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**PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS FOR HEALTHY DIETS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: THE KEY ROLE OF SCHOOL FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMMES**

**EFAD - ESDN PH answers to the questions provided in the consultation**

**1. Food security and nutrition policies and governance**

* 1. **What are necessary elements for school food and nutrition programmes to be well aligned with and integrated into national policies relevant to food security and nutrition?**

School food and nutrition programmes provide an excellent opportunity to be included in national polices which address food security – the access and equitable availability of safe and healthy foods which contribute to a balanced diet today, tomorrow and for many years to come. Important elements may include;

* Making children aware of how food is produced – the ‘farm to fork’ journey. This may include school gardens – growing food that is then used on the school menu or provided to local luncheon clubs for older people. Using locally grown/produced foods which contribute to a healthy balanced diet.
* Making children aware of how food waste may be contributing to C02 emissions and thus to climate change and how reducing food waste and be incorporated into healthy eating messages/cook and eat sessions. And of course the packaging associated with processed foods may also contribute and thus the value of having fewer processed foods to contribute to both healthy eating and food security.
* School food and nutrition programmes must be aligned with the basic principles of generating healthy food environments is the community, the workplace, etc., so that all the actions of national policies to promote healthy habits are coherent with each other.
	1. **How to make school food and nutrition programmes more cultural- and context-specific in order to guarantee country ownership and sustainability?**
* Given that food choices do have cultural origins, as part of children’s learning of nutritional awareness there is a great opportunity to get children to consider the cultural origins of food choices as part of the school food and nutrition programme. This could be incorporated into the above alignment too.
* Eating pattern and traditional gastronomy need to be reflected in the school food and nutrition programmes, since culture It is linked to the people and the way of understanding food and the use of its natural resources
	1. **What elements should be included in an efficient coordination mechanism for school food and nutrition programmes with other sectors’ policies?**
* The providers of school meals, the parents and extended family, the students and the teacher/school governors are all key partners in the school food and nutrition programme.
* Other sectors could include local food producers/farmers who could support children’s learning of the ‘farm to fork’ journey; the local producers who provide food to the school; local voluntary organisations who may help with some of the extracurricular school growing or cook and eat activities.
	1. **What methodologies, guidelines and tools are needed to support decision makers for better design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of school food and nutrition policies and programmes?**
	2. **What are the most effective ways of increasing the participation of civil society, private sector and academia in the policy dialogue with the public sector for contributing to healthy food system-oriented actions?**
	3. **What should be improve in local food procurement policies in terms of collaboration with local producers and processors to provide healthy foods to schools?  On the other hand, what mandatory or voluntary regulations on unhealthy foods (imported/locally produced) are needed to restrict their commercialization?**

One the methodologies used in public policy analysis is the “policy cycle” consisting of: 1) Construction of policy agenda, 2) policy formulation, 3) decision-making process, 4) policy implementation and 5) policy evaluation

Promoting healthy eating at school is not only a matter of nutritional knowledge. This is an area which involves many partners at different levels of society. Cross-sector partnership is essential in developing policies and programmes for food and nutrition in schools (i.e. through processes of cooperation, coordination or integration)

It’s essential to facilitate collaboration among European, national and local agencies and departments and seek alignment of policies and programmes that impact the school food service across multiple divisions and administrative levels.

However, school food policies and programmes should be modelled on the local situation basis, with its social, political and human peculiarities to assume a specific identity.

All actors involved in the school food service should be heard and involved synergistically with academic and scientific resources to achieve innovation performance within the interweaving of giving and receiving, to translate the policy role in a broad way to meet not only children’s needs but also the needs of other stakeholders involved in food system.

School is a place with educational aim; a place to learn and grow. It’s also a meeting-place and a listening-place where it is possible to aggregate to overcome inequalities and promote sustainable food policies. These approaches should be coordinated by formal structures and mechanisms of governments and should be explicitly linked to structural and long term governmental policies and agendas.

The success of policy implementation is determined by links between different at the local level. Collaborations between farmers and school food service can have multiple benefits, from the provision of seasonal and regional foods to field experiences that allow children and teens to learn more about food production, sustainability and ecological issues. Farmers can benefit by stimulating new market opportunities and also by helping children to understand the role of agriculture in society.

A written policy document should be produced based on a situational analysis specific to the context and agreed upon by all the different stakeholders involved. Moreover, it’s fundamental to develop or improve multi-sectoral information systems for policy development and accountability by enhancing the availability, quality, quantity, coverage and management and exchange of data related to school food programmes, including both formal (quantitative and qualitative) data collection and data generated by civil society and other partners.

Policies should consider reducing the exposure of school children to unhealthy foods. Thus, the adoption of mandatory measures should be considered, for example regarding food availability in canteens and vending machines or food and beverage marketing to children. These measures should be introduced alongside other settings.

Since the food choices don't depend solely on the will of the citizen, the food and nutrition policies should be able to establish a compromise between strategies promoting the empowerment of citizens for healthy food choices and promoting thus the autonomy of individuals, in which the participation of public health dietitians is key.

1. **Awareness, Advocacy and School-based food and nutrition education (SFNE):**
	1. **How can local food culture and habits be better integrated into nutrition education to foster adoption of healthy and culturally adequate diets?**
* Traditionally nutrition teaching is geared towards helping both vulnerable adults and children meet their dietary recommendations. Dietary recommendations are typically given in terms of ideal nutrient profiles for diets and often neglect cultural, emotional and social dimensions of food and eating. A step to better integrating local food culture and habits into nutrition education is that cultural, emotional and social dimensions of food and eating are given more value in dietary guidelines. Specifically, they would raise awareness of the role of nutrition education in embedding or challenging narratives of globalisation and neoliberalism. This means that dietary guidelines are concerned not only with nutrient profile but also with social justice, food procurement, food growing and production, cooking, eating behaviours and attitudes, planetary stewardship and reducing health inequalities.
* Traditional nutrition education relies on a model of cognitive restraint. This has several shortfalls as a teaching tool. For example, it was not designed to accommodate attention to local food culture and habits or be responsive to family’s overall health, including the impact of trauma and food poverty.
* A model that embraces the cognitive and also links somatic and social/symbolic aspects of eating through practical attention to (trauma-informed) self-care is designed to integrate local food culture and habits. This model is known as connected eating; it recognises that food and eating serve many roles and meet many needs and provides a theoretical framework that bridges personal behaviour, social factors and health equity.
* Integration of recommendations of local and proximity products in the meals that are provided to schools. Also the recommendation that the meals served be in accordance with the culture and the traditional gastronomy that want to be promote in the different regions.
	1. **What should be done to foster healthier food environments contributing to the prevention of malnutrition, including overweight, of schoolchildren?**
* Good nutrition provides the basis for all children to fulfill their optimal growth and development (physical and cognitive). Good nutrition provides the scaffolding which enables all children to fulfill their potential in life. Healthier food environments improve the access to good nutrition enabling healthier food choices to be the easier options. Healthier food environments should recognize and work to address health inequalities given the strong associations between low socioeconomic status and childhood obesity prevalence.
* Healthier food environments pay attention to all aspects of eating for wellbeing. This extends beyond the material role of food in providing nutrients to include the (relational) role that food and eating have in constructing values and in meeting social, psychological, cultural, religious and other needs. Healthier food environments encourage attitudes and practices that foster self-worth and self-care in children of all shapes and sizes.
* Traditional nutrition education focuses on teaching nutrient profile within a reductionist paradigm. This is prone to overlook relational aspects of food and eating. It also typically emphasizes cognitive learning at the expense of context (culture and family circumstances) and emotional and somatic learning. When it uses the metaphor of ‘the body as a calorie burning machine’, and medicalizes body size, it may also inadvertently contribute to size bias and body shame, with detrimental impact on children’s personal wellbeing, and on health equity. The Academy for Eating Disorders has produced guidelines for school-and community-based interventions addressing rising weights in youth to minimize any harm that may result.
* Healthier food environments help children learn to eat in ways that support the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of all children (and adults). This is achieved by nutrition education that integrates nutrition science with pertinent cultural factors and strengthens children’s body awareness. Age-appropriate attention to teaching media literacy, and exploring size discrimination, and social determinants of health are recommended.
* Healthier food environments recognize the role that adverse childhood events (ACEs) and oppression can have on all aspects of children’s wellbeing, including specific impact on eating.
* Making efforts so that school food and health programs reach families, training them in healthy eating, because in the end they are the ones that create the environment that most influences eating habits.
* Having updating and training programs for teachers and staff of educational centers (technicians, assistants, caregivers, etc.) in healthy and sustainable eating.
	1. **In terms of advocacy and awareness raising, what kind of mechanism and tools should be used to better inform potential beneficiaries (e.g. parents, school students, teachers, local communities, etc.) and stakeholders about the national programmes, grants and innovations related to school nutrition?**
* Public health nutrition is all about raising awareness at both a national and local level by including all key partners. Ideally this should include public engagement to determine the views of the students, parents and teachers – what methods do they feel are going to increase their awareness of national programmes and what interventions do they feel would help to improve school nutrition? There needs to be a sense of ownership by the recipients with a clear understanding of what the benefits are to them and how small and realistic changes can make a big difference.
* Health technology provides a platform to raise awareness of key nutritional messages and is accessed by people across all socioeconomic groups so provides an opportunity to address health inequalities. However it is important that healthcare professionals are included in the development of these resources to ensure that nutritional messages are up-to-date and consistent. Monitoring of access to this technology must be implemented in order to detect barrier in low income and educational groups.
* More use of arts-based participatory interventions for advocacy and awareness raining, especially for reaching people marginalized or excluded when conventional methods are used.
	1. **How can the governmental bodies and other stakeholders raise the priority of SFNE in the school system and enhance the programmes’ impact on children’s food-related practices (e. g. funding, hours dedicated, investing in capacity development of teachers, quality control, support by parents, communities and the private sector)?**
* Building a subject on food and nutrition into the curriculum – knowledge transfer on different levels to nursery-, elemntary- and secondary school-aged kids
* Investing in the capacity and knowledge development of teachers who are responsible for knowledge transfer
* Investing in hiring dietitians/nutritionist through the national dietetic associations for keeping the lessons
* Investing in not just educating, but activating kids as part of SFNE programes, so that they could build in the knowledge into their everyday life
* Funding researches for studying the impact of the education programs and making necessary changes in case of inefficient intervention
* Extending education with parents’ inolvement
* Supporting community programes, targeting obesity prevention and health promotion, like EPODE, Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Action (JANPA)
	1. **In which part of the school activities (e.g. science or health classes; school food procurement system, extracurricular activities such as school gardening) should a systemic learning approach be introduced to better support the adoption and practice of healthy diets?**
* Systematic learning approach should be introduced primarily into the curriculum, as part of a dedicated class.
* It should be associated with a public catering- and buffet regulation, which follows the dietary recommendations, given theoretically to kids.
* Other extracurricular activities, like gardening, cooking, sport and health events could further involve kids in the practical implementation of the transferred knowledg.
* The school canteen should be seen as an opportunity to learn about healthy habits: posters, short sessions, training staff in how to manage certain behaviors, etc.
	1. **What are effective ways to ensure the implementation and evaluation of school food and nutrition standards (school meals based on dietary guidelines, canteens, vendors, vending machines, etc)?**
* The implementation of school food policy can be the most effective if it is issued in form of law/directive
* The evaluation can be done by a monitoring committee, involving dietitians/ nutritional professionals
1. **Role of private sector in supplying healthy and diversified nutritious foods**:
	1. **How can the private sector be further encouraged to meet food safety and quality requirements and the demand for healthy foods arising from schools?**
	2. **What actions are needed to integrate small-scale producers better into school food and nutrition programmes in order to supply locally produced healthy foods?**
	3. **What should be done to make the private sector (agricultural producers, processors and traders) consider schools as an attractive market and to feel more responsible for supplying safe and nutritious food to schools (e.g. reliable information, efficient coordination, friendly payment mechanism, adequate regulations, reasonable assurance, tax advantages, others)?**

What we need most urgently is an informed debate: the discourse of civil society must reach a certain level, in order to legitimize politicians to act, to make the decisions that are still too difficult at the moment - to legislate, taxing production, consumption and food markets on a global scale certain types of food, or even requiring the private sector to restrict what it puts up for sale in supermarkets (in this topic, we can draw a parallel with smoking). This informed debate should lead to the follow considerations:

* Understand food consumption as being strongly influenced by the various sectors of the State (in particular by the health sector and its professionals), private sector and civil, and social, economic and cultural factors;
* Implement integrated and inter-sectorial actions through the development of common initiatives, advocating the principle of "health in all policies";
* Consider combating social inequalities in access a healthy diet and health as a great current challenge;
* Include the human rights approach, in particular the human right to food in the implementation of this policy;
* Understand the promotion of healthy eating as a concerted set of measures which aim to capacity of citizens to adopt food practices and, on the other hand, the creation of favourable practice of healthy eating; and
* Design a medium and long-term strategy capable of generate consensus and that can be evaluated throughout its implementation.

Whole-of-society and whole-of-government responsibilities for health will be driven by a high degree of political commitment, enlightened public administration and societal support, with the aim of including, where appropriate, health in all policies, sectors and settings. By engaging the private sector, communities and individuals, the whole-of-society approach increases the resilience of communities to withstand threats to their health, security and well-being.

As the processor and distributor of food to the majority of the world’s population, the private sector can play an important role in nutrition through the development and marketing of nutritious products and services, but evidence gaps may limit their ability and willingness to invest in nutritious products and services. The creation of a business platform for nutrition research based on multi-stakeholder partnerships between companies, education, donors and civil society, may bridge gaps in the evidence base, which remain to methods for delivery of and effectiveness of nutrition interventions, and optimal combinations of nutrition interventions to improve health outcomes and optimize use of scarce resources, because where resources are limited, projects must be cost effective. Thus, there are potential benefits of such a business platform for nutrition research based on public-private partnerships:

* Identification and commissioning of pre-competitive research that addresses evidence gaps relevant to stimulate greater business investment in nutritious products and services - work with partners to translate and facilitate uptake of results.
* Increase investment in nutrition - as core to business; industry undertakes research that contributes to evidence-based practice; industry would benefit from having access to the dietitians’ work; industry employs dietitians, so has an interest in their education and training.
* Promoting collective impact in nutrition research - research conducted by independent best in class researchers & institutions; research results published in public domain and translated by government and others, especially its implications for private and public sectors; research shared with public via an online platform; results provided to key actors in developing countries (policy makers, researchers, etc.).
* Improved relevance - multi-stakeholder involvement; industry has the knowledge, ability and resources to disseminate information to large groups of people, which can be useful to increase dissemination of nutritional health messages
* Increased academic standards – high, projects must be research-based and evaluated.
* Neutrality - independent programming; systematic peer-review; sectoral and geographic diversity; transparency in the decision-making process.

The real advantages can be financial, strategic and political.However, there must be some conditions of collective impact in focused partnership in nutrition:

* Common Agenda - all participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it.
* Shared Measurement - collecting data and measuring results consistently ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
* Mutually Reinforcing Activities - participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
* Continuous Communication - consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust and assure mutual objectives and motivations.
* Backbone Support - creating and managing collective impact requires an organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative.
* Ethical Responsibilities - need for critical reflection to meet ethical responsibilities.

If stakeholders play a key role in the success of a project and have the power to make the healthier choice the easier choice (the way to empower health equality), the public health dietitian plays a leading role in the process, being an irreplaceable element. Also, the results of such projects should be available to the general public so that public money benefits the public and not the private companies and research institutes. Public health dietitians should always be involved in the advisory board, where they can make an important contribution with regard to the practical implications of healthy eating (e.g. food reformulation on salt and sugar), and in developing national policies focused on the pricing and/or taxation of specific nutrients, that may impact health in a negative way.