



# STUDY

to Identify and Analyse Country-Level Experiences  
in Strengthening Food and Nutrition Education within  
the Framework of School Food and  
Nutrition Programmes

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



With technical support from:



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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Study conducted under a Letter of Agreement  
with Humanitas Global Development.  
San Salvador, El Salvador  
[www.humanitasglobal.com](http://www.humanitasglobal.com)

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## BACKGROUND

**Food and Nutrition Education (FNE)** is defined as any “combination of educational strategies implemented at different levels (with individuals, families, schools, communities, and policy levels), whose objectives are to assist individuals in achieving sustainable improvements in their feeding behavior and practices.” It is believed that the **School Food and Nutrition Programmes (SFNPs)** should include FNE in their interventions to

create a long-range impact, and not only provide food assistance.

To support Pillar #3 “Nutritional Well-being” of the **CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security 2025** on Nutrition, FAO, with the collaboration of the Humanitas Global Organization, has identified and reviewed country-level FNE experiences within the SFNP framework.

## OBJETIVE

The objective of the study was to identify and review good and successful practices and programmes that may be expanded/replicated in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

## METHODOLOGY

During the first phase of this study, an on-desk bibliographical analysis by LAC country was done of the experiences at SFNP and FNE levels. An in-depth review was implemented during the second phase to better assess and understand the experiences of countries with active FNE, which may serve as an example for other countries in the LAC region. The countries reviewed included: Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago. In-depth interviews on FNE were conducted with select countries by using a discussion guide, in order to learn about their status on the matter.



A total of  
**31**  
interviews were held at

1

**Government:**  
SFNP central-level  
representatives  
of the Ministries of  
Education.

2

**Department / State:**  
SFNP representatives  
at a state/  
department level.

3

**Community/School:**  
SFNP representatives  
at a school/  
community level.

The third phase of the study, with the objective to prepare recommendations for a public policy that integrates FNE as a fundamental part of SFNPs in LAC was carried out based on the recommendations made by the countries. Recommendations were discussed during three virtual workshops and by on-line consultation to obtain a more detailed feedback.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- The development of a **Policy Framework** that may sustain FNE actions is paramount to establish the legal basis for the compliance with plans and strategies that may respond to each country's reality. This has not been fully generated throughout the region, and therefore, it is a priority for the coming years.
- The incorporation of **FNE into school programmes**. Aspects of FNE such as feeding and hygiene are included in school curricula, but FNE as a core educational subject is not present in most countries in the region. In many cases, FNE is limited to a few knowledge-based lessons per school year.
- **The development of educational materials**. Every country has a certain number of educational material to develop courses, teacher manuals, school activities and/or educational messages. A diversity of materials should be added to these materials, aimed at changing food and hygiene practices that may develop a culture of good nutrition and health from an early age, and to develop a network of young people who will introduce good practices into their homes and communities.
- **FNE cross-cutting advocacy**. The regulation of school vending to provide nutritious and local diversified meals, along with the promotion and implementation of school gardens that may provide life skills training to students.
- **School community participation**. There is participation by the school community consisting of the parents, principals, teachers, community leaders, students, and others. By being involved in training sessions and in FNE activities, the members of the school community become an important resource to strengthen actions within SFNP frameworks, and thus widen the impact of such actions within and outside the scope of the schools.

# BETTER PRACTICES TO REPLICATE

- FNE is most effective when it is implemented by experts working at a local level. Local government leaders and other community leaders at the schools as well as experts in the area can create relevant proposals consistent with the realities at their locations.
- In order to achieve success, it is essential to generate awareness among the stakeholders in charge of implementing the FNE. The generation of efforts by the local sectors can create a deeper involvement in the beliefs and situations at each location, with an even greater impact on the stakeholders' awareness and changes in their feeding practices. Teachers must incorporate FNE into school activities as a cross-cutting element, and not just an annual subject.
- The development of multimedia educational programmes and materials. The use of the media, social networks, and youth spaces for FNE advocacy can generate changes for healthy feeding practices.
- Interinstitutional coordination for FNE advocacy. Coordination between the various public and private sectors creates the bases for the sustainability of these programmes. This coordination should be directed by a national authority such as the Ministry of Education or any other responsible Ministry in order to ensure that all efforts are aligned under a common objective.
- Offer bilingual FNE where native languages are spoken. Access to FNE must be conducted equitably; thus, the use of native languages is required to create awareness among the students and communities throughout the region, and encourage learning and participation in FNE activities and practices within a proper context.
- School vending as a tool to promote FNE. School vending restrictions have spread in the region with the promulgation of laws and regulations that govern and ban processed food items rich in sugar, salt, and saturated fats.
- School gardens with an educational focus. School gardens offer great opportunities for educational actions in various disciplines by instructing students on how to grow and care for a garden, harvest and recognize the nutritional features of vegetables. Some of the objectives of school gardens are to promote an active and comprehensive FNE learning, encourage changes in feeding habits, and complement school meal menus with fresh and nutritious products.

## MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES/NEEDS

- Create an awareness among parents of the importance of FNE, so they may understand how crucial healthy feeding is, identify harmful food, and promote healthy feeding habits among children.
- Create an awareness of FNE among teachers. Teachers must be trained to make FNE a cross-cutting feature in teaching and generate a greater impact among the student population.
- Develop an effective interinstitutional coordination by means of a coordinating entity. Both public as well as private organizations require an effective coordination of their common objectives, conducted by an institution that provides leadership and manages their efforts.
- Monitoring and assessment. There are no consistent indicators in the region to assess the effectiveness of FNE efforts. In addition to a methodology and indicators to guide these efforts, human and financial resources are required, as well as technical training to monitor and assess interventions for the purpose of improving processes and their impact.
- Provide financing for the FNE component. Financing is required to develop policies, plans, and strategies in order to conduct activities, provide materials and human resources, and assess the impact achieved with FNE policies.

### FNE POLICY OBJECTIVE ON SFNPs

Strengthen the impact of food and nutrition education to improve healthy feeding practices among students.



## PILLARS

Strategic pillars include actions promoting FNE at all schooling spaces, as a political framework that will allow regulation, implementation, and assessment of FNE.

### 1. Political framework

Provide an FNE political framework for the SFNPs to support their incorporation and development at educational centers. In order to put it into actual practice, this policy must be specific enough and be accompanied with information on its methodology, implementing actions, and technical assistance.

#### Actions

- Create an institutional coordination of all FNE actions at a national level.
- Define actions, establish policies as a requirement, and make them specific enough to allow their application.
- All social sectors must participate in their formulation.
- Conduct **advocacy** among decision-makers (ministries, the private sector, principals, teachers, parents, etc.) to implement the policies with actions to promote good food.
- Strengthen **the technical skills on nutrition, medical, nursing, agronomy, etc.** of the institutions in charge of public health, education,

and agricultural areas, as well as of universities, in order to establish uniform criteria and terminology.

### 2. FNE as a cross-cutting element in school courses

FNE actions must be incorporated into all school courses and activities. Not only should there be a number of courses provided, but be accompanied as well with complementary activities such as school gardens and extracurricular activities.

#### Actions

- Require the inclusion of FNE content in school courses by incorporating principles on good feeding practices from the Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs), and teaching strategies based on evidence and practice.
- Integrate FNE comprehensively into school courses, beyond physical education and student health.
- Specify the number of FNE modules or contact hours. Our recommendation is of 50 hours per year to achieve a change in

feeding habits. In the event this is not possible, at least 10 FNE hours should be provided to support learning.<sup>1</sup>

- Establish that the FNE content must be participatory, that lessons must encourage learning on the basis of experiences (such as menu planning, food preparation, school garden work, etc.).
- Generate attractive educational materials about the objective that catch the eye of the public clearly and effectively, and also make good use of the media. Include the use of traditional and local foods as nutritional alternatives.

### 3. Participation of the educational community

Spaces should be generated in order to involve the school community in the decision-making, policy implementation and assessment. This will generate community commitment, and allow for the sustainability and cross-cutting of actions.

#### Actions

- The participation of the school stakeholders (principals, teachers, male and female students, parents, local producer organizations, community leaders and local governments, etc.) should occur starting with policy formulation and on, with an active participation in decision-making.

1. California Department of Education. 2011. Nutrition Education Resource Guide – Section III: Guidance on Implementing a Quality Nutrition Education Programme.

- Strengthen interinstitutional partnerships at a municipal level, with universities, NGOs, UN organizations, local governments, communities, and the private sector.

### 4. Training the school community.

Training the school community does not only consist of introducing course hours/training of teachers and students; it also involves creating an awareness of the entire school personnel, such as the administrative staff, kitchen crews, etc. In order to generate changes among family members, they must be made aware and trained about FNE.

#### Actions

- Require FNE training of the entire school personnel, at least 10 hours a year.<sup>2</sup>
- Generate spaces for awareness and training of the extended educational community, school field trips, and extracurricular activities.
- Develop opportunities for the active participation of parents and other school stakeholders in school activities with food shows, the participation in school cafeterias, etc

2. California Department of Education. 2011. Nutrition Education Resource Guide – Section III: Guidance on Implementing a Quality Nutrition Education Programme.



## 5. Monitoring and assessment

Constant assessments are required to measure programme impact and effectiveness.

### Actions

- Define monitoring and indicators for medium and long-range assessments.
- Define an annual specific budget for policy monitoring and assessment.
- Provide human and financial resources to follow up on policy compliance.
- Assess the cost-benefit impact of the policy and implementation actions.

## 6. Spaces for the preparation of healthy foods

Spaces for the preparation of foods that may generate FNE actions, considering all models (centralized, decentralized, etc.) must occur in a healthy environment.

### Actions

- Ensure adequate preparation spaces in compliance with basic hygiene and food handling regulations.
- Involve the school community in the selection and preparation of menus with the support of nutritionists from the area, or with food preparation manuals.
- Train cooks and food handlers in good preparation, hygiene, and food handling practices, in addition to FNE.
- Consume locally-grown products and use healthy traditional recipes.
- Ensure the supply of materials and utensils to prepare, cook, and serve foods.

## CONCLUSION

An effective FNE policy requires that a communication agenda, an implementation methodology, and technical support be provided to central as well as local governments. Its adoption and activation also require that an item be allocated for it in the public budget. Civil society and the school community must adequately communicate, advocate, and share findings according to the legal procedures and frameworks within parliaments, ministries, and local governments.

There is sufficient FNE evidence and experience that allows the design of effective policies to eradicate hunger and malnutrition by the year 2030, according to sustainable development goals. It has been shown that food education and early interventions are essential to develop healthy food habits permanently. In this regard, schools play a determining role in acquiring healthy food habits by changing the current heavy load of malnutrition, overweight, and obesity, and advocating a sensible culture and environment for good food, nutrition, and health.











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