

**Nutrition  
education in  
primary schools**

*Nutrition education has been recognized as an essential element in the prevention and control of diet-related problems. Schoolchildren are a priority group because an appropriate diet is crucial to their healthy physical and mental development. They are present and future consumers, and they constitute an important link between the school and the home and with the community at large.*

*FAO and the Netherlands Nutrition Centre prepared a questionnaire which was sent to 55 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Near East. Eighty replies were received from 50 countries, from ministries of education and health, universities and national programmes and non-governmental organizations involved in nutrition education.*

*Countries with nutrition education policies reported these as part of their general education and health policies; nutrition was not a mandatory school subject assigned a specific time or structure. The methods normally employed in primary schools that teach nutrition are conventional lessons with explanations and group activities or discussions. Less than one-third of the countries use nutrition guides and recommendations in primary-school nutrition education. Perhaps the most critical finding was the lack of teacher training in nutrition education. Less than half the Latin American and Asian countries reported the inclusion of nutrition in teacher training. The situation was better in the Caribbean, Africa and the Near East.*

*The constraints and problems of getting schools to encourage children and their families to adopt healthy eating habits and lifestyles continue as before. Greater efforts are needed if children are to decide for themselves to adopt healthy eating habits. Policy-maker support for related teacher training, through systematic programmes with sufficient coverage and continuity, and the inclusion of nutrition in school curricula, with allotment of adequate time and a focus on tangible results rather than just increased awareness, are needed more than ever to deal with existing nutrition problems and to prevent chronic diet-related diseases, which are becoming increasingly common as a result of new lifestyles and eating habits. Education represents the best strategy for overcoming these problems.*