

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia 12-15 July 2021

Background Note

Session 8

Case study for Regional Priority 4: Connecting school food and nutrition programmes with local food systems

1. Introduction

Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition is embedded as an overarching priority in the three FAO Regional Initiatives in Europe and Central Asia. The areas of focus include mainstreaming food security and nutrition across sectors, influencing consumers' desire for healthy diets, increasing evidence and data on food supply, and promoting the Urban Food Agenda. These are fully in line with the action areas identified in the Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition, which was endorsed in May 2021.¹ Related goals also are set by the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit as action tracks; these include Action Track 1 (ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all) and Action Track 2 (shift to sustainable consumption patterns).

Countries in the ECA region are building on the progress made since 1990 in sharply improving food and nutrition security. Between 1990 and 2015, all but one of the five Central Asian countries succeeded in reducing the prevalence of undernourishment by half, thereby achieving Millennium Development Goal 1c. In most countries of the ECA region, national governments continue to recognize food and nutrition security as one of the key priorities in their national development strategies and policies.

The nature of food and nutrition security has been changing gradually as countries of the ECA region have experienced dynamic changes in the main elements of food systems – particularly food supply chains, food environments, individual factors and consumer behaviour. Changes in food consumption patterns have been driven by an increased variety of food available in markets, rapid urbanization and increased disposable incomes, especially in countries where economic growth has been faster.² This transition indicates the rise of new types of challenges to food and nutrition security in the region.

Despite the rapid changes taking place in diet and nutrition, solutions to these issues have largely been considered a health sector problem. National strategies were developed separately for food security, nutrition and health, including for diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in most countries in Central Asia. Strategies and policies to address malnutrition and NCDs tend to disregard the roles of agriculture and food-related sectors in addressing malnutrition, while food availability and food self-sufficiency are typical priorities in national food security policies. It is important to respond to nutrition

¹ FAO. 2021. Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition. Programme Committee Hundred and Thirtieth Session, 22–26 March 2021. <http://www.fao.org/3/ne853en/ne853en.pdf>

² FAO's food balance sheet data show that the availability of macronutrients, particularly proteins and fats, has sharply increased, in line with economic growth. For more, see: FAO. 2017. Europe and Central Asia Regional Overview of Food Insecurity. Rome, FAO. 56 pp. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i6877e/i6877e.pdf>)

transition from a range of sectors and programmes, including food security, agriculture, food and nutrition education, school meal programmes, public health, climate change and the environment.

FAO has piloted innovative models of school meal programmes that link with local food systems in Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Albania, a project has been launched to increase milk production and access to processors among more than 900 smallholder farmers, while supporting schools in food and nutrition education. In Kyrgyzstan, a Logistic Centre was established to link schools and small agricultural producers. This aimed to improve the nutrition of school meals and raise incomes for small farmers and the rural economy of the pilot district. In Tajikistan and Armenia, backyard greenhouses were established to diversify schoolchildren's diets and provide food and nutrition education. School meal programmes are recognized as a key platform to deliver nutrition-sensitive social protection to children and their families.



Source: FAO School Food and Nutrition Framework <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4091en/ca4091en.pdf>

2. Country case study: “School food and nutrition programme linked to the agricultural sector” in Kyrgyzstan

Problem analysis

Kyrgyzstan is one of the 18 countries in the world that have achieved both Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target 1C to halve the proportion of hungry people and the more stringent World Food Summit (WFS) goal.³ While significant achievements were made in the reduction of undernutrition, Kyrgyzstan experienced a gradual rise in obesity and a persistent prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies, which were associated with dietary quality. In order to address emerging nutritional challenges, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has adopted a number of national strategies and programs for food security and nutrition, such as National Food Security and Nutrition Programme (2017–), the Programme for Development of Agro-Industrial Complex and the Major School Feeding Development Directions.

In Kyrgyzstan, the national school meal programme was launched in 2006 to ensure all primary school children receive state-funded meals in schools. Initially, school meals largely consisted of black tea and a

³ FAO. 2013. 38 countries meet anti-hunger targets for 2015. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* [online]. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/177728/icode/>

bun or sweets, bringing no major nutritional value to children. In 2014, the Government of Kyrgyzstan endorsed a new school meals policy to improve the diversity and quality of the food provided by the school meals programme. Under the new policy, the government improved the facilities for school meals, procurement systems and management capacities, resulting in improved diversity of school menus.

However, challenges remained in insufficient links between school meal programmes and local agrifood systems, preventing the consumption of locally produced diverse and nutritious foods by children. Local producers and processors were facing seasonal income variations, while there is a demand for year-round supply of diverse food to local schools. Local stakeholders generally lacked knowledge and experience in local procurement for school meal programmes. In addition, as a recent study on the food environment in Kyrgyzstan showed, children are highly susceptible to unhealthy food environments.⁴ It is critical to improve children's access to healthy diets.

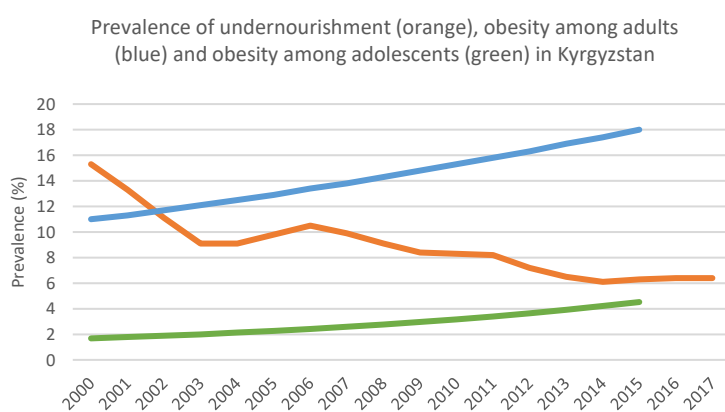


Figure 2. ‘Nutrition transition’ in Kyrgyzstan

While significant achievements were made in the reduction of undernutrition, Kyrgyzstan experienced a gradual rise in obesity among adults and adolescents. The prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies is also persistent among women.

Approach

When food for school meals are provided by local smallholders, school meal programmes can broaden their benefits to the local economy by providing structured demand, stable markets and income opportunities.^{5,6} Therefore, school meals programmes that create synergies between the food available in schools and local food system initiatives can contribute to multiple SDGs, including no poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health (SDG 3), decent work and growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). Food procurement from local smallholders also is one of the prominent recommendations resulting from the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2).⁷

In 2016, under the project “Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia,” funded by the Russian Federation, FAO and the Government of Kyrgyzstan piloted a project to link school meal programmes to the local agrifood sector. The project aimed to supply rural schools with locally produced fresh agricultural produce. School food and nutrition programmes can be effective tools to reach nutritionally vulnerable populations, and they have the potential

⁴ WHO Europe. 2017. FEEDCities project: The food environment description in cities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan. Technical report. 36 pp. (also available at https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/353001/FEED-TJK-report.pdf)

⁵ Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (GLOPAN). 2015. *Healthy meals in schools: policy innovations linking agriculture, food systems and nutrition*. Policy Brief. London.

⁶ FAO & WFP. 2018. *Home-grown school feeding: Resource framework*. Technical Document. Rome.

⁷ FAO & WHO. 2014. *Second International Conference on Nutrition – Framework for Action*. Rome.

to address the causes of malnutrition. By adopting a food systems perspective, school food programmes can contribute to long-term gains in nutrition and broader rural development by encouraging the involvement of local producers and processors.

FAO selected the Kemin District of Chuy Province for piloting school meals sourced locally from smallholders. The district is located in highland areas of north-eastern Kyrgyzstan, where agriculture is the major source of livelihoods. In 2018, a Logistic Centre was established to improve the supply of diverse and nutritious food from local agricultural producers to schools in the district attended by children aged 6–12. The Centre had capacity for quality control of 250 tonnes in a total warehouse area of 270 square metres. It was furnished with equipment for cool storage, a laboratory, tools, and a truck with a thermobox for transporting agricultural products to schools.

During 2017 and 2018, technical assistance also was provided in conducting a feasibility study and providing trainings to the Centre staff. The District Sanitarian Epidemiological Station conducted laboratory tests of crop products (bacteriological and chemical tests). The project developed guidelines with methodical recommendations on setting up and organizing the central supply system of agricultural products. The project supported the Logistic Centre in enhancing networks among farmers, schools and other partners and ensuring food procurement through state tenders and food delivery to schools. An economic analysis was conducted on the cost efficiency of the Logistic Centre. A system for monitoring and evaluating the efficiency and sustainability of the Centre's operations also was proposed by the project, which was reviewed and approved by the Centre's observing committee in June 2019.



Figure 3. Logistics Centre in Kemin District, Chuy Province, Kyrgyzstan

The Centre was established in 2018 to improve the supply of diverse and nutritious food from local agricultural producers to 29 public schools in the district, attended by 3 000 schoolchildren. FAO provided technical and institutional support for operationalizing the Centre.

Results

The Logistic Centre served as a centralized procurement, storage and quality control facility. The Logistic Centre management participated in an open tender organized by the Education Department of the Kemin District in July and August 2019. The Logistic Centre was awarded the supply of diverse agricultural produce (eggs, potatoes, carrots, red beets, cabbage, onions and fresh milk) to schools for an amount above KGS 325 000. In total, 27 schools received the products for schoolchildren's meals in 2019. Ten of these schools also were supported by the World Food Programme (WFP). An estimated 3 000 schoolchildren received improved school meals from local agricultural produce. An estimated 50 smallholder farmers around the schools supplied their produce. The estimated total value of the supplied product was KGS 326 000, equivalent to around USD 4 000.



Figure 4. Meals provided in schools in Kemin District, Chuy Province, Kyrgyzstan

Diverse agricultural produce was procured from approximately 50 smallholder farmers for school meals. A total of 27 schools received the products for an estimated 3 000 schoolchildren.

3. Guiding questions

- *How can we reinforce the work to reduce food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition?*
- *What would be the roles of the food and agriculture sector in improving people's access to healthy diets?*
- *What roles and expertise are expected from FAO?*