

CUADERNO 2

La Agenda Mesoamericana de Cooperación para un Desarrollo Social Incluyente: Alcances e Impactos en Salud, Vivienda, Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional



Improving food and nutrition security and encouraging healthy eating habits in Belize through strengthening of the school feeding programme¹



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¹ Project: "Improve food and nutrition security and encourage healthy eating habits in Belize through strengthening of the school feeding programme" GCP/SLM/001/MEX

1. Background

School feeding programmes in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, have long been established and recognized as an important instrument in facilitating learning, especially for poor and vulnerable school children. More recently, in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the goals of these programmes, as well as the forms of delivery of the assistance, have evolved and are now recognized as important tools for strategic intervention of social protection and for the fulfilment of the human right to adequate food, and are recommended as one of the key components of long-term sustainable development.

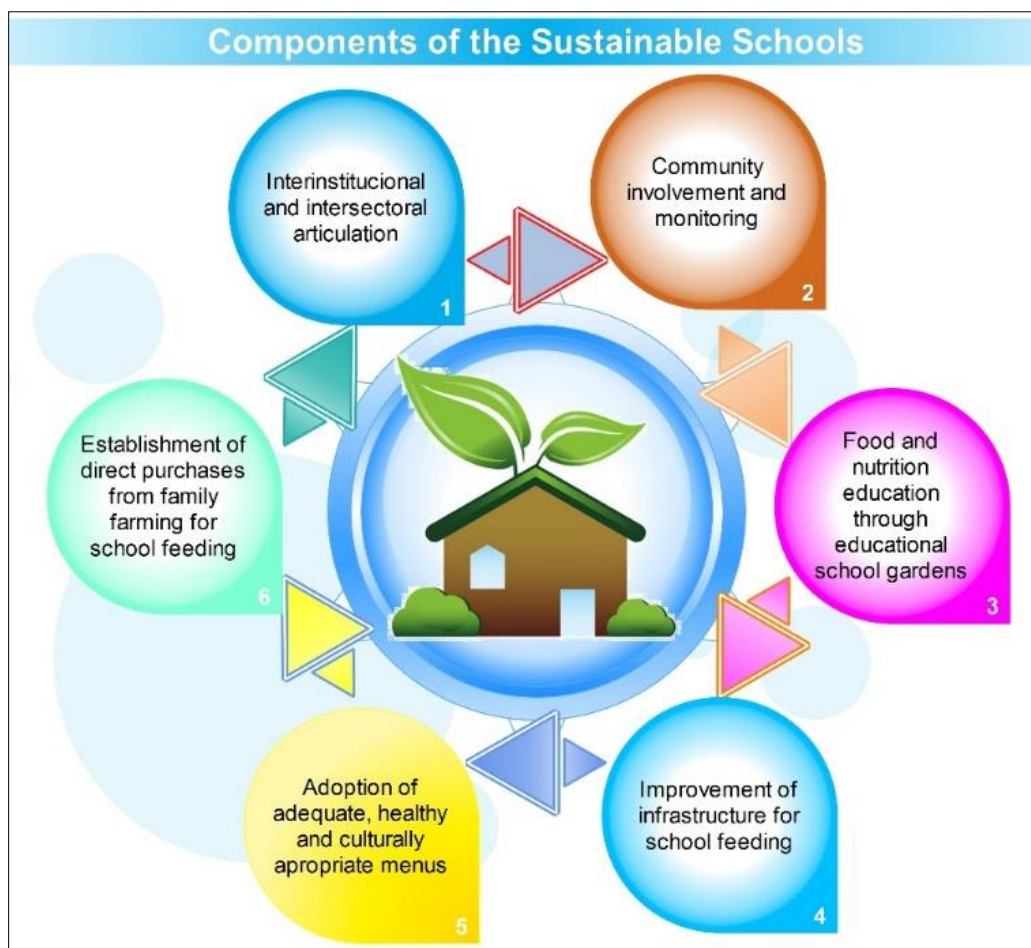
The Government of Brazil and FAO initiated the project *“Strengthening of School Feeding Programs in the framework of the Hunger Free Latin America and Caribbean 2025 Initiative-GCP/RLA/180/BRA”* in 2009, with the aim to promote and implement sustainable school feeding programs (SFP) in LAC countries. FAO has designed a framework to formulate technical and financial assistance to countries interested in improving their national SFP. The project has expanded to 17 countries, 13 of them currently active in Costa Rica, Belize, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mesoamerica Hunger Free, under the technical cooperation of FAO, is a program of cooperation between countries that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. With aid from the Mexican Government, through the Mexican International Development Cooperation Agency (AMEXCID), and with technical support from the FAO, Mesoamerica Hunger Free also seeks to strengthen institutional plans for achieving food and nutrition security and providing support for individual family farming.

The SFP model that is being promoted within the region goes beyond a conception where the role of the programme is limited to just providing meals to poor and vulnerable children. The new model is strongly based on the human right to adequate food approach, also considering the environment, cultural, social and economic sustainability. It is linked to school gardens and nutrition education, to promote lifelong healthy eating habits for school children and by extension, for their families. It also focuses on the utilization of local products, especially from family farming, promoting the consumption of fresh, local and healthy foods and, at the same time, boosting local production and local job creation and reducing the food import bill.

The methodology used to strengthen the SFP is the implementation of Sustainable Schools, which are pilots that constitute a reference for the implementation of a sustainable SFP. The Sustainable Schools are based on the following components:

Figure No. 1: Components of the Sustainable Schools



The pilots are being implemented in four schools in the Toledo District. These schools are in the communities of San Antonio, Santa Cruz, Santa Elena and Pueblo Viejo. Brazilian and Mexican cooperation are supporting Belize in the implementation of its sustainable school feeding pilots, strengthening these six components. "The Nutritional Plan" document presents a systematized information about components 5: Adoption of adequate, healthy and culturally appropriate menus and 6: Establishment of direct purchases from family farming for school feeding.

2. Mesoamerica Hunger Free in Belize

Project: "Improve Food and Nutrition Security and Encourage Healthy Eating habits in Belize through Strengthening the School Feeding Programme" GCP/SLM/001/MEX

Current challenges

- Belize is one of the countries in Mesoamerica that has the best nutritional indexes, although 6.2% of its population still suffers from undernutrition.
- As part of the nutrition investigations, a 1996 National Height Census was implemented in different schools throughout the country. The results showed that 15.4% of the students at national level were considered to have growth retardation and that the prevalence is much higher in rural than urban areas, specifically 39% in the Toledo District.
- Micronutrient deficiencies have also been documented with an increased prevalence of vitamin A deficiency and anemia, also particularly in the Toledo District.
- Obesity affects 22.5% of the population and 7.9% of children under five are overweight.

Source: Food and Nutrition Security Platform (CELAC)

Mesoamerica Hunger Free in action

- The Mesoamerica Hunger-free program, signed by FAO and the Government of Mexico (2014) is a South-South triangular cooperation agreement, that includes actions and cooperation initiatives towards strengthening ties between Mexican and Mesoamerican institutions, to promote the fight against hunger, reduce inequality and increase living standards in the countries involved.
- MHF seeks to support, through FAO, agreed actions with each of the countries in the region to strengthen food and nutrition security.
- The technical assistance of Mesoamerica Hunger Free in Belize pursues to attain the following main objectives:
 - a) To contribute to Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) in Belize through strengthening of the School Feeding Programme and supporting FNS governance institutional mechanisms;

- b) To support the design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SFP; and
- c) To facilitate coordination and synergies among programmes and public policies with special consideration of family/small farming for enhancing territorial development

Toledo District

- Toledo District, the southernmost district in Belize, and it is characterized by its rural setting.
- The population of this area is relatively young, 77% are under the age of 35 years. There is a sharp contrast in ethnicity in this district compared to the rest of the country; in Toledo, 73% are indigenous and of most of them are Maya.
- The four targeted communities for the implementation of Sustainable School, located in the South Western part of Toledo are Santa Cruz, Santa Elena and Pueblo Viejo and San Antonio are strategically located along the highway. These rural villages speak English as well as Q'eqchi and/or Mopan Maya

Sustainable Schools Feeding Pilots in Toledo, Belize

- FAO, in collaboration with country governments and international cooperation, boost the sustainable school's initiative (Brazilian model) in more than 14 countries in Latin America and The Caribbean, as a strategy to reach the Zero Hunger goal, of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- The Sustainable School Feeding Initiative (SFP) is especially based on activities such as the involvement of the educational community; the adoption of adequate and healthy school meals; the implementation of educational school gardens; the improvement of kitchens, dining areas, storage, and the direct purchase of products from local family farming for school meals.
- FAO, together with the Governments of Belize, Mexico and Brazil launched a project which under the MHF frame is providing financial and technical assistance to both improve the programme at selected schools, but also contributing to create the bases for developing a national SFP policy.
- The SFP model is now linked to school gardens and food 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 emphasizes SFPs as a market for domestic production of quality products, thereby focusing on the utilization of local products, reducing the food import bill and local job creation.
- This model also emphasizes 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 recognizes 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 program leadership and analysis, and (iii) at the level of the school and community, empowering and allowing the participation of those closest to the program, including parents, to shape the program.
- Substantial progress has been made under the milestone (Inter-sectorial coordination, Infrastructure, family farmers and food and nutrition education). A National School Feeding Team was established with participants from several ministries (Health, Education and Agriculture) and PAHO/WHO. A nutritional plan was drafted and highlights some of key nutrition related activities assisted such as, review of menus, training to cooks, nutritional assessment, etc. School gardens were assisted in all the schools. Infrastructure improvement is now completed for cafeterias of three of the pilot schools.
- The remaining activities to advance this year include the pilot of a 60 days direct purchasing of products from small scale and family farmers for the school meals in the 4 selected schools and continues training and technical assistance to reinforce and consolidate actions initiated under the other components. Particularly, the strengthening of the inter-sectorial and inter-institution coordination structure and mechanism in placed, and the launch of the milestone of Family Farmer.



Mesoamerica Hungry free

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