate resources, CDF can promote innovative, customized solutions such as school feeding programs, health initiatives, and nutrition education.

This report examines how CDF can be strategically utilized to combat child hunger and malnutrition, supporting improved educational outcomes and health in Zambian communities through a local, participatory approach.

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia was established under the Constitution, operationalised first by CDF Act No. 11 of 2018, replaced by the CDF Act No. 1 of 2024, which aims to decentralise management and strengthen accountability.⁷ CDF committees in each constituency receive proposals (from ward development committees), approve, and implement community-based projects. The government pledged high utilisation: from 19% in 2022 to 86.1% in 2024.⁸

3|Problem Statement

Child hunger and malnutrition are pervasive issues in many African countries, with an estimated;



35%

of children under five experiencing stunted growth due to chronic malnutrition.⁹

These conditions impair cognitive development, weaken immune systems, and increase mortality risk. Inadequate nutrition is also linked to poor school attendance, low concentration, and reduced academic performance.

Existing interventions often face challenges such as limited funding, inefficiencies, and a lack of community involvement. Moreover, national-level programs may not adequately address local needs, highlighting the necessity of localized, community-driven approaches. CDFs, when effectively harnessed, can serve as catalytic tools to fund and sustain targeted solutions such as school feeding programs, health screenings, and nutrition education, directly addressing the roots of child hunger and malnutrition at the community level.

4|Education & Health Implications



Hunger negatively impacts school attendance: children skip school when they are hungry or because their households are food insecure.



Nutrition deficits in early childhood impair cognitive development and learning capacity, leading to lower performance, grade repetition, and drop-out.



School feeding programmes in CHIPILI district saw over **40% increase** in enrollment and attendance after the introduction of meals.¹⁰



National school feeding programmes currently reach millions: **over 4.6 million learners benefit in 106 districts** in 2025 from the programme.¹¹

5|Selected Best Practices of Localised CDF backed School Feeding Programmes in Africa



Kenya's County Wide School Feeding Initiative: Kenya's CDF has facilitated school feeding programs that are community-managed, ensuring local dietary preferences and nutritional needs are considered. These programs have increased school enrollment and retention, especially among girls.

⁷ Parliament of Zambia
⁸ Presidential Delivery Unit, Zambia
⁹ WHO, 2022
¹⁰ ZANIS
¹¹ Open Zambia



Ghana's Community-Driven Nutrition Programs: In Ghana, CDF allocations have supported school-based nutrition education coupled with the provision of locally sourced meals. Communities participate actively in menu planning, procurement, and distribution, fostering ownership and sustainability.



Nigeria's Local Food Sourcing for School Meals: In Nigeria's rural regions, CDF-funded initiatives promote local agriculture by sourcing ingredients from smallholder farmers, creating a cycle of community empowerment, nutrition, and economic development.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED:

- Community involvement enhances program acceptance and sustainability.
- Utilizing local food sources reduces costs and supports local economies.
- Transparent management and monitoring improve accountability.
- Integrating nutrition education amplifies program impact.

6 | Policy Context

African countries have adopted various policies supporting child nutrition and education, but implementation gaps persist. For example:

- National Education Policies often include provisions for school feeding but lack dedicated funding or community-based mechanisms.
- Health and Nutrition Policies emphasize child health but rarely integrate localized funding approaches.
- Legal and Institutional Frameworks governing CDFs vary, with some countries providing clear mandates for community-led development, while others lack explicit provisions for nutrition programs.

Aligning CDF policies with national development plans and ensuring legal frameworks empower local communities to allocate funds effectively is vital. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly;



7 | Rationale, Expected Outcomes, and Impact for Localised Interventions through CDF

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Rationale

Localized interventions via CDF harness community knowledge, foster ownership, and ensure resources address specific local needs. They enable rapid response, flexibility, and accountability, making them ideal for tackling child hunger and malnutrition at the grassroots level.



Expected Outcomes

Increased school enrollment, attendance, and retention, improved nutritional status among children, evidenced by reduced stunting and anaemia rates, enhanced community participation and empowerment, strengthened local capacity to sustain nutrition and health programs.



Impact

These interventions contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty, improving child health and education, and fostering resilient communities. Over time, they can lead to improved socioeconomic outcomes, including higher productivity and reduced healthcare costs.

8|Implementation Considerations

To leverage CDF for better child nutrition and education outcomes, the following options are proposed:

- i. Designate specific budget lines within CDF for nutrition-sensitive education interventions :
 - Earmark portions of CDF allocations for: school feeding; provision of clean water & sanitation at schools; hygiene; micronutrient supplementation; breakfast or snack programmes.

ii. Strengthen local capacity for health/nutrition-education integration:
 - Train members of CDF Committees, Ward Development Committees, and local government officials in nutrition, health, and educational planning.
 - Ensure coordination between ministries (Education, Health, and Local Government) and with community health and nutrition actors.

iii. Improve governance, transparency, and accountability through:
 - Regular public disclosure of CDF budgets and nutrition-oriented project lists at the constituency level.
 - Monitoring and evaluation frameworks with indicators for nutrition, attendance, and learning outcomes.
 - Empower community participation (parents, caregivers) in project selection and oversight.
- iv. Facilitate quicker disbursement & flexible procurement
 - Reduce bureaucratic delays; delegate appropriate decision-making powers to local levels within clear oversight.
 - Where possible, source food locally to support smallholder farmers and ensure relevance of diets; ensure local preferences are considered.

v. Strengthen/expand School Feeding Programmes using CDF
 - Use CDF to complement national school feeding programmes, especially in constituencies with high rates of hunger or malnutrition.
 - Support emergency feeding in drought-affected or food-insecure areas.

vi. Optimise CDF to improve nutrition education and early childhood interventions
 - Early childhood centers (0-5 years) are critical; use CDF to support maternal nutrition, breastfeeding promotion, and caregiver education.
 - Link community health posts and early childhood development (ECD) with schools for integrated services.

9|Policy Recommendations

- Formalize Community-Led Nutrition Initiatives: Develop policies that explicitly recognize and empower CDF-funded local programs.
 - Allocate Dedicated Funds for Child Nutrition: Prioritize school feeding and nutrition programs within CDF budgets based on community needs assessments.
 - Strengthen Capacity Building: Invest in training community leaders and local organizations to manage and evaluate programs effectively.
- Promote Transparency and Accountability: Implement monitoring frameworks and community oversight committees.
 - Foster Multi-sectoral Collaboration: Encourage partnerships among health, education, agriculture, and social services sectors to maximize impact.
 - Support Innovative Approaches: Pilot and scale community-led models that integrate nutrition, education, and livelihood support.

10|Timeframe Recommended Action

Based on the options, the following are recommended for immediate and medium-term actions:

Short term (6-12 months)	Medium term (1-3 years)
<div>Revise CDF Guidelines to include mandatory minimum allocation (% of constituency allocation) for nutrition-sensitive education projects.</div> <div>Pilot in selected high need constituencies (e.g., Southern, Western Provinces) interventions combining school feeding, WASH, micronutrients funded through CDF.</div> <div>Capacity building workshops for CDF committees in nutrition planning, procurement, and tracking. Establish M&E framework with baseline data for child health & educational outcomes in constituencies.</div>	<div>Institutionalise school feeding in all constituencies via CDF where gaps exist.</div> <div>Strengthen intersectoral coordination mechanisms (Education, Health, Local Government) at provincial and national levels to support CDF implementation.</div> <div>Increase transparency: public dashboard of CDF projects, budgets, and outcomes, with specific nutrition indicators.</div> <div>Incentivize local procurement of nutritious foods to both improve diet diversity and support farmers.</div> <div>Secure sustainable financing: ensure that CDF allocations are sufficient and predictable; explore matching funds or co-financing from partners or donors for nutrition components.</div>

11 Expected Impacts

-  Increased school attendance and reduced drop-out rates among children from food-insecure households.
-  Improved learning outcomes due to better attention, cognition, and health.
-  Reduction in stunting, underweight, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies over time.
-  Enhanced equity, especially in rural, remote, or drought-affected areas.
-  Strengthening of local communities' capacity to identify, plan, implement, and monitor interventions.
-  Auxiliary benefits: local economic stimulation via procurement; improved WASH; stronger health services.

12 Barrier Mitigation Strategy

- Political/patronage and misuse of CDF:**
Stronger transparency; community oversight; clear legal penalties for mismanagement; independent audits.
- Low capacity at the local level:**
Training, technical support, simplified procedures, and bringing in nutrition/health experts.
- Unpredictable or insufficient funding:**
Budget planning, binding allocations, aligning with national development plans, and mobilising donor or private-sector support.
- Logistical / procurement issues (e.g., sourcing food):**
Develop local supply chains; flexibility in procurement; planning, especially in lean seasons; and collaborating with the agriculture sector.
- Cultural/dietary preferences:**
Community engagement to ensure diets are culturally appropriate; nutrition education.

13 Policy Implications & Alignment

- These interventions align with Zambia's 8th National Development Plan, Vision 2030, and commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals:
- The 2024 CDF Act provides an improved legal framework to facilitate decentralised funding and clearer accountability.¹¹
- The government's school feeding programme is already in place and expanding; CDF can be a complementary mechanism.¹²



CONCLUSION

Leveraging Constituency Development Funds presents a promising pathway to combat child hunger and malnutrition, as well as improve learning outcomes through localized, community-driven school feeding programs. These initiatives not only improve child health and educational outcomes but also foster social cohesion and economic empowerment at the grassroots level. To realize this potential, policymakers must create enabling environments through clear policies, adequate funding, capacity building, and robust monitoring. Embracing a participatory, localized approach can significantly accelerate progress towards healthier, better-educated children and more resilient communities across the country. With political will, improved oversight, and investment in local capacity, leveraging CDF for nutrition-sensitive education projects could produce significant improvements in child well-being across Zambia.

¹¹ Parliament of Zambia

¹² Africa Press Arabic

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