

AUC Press Release

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HOMEGROWN SCHOOL FEEDING A GAME CHANGER FOR AFRICA'S SCHOOL CHILDREN

Children more likely to return to school and local economies to recover from the devastating impact of COVID-19 in the continent

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – The 6th African Day of School Feeding (ADSF), was celebrated under the theme "*Harnessing Africa's Traditional Knowledge and Food to Support Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes and Systems During COVID-19 Response and Beyond*". The date marked the commitment of African countries to strengthen and consolidate political will for school feeding on the continent.

Across Africa, one in two school children, or over 65 million children received a nutritious meal in school every day in 2019, a massive increase from 38.4 million in 2013. This was until the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in learning and ended a decade of growth for school meal programmes in 2020. The African Union Commission in a new report launched on the 6th Day of the Africa School Feeding day, underscored that African Governments to prioritise School Feeding to get children back in schools.

In her opening remarks, H.E Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor, AU Commissioner for Education, Science Technology and Innovation (ESTI), said: "today we celebrate significant achievements recorded in the course of implementing the home-grown school feeding programme. Domestic budgets continue to represent the main source of funding for school feeding programmes, and this is a significant contribution towards achieving the Africa We Want"

In 39 countries across the African continent, governments are financing and managing national school feeding programmes. Ghana, Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe all feed over 1 million school children; while Egypt and Nigeria each feed more than 9 million children every day of the school year. According to the new report, African Union Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding (2019-2020), the share of domestic funding as compared to international donor funding has increased from 76 percent to 80 percent across the continent.

The African Union Commission (AUC) commended African governments for the significant efforts to increase their budget allocations and adopt rigorous policy frameworks for school feeding. These efforts have not only led to feeding more children, but also to improving the quality of school health and nutrition support.

"School feeding provides the answer to the worrying statistics of low educational enrolment and attainment, high levels of school dropout especially for the poorest and for girls, chronic malnutrition which has been exacerbated by COVID 19 pandemic, unacceptable rates of physical and cognitive stunting. The cost of such statistics is unacceptably high and spans generations through childhood, youth to adulthood in terms of sickness, morbidity and workplace underperformance," Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor added.

“Investing in Home Grown School feeding has far reaching short, medium- and long-term benefits to an economy. When food is purchased locally farmers benefit from enhanced access to more stable markets, women - especially those with micro, small and medium-sized businesses - benefit from providing services to school feeding programmes, and local communities and nations benefit from enhanced human capital and improved socio-economic development.”

A communique released by the AUC during the event calls upon Member States and Development Partners to take action to ensure that as school systems reopen safely, access to school feeding is restored as an urgent priority to drive children back into school and support their recovery.

Speaking at the same event, WFP’s Senior Director, Strategic Partnerships, Stanlake Samkange, said, “School feeding is a game changer - for children, for communities and for countries across Africa. That one meal a day is often the reason kids go to school in the first place. It’s also the reason they’ll come back after the lockdown. We need to get these programmes running again - even better than before - to stop COVID destroying the futures of millions of our children. For this to be achieved, it is critical that investment in human capital development in schools is prioritized in our efforts to build back better.”

“Home-grown school feeding is a typical example of a programme that brings into play the education, agriculture, trade and rural development sectors to interact and benefit one another. Every one of us has a role to play in school feeding. Let’s support our governments and the African Union to realize the goals behind creating this programme and indeed our shared Vision of the ‘Africa We Want,” Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor added.

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