



## **Joint Action for Healthy and Sustainable School Nutrition**

Promoting balanced diets and good nutrition for a healthy development is both a priority and the common goal of the United Nations (UN) and their implementing and partner organisations in the member states as proclaimed in the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025). Joint action of multiple governmental and non-governmental actors at local, national and international level directly contributes to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the scope of the 2030 Agenda. This immediately entails enforcing the human right to adequate food, which aims to secure the sufficient access to nutritious food for all people of all income groups at all times. The Global Sustainable Development Report (2019) identifies food systems as one of six priority fields of action for implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals as a whole.

The number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition continues to be too high. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that 690 million people are currently suffering from chronic hunger. Continuing undernourishment has caused stunting (chronic undernutrition) in over 144 million children and another 47 million children suffer from wasting (acute undernutrition), which impacts their entire development<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, more than two billion people exhibit micronutrient deficiency (hidden hunger) and an additional two billion people are over nourished<sup>2</sup>. Due to their physiological needs, women and children are at higher risk and are more strongly affected by imbalanced nutrition. These forms of malnutrition entail high economic and health expenses and could be prevented.

The COVID-19 pandemic, numerous conflicts, and climate change including its economic, ecological and social consequences are currently exacerbating the food and nutrition insecurity of millions of people. The recent SOFI 2020 report suggests that the pandemic has added another 83 to 132 million people suffering from hunger in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has also severely affected children and school systems, while exposing the intrinsic ties and vulnerabilities of global food and nutrition systems, particularly in times of crises. Strengthening a balanced diet and good nutrition for healthy development should start at an early age and prevent any form of malnutrition. By gearing joint action for better food in schools to the school system and school food environment, it is at the same time possible

---

<sup>1</sup> The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI), 2020

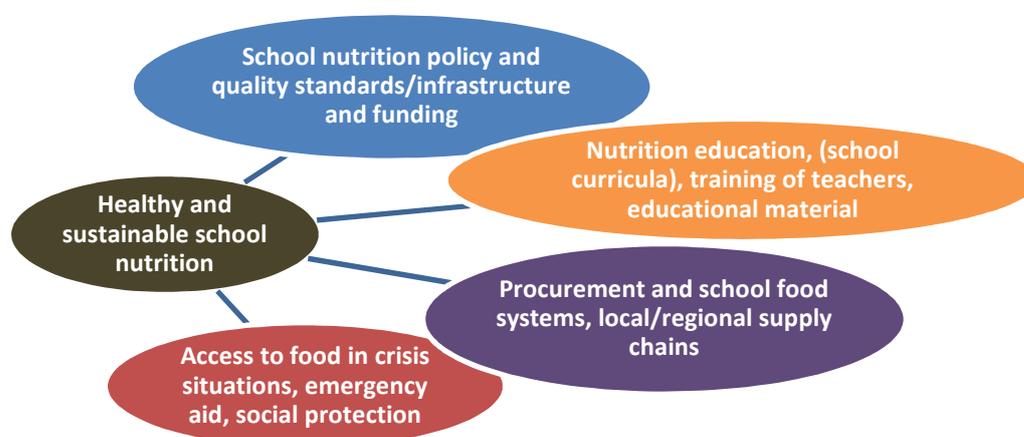
<sup>2</sup> Global Sustainable Development Report (2019), p. 65

to particularly address the SDGs 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), and 12 (responsible consumption and production).

The 2021 “Policies against Hunger” Conference aims at (a) exchanging current *state-of-the-art* school nutrition programmes, (b) supporting integrated approaches of school policies towards healthy and sustainable school nutrition and (c) bringing together multiple stakeholders from governments, civil society, private sector and academia to promote networks of stakeholders. School nutrition is considered a strategic instrument for supplying children and adolescents with nutritious food while also incorporating the entire food and nutrition environment of schools.

Promoting sustainable and healthy school nutrition in low-, middle- and high-income countries globally is a promising instrument for viably improving the food and nutrition situation of the entire population in the long run. School nutrition involves several factors relating to the school food and nutrition environment (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1: Healthy and sustainable school nutrition and the factors relating to the school food environment**



*The healthy school nutrition environment includes mainly (i) the corresponding school nutrition policy and legal frameworks, requirements for quality standards, the necessary infrastructure, as well as sufficient funding, (ii) nutrition education in school as well as corresponding training for teachers and staff, (iii) procurement and use of highly nutritious and, if possible, locally and sustainably produced and sourced food, as well as (iv) stable school food systems and quality nutrition and health services for children and adolescents in crisis situations.*



By factoring in the entire context of school nutrition, the diversity of food production, the establishment of local, national and international supply and value chains for enhanced access to high-quality and nutritious foodstuffs, the impact on the environment and education, health and hygiene as well as social protection can be intertwined within the whole food system in a sensible and comprehensive manner.

The 2021 “Policies against Hunger” conference will tackle the core question of how healthy and sustainable school nutrition can be ensured by better integrating the factors mentioned above. During the conference, four working groups will address selected guiding questions on experiences made and success factors identified in the work of international organisations, in public and private school nutrition programmes, and in research in order to underline the potential of successfully implemented school nutrition schemes.

Topics the working groups will address:

- (1) Requirements for school nutrition policy, legal frameworks, quality standards, and infrastructure
- (2) Food and nutrition education in schools and their environment
- (3) Development of sustainable school food systems
- (4) School food and nutrition in crisis situations, such as pandemics

The expert meeting will allow all participants to engage in a dialogue on experiences made in the respective organisations and countries and to advance the international exchange on the issue of food and nutrition in schools.

The 2021 “Policies against Hunger” conference is a contribution to the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025). It will bring together political representatives, technical experts and practitioners from governments, civil society and private sector alongside international organisations and academia to exchange views on sustainable and healthy school nutrition. It is closely linked to the manifold activities currently ongoing to re-establish, improve and scale up school nutrition programmes in high, middle and low-income countries in the context of sustainable food systems. In particular, the conference provides a platform for multiple stakeholders interested to join forces and build a global coalition to re-establish, improve and scale up school feeding programmes and to present school nutrition as a game changing element to support the creation of sustainable food systems to the United Nations *Food Systems Summit* (FSS) in September 2021.