



21 August 2013

**International and Multi-Sector Seminar on Sustainable
School Meal Programs for Latin America and the Caribbean
Message from the FAO Director-General José Graziano da
Silva**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting brings together the consensus view of those who know that the fight against hunger is not a problem only of the hungry.

Especially when it comes to child undernutrition, it is a problem of society as a whole, and one of the greatest public health challenges in developing countries.

Over 25% of all children under the age of five are stunted and undernourished, and have a much greater risk of dying at an early age. But that is not all. The damage caused by malnutrition to the human body, if not avoided in time, can cause intergenerational transmission of poverty. Furthermore, we know that increasing student achievement in schools and teaching healthy eating habits are linked to the supply of adequate food during the school day.

Facing this challenge costs very little compared to the benefits, which are immense.

A Government that has a narrow fiscal space will not regret making children's food security a priority.



One of the first measures adopted by Lula's Government in 2003, under the then nascent Zero Hunger Programme, was to update the value of resources transferred to school feeding which had not been adjusted for years, even in the context of rampant inflation.

It seemed of minor importance compared to the country's challenges. But it was not.

Today, Brazil has one of the largest school feeding programmes in the world, ensuring daily coverage of 45 million children and adolescents.

With an important peculiarity.

Since 2009, a national law requires that at least 30% of the budget allocated by the national government to departments and municipalities for school feeding be used to purchase products directly from family or peasant-based agriculture. In 2012, the budget accounted for approximately 1.5 billion U.S. dollars.

In this way, the programme was able to incorporate eggs, milk, fruit and vegetables produced and harvested by family and small-scale farmers, near the schools they will help feed.

It's a triple win solution.

First, it ensures the quality of the food offered to students in public institutions, and encourages the consumption of fresh and healthy food.

Second, it opens a new market and the possibility of increased income for family farmers.

And third, it promotes local development.

The success of this policy has aroused the interest of other countries.

Through technical cooperation between FAO and the National Fund for the Development of Education of the Ministry of Education of Brazil and with the support of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, it has been possible to share Brazil's technical knowledge and experience with the various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.



I would like to add that, last week, FAO and the Government of Brazil signed an agreement to bring the family farming - school feeding link also to Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in this seminar you will see an overview of the school feeding system in 8 Latin American countries, covering 15 million children who receive school meals.

This is our starting point. We will discuss the challenges of the current situation and how to strengthen school feeding programmes and exploit the potential that lies in linking them to family farming.

One thing is clear: we do not start from scratch. The countries of the region have demonstrated a political commitment to food security and to the Hunger-free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 Initiative.

The effort has already shown results. Between 1990 and 2012, undernutrition in the region has dropped from 14.6% to 8.3%.

The social policy which involves transferring incomes and promoting family farming, absent in previous crises, has helped cushion the impact of the international economic crisis in our countries since 2008.

We have made progress, but there is still much to do: hunger continues to afflict 49 million men, women and children in the region.

Investing in child food security will help reverse this trend and make social justice one of our main achievements as a region.

I wish you success in this seminar. Thank you.