



Strengthening School Feeding Programmes in the Caribbean

School feeding programmes in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, have long been established and recognised as an important instrument in facilitating learning, especially for poor and vulnerable school children. More recently, in Latin America and the Caribbean, while school feeding programmes (SFPs) maintain their original purpose, the goals of these programmes, as well as the forms of delivery of the assistance have evolved. Experience with SFPs elsewhere, primarily in Brazil, has prompted Caribbean governments to consider SFPs as an integral part of their social protection and development strategy.

A New Model of School Feeding is Emerging in the Caribbean



Based on the Brazil experience, the new model of SFPs is aimed at more than just providing healthy and nutritious meals to poor and vulnerable children. The new model is now linked to school gardens and nutrition education, as it promotes lifelong healthy eating habits for school children and by extension, their families. It links SFPs to markets and producers, especially small farmers, and emphasises SFPs as a market for

domestic production of quality products, thereby focusing on the utilisation of local products, reducing the food import bill and on increasing local job creation.

The new model also emphasises improved governance and institutional management mechanisms. From a governance standpoint it promotes inclusive and participatory processes whereby the government, community, school administrators, parents, families and other stakeholders all contribute to the design and implementation of the SFP. In terms of institutional management, the model recognises the need for inter-institutional and inter-sectorial collaboration, ensuring the development and implementation of public policies related to education, health, agriculture, finance and planning as well as social and economic development, that lead to sustainable and successful SFPs.

The model calls for at least three levels of integrated management structures: (i) at the Parliamentary level to ensure broad-based support and continuity of policies, (ii) at the Ministerial technical level to inform civil service functionary responsibility for programme leadership and analysis, and (iii) at the level of the school and community, empowering and allowing the participation of those closest to the programme, including parents, to shape the programme.

KEY FACTS

- School feeding programmes (SFPs) in the Caribbean have a long history of contributing to the facilitation of learning amongst children.
- Based on the success of the SFP model in Brazil, SFPs in the Caribbean have now become an integral part of countries' national social protection and development strategies.
- FAO has contributed to the development of the SFPs in Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica and St. Lucia. Notable achievements include:
 - the improvement of the nutritional content of meals,
 - the establishment of linkages with local small farmers and the wider community and
 - the installation or improvement of school garden facilities.
- FAO will continue to work with these countries to ensure sustainability and a continued improvement of the programmes.

This Issue Brief describes FAO's work in Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica and St. Lucia. It examines the challenges of designing alternative programmes, testing and adopting changes where appropriate, to improve the quality and sustainability of these programmes.

Summary of the School Feeding Programmes in Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica and St. Lucia

Antigua and Barbuda	Jamaica	St. Lucia
Services 26 schools (23 primary and 3 pre-schools) Caters for approximately 3000 students/day	Two components – (i) Nutribun and milk and (ii) cooked lunches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutribun is served to 138 000 children in primary/junior high and in some high schools; Lunch served to 176000 students island-wide 	70 primary schools served 7500 children served (45 % of student population)
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology responsible	Ministry of Education Welfare Programme responsible	Ministry of Education Human Resource Development and Labour responsible
Meals heavily subsidised EC\$ 1.00 per day for students and EC\$ 2.00 per day for teachers	Schools obtain a subvention and/or commodities from the MoE MOE, School Feeding Unit manages subventions, procures inputs and works with snack manufacturing company to ensure snacks are distributed according to need	Provides free hot lunch to children from low-income families. Also available to children whose parents can make a financial contribution towards the meals
Budget: EC\$ 6,890,799 (2015)	Budget JMD 2.97 billion	Budget: EC\$ 900,000 (2012/13)

FAO assistance in School Feeding in Antigua and Barbuda:

The changes introduced to improve the programme started with an evaluation against a standard reflected by the elements of the new approach. The findings of the evaluation showed that the capacity of the production facilities had not kept pace with the expansion of the programme from 9 to 26 schools.

Menu compliance was unsatisfactory and recipes had not been standardised. Other challenges included inadequate and inappropriate transportation and storage space especially for cold storage. There was a demand supply gap for vegetables in particular and a lack of linkages with other sectors including the Ministries of Health and Agriculture. Assessment of students' food preferences indicated a need for them to consume a wider variety of foods especially fruits and vegetables and healthier snacks. The absence of a school feeding policy to guide programme implementation and development was identified as a major challenge.

In Antigua and Barbuda, under the Zero Hunger Challenge Initiative that was launched in 2012, FAO, in collaboration with other partners, including the Brazilian Cooperation programme, implemented several actions to address these problems.

- A nutritionist was recruited to review the nutritional content of meals. As a result, over 3000 children serviced by the programme now eat healthier and more nutritious foods.
- The dietician conducted training for staff with an aim to improve adherence to meal standards. Recipes were also standardised and software developed to facilitate calculation of foods requisitioned from the stores and food portions dispatched to schools. Nutrition education and food demonstration sessions were conducted in schools and were linked to school gardening which was being done as part of the ZHC.

- Through the FAO-Brazil Cooperation Programme, a boxed van and some kitchen equipment were purchased for the NSMP to address the inadequacies in the area of transportation and equipment.
- A school feeding committee was established with participation from the NSMP, the Ministries of Education, Health and Agriculture to promote coordination/integration among the stakeholder ministries. Members participated in a school feeding seminar aimed at promoting collaboration among these sectors. Some 14 participants also completed a school feeding course which is part of an initiative to strengthen school feeding programmes in the framework of Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean 2025 Initiative. The major challenge still remaining on the Antigua and Barbuda School Meal Programme is to develop a public policy that ensures the sustainability of the SFP.

FAO assistance in School Feeding in Jamaica:

The opportunity exists to widen the SFP from its current focus on social protection, to one that focuses on the SFP as a national development strategy, with the students and school community at the core, while making critical linkages with the wider community. The lessons and best practices learnt from the Brazil-FAO Project Fortalecimiento al Programa de Alimentación Escolar and the América Latina y el Caribe Sin Hambre 2025 initiative, will be applied to these efforts.

Following initial consultations and planning, the process started in September 2014, with a knowledge building exercise. Forty-five national stakeholders from diverse ministries and agencies participated in a 3-month e-learning course which introduced the concept and principles that underlie the success of the integrated model used in Brazil and piloted in several Latin American countries. By the end of the course, the participants better understood the integrated approach to SFP, and had prepared a national plan of action to adopt relevant aspects of the Brazil model. It is anticipated that the plan of action will be taken to parliament for endorsement through a submission to cabinet.

A multi-sectoral approach is critical to the development of a public policy framework that can support a sustainable SFP. Three mechanisms will support this: (a) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ministries that identifies the areas of collaboration and set tasks and outputs for improving the SFP; (b) the designation of focal points – one from each Ministry - which constitute the SFP working group and (c) the plan of action prepared by the e-course participants is to be endorsed at a national level.

FAO assistance in School Feeding in St. Lucia:



With the assistance of FAO, and with the collaboration of different ministries and the private sector, the Saint Lucia SFP has achieved important goals:

- The establishment of a database system to monitor and evaluate the impact of the SFP. It also allowed students' academic progress and anthropometric indicators to be monitored.
- Important measures were adopted to improve Nutrition Education. In January 2015, a Nutrition Campaign was launched at the Secondary School level to encourage the development of a slogan to increase the adoption of low-sugar foods.
- Four primary schools benefitted from the installation of greenhouses and refurbished school kitchens.
- Thirteen schools benefitted from a distribution of seedlings and a planting pilot in several schools.
- Five schools, received support to install gardens with irrigation systems.
- A technical committee was established to oversee implementation of activities related to school feeding, appointed by the ministers, consisting of technical officers and chaired by the Chief Agricultural Planning Officer.
- The private sector raised and contributed approximately \$150,000 (EC) to support the SFP.



The Way Forward

Based on the experience to date, the future development of School Feeding Programmes is expected to place increased emphasis on:

- Improving the nutritional content of the menus
- Expanding the source and use of local produce
- Establishing more diversified bases of funding
- Improving the management of SFPs and establishing better systems of inclusive governance and public policy development
- Improving infrastructure, kitchen facilities and utensils
- Strengthening the quality of nutrition education programmes
- Supporting the implementation of school gardens as a learning tool

Under the governments' leadership, with assistance from FAO and the support of agencies such as the Brazilian Cooperation Programme, the private sector and other partners, the challenges outlined in the previous sections will be addressed.



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