

POLICIES FOR GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP: SHIFTING THE BALANCE IN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS



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Executive Summary

One of the roadblocks continuously encountered in development work is the role of the “intervener” in development and the long-term vision of their role in the greater context of the intervention. WFP particularly struggles with this question and is moving towards transitioning its current school feeding programs to national government ownership. This transition, with an emphasis on sustainability, is where countries move from relying mostly on external funding and implementation to programs nationally funded and implemented. This process is fraught with complexities.

This paper will concentrate on the specific challenges to transitioning a school feeding program to national governments, as well as ways to mitigate the depth of these challenges. It is crucial to first assess country readiness and timing by looking at the pre-qualifications for moving forward in the transition process, then to create a medium-term and long-term vision, and, finally, to decide appropriate next steps (tailored to the specific country context). It is good to note that a country may not demonstrate the conditions necessary for a successful transition, which is an important conclusion in and of itself for both the development organization and the country in creating a long-term program plan.

Principal transition components that will be addressed are:

1. ***Alignment with Existing National Policies and Political Will***
—> analysis and subsequent actions must be driven by the government and its needs
2. ***Designing National Policies***
 - *Targeting*
—> prioritization of coverage: most vulnerable populations or universal
 - *Food Procurement and Distribution*
—> examination of different production and sourcing options
 - *Ensuring Quality Standards for Food*
—> mechanisms to guarantee healthy food options and safety and quality controls
3. ***Capacity Strengthening***
—> inclusive of management, monitoring, and accountability systems
4. ***Cost-effective and Stable Long-term Funding and Budgeting***
—> create a space in the government’s budget for all related school feeding costs
5. ***Community Participation and Ownership***
—> inclusion of community level participation in design and implementation
6. ***Multisectoral Coordination and Partnerships***
—> accessing technical expertise and resources of all relevant stakeholders

Embarking on a national school feeding program is an extremely long-term government investment, where the transition from a previously existing program could take a minimum of 5-10 years or longer. As evidenced in the list above, this requires a long range level of commitment and planning from all parties involved to ensure that the necessary structures, services and channels of operation are put in place.

Introduction

Feeding children in school, in order to improve education levels, was an idea introduced in some countries recently and in others more than half a century ago. However, even today school feeding is not universally carried out worldwide, and countries that have it are often reliant on donors. The role of foreign aid in the developing world is always a tricky business. Cultural, political and economic sensitivities must be juggled, while investment in foreign aid is constantly scrutinized for illustrations of impact. There exists a delicate balance between the host country's role and that of the donor/international institutions, in terms of the long-term vision of the role of each in the greater context of the intervention. How can all of these pieces come together to create a successful combination that will yield change – change in the form of improved education for children? The answer has changed over time as the role of education in development is constantly evolving to suit the needs of ever-changing realities. One illustration of this shift occurs in school feeding programs.

Putting Development into Context

Many countries have school feeding, with formal policies in place; many countries have it and implement through informal services; and for some countries, such programs do not exist. The World Food Programme (WFP) has played a large role in creating, shaping, and implementing these programs for over 45 years. Although it has not done so exclusively, as there are several other organizations working towards a similar goal, it has been the leading actor worldwide. As a result of its continued presence - in conjunction with a new mindset towards locally-led development initiatives - WFP has shifted the idea of *its* school feeding programs towards *national* school feeding programs. This transition, with an emphasis on national sustainability, is where countries move from relying mostly on external funding and implementation to programs nationally funded and implemented. Critical to a successful transition is government ownership.

This process is new and fraught with complexities, as there are numerous roadblocks that challenge a national policy framework at each step in the transition. It is helpful to break down these development challenges in order to present some considerations that could mitigate the depth of these challenges.

Before an analysis of challenges, it is crucial to first assess country readiness and timing. Some points to consider are the institutional and financial capacity of the government as well as if legislation relevant to school feeding exists.¹ In addition, there may be other extenuating conditions, such as civil unrest or chronic climactic emergencies in part of the country, that would influence a decision for a short-, medium- or long-term country vision and strategy for a school feeding program. It is possible that this examination of factors might lead to a non-eligibility status for transition, where a country does not have the necessary conditions to allow for a successful transition. It is essential to gain a broad understanding of the country's circumstances and current situation before moving on to further steps in the transition process for the government to adopt a national school feeding program.

¹ Examples of relevant legislation could be in relation to rights of the child, adequate nutrition, education, etc. See Section 1 below for more examples.

1. ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING NATIONAL POLICIES AND POLITICAL WILL

To understand how a national school feeding program will fit into the country's overall policy framework, it is necessary to identify what current policies exist (e.g., the rights of the child, health, food security, agriculture, nutrition and social protection) and to what level corresponding legal mechanisms have been established. Often there might already be a law in place (such as in a country's poverty reduction strategy or their Constitution) that provides a population a certain right, but sometimes the necessary means to execute and enforce that right are not in place. Therefore it is important to look at the broader legal picture to fully understand the country's current status so that appropriate next steps can be taken without jumping ahead.

Although the legal structure of a country is significant to its ability to carry out the country's interests, it is only one aspect of the bigger picture. What is behind policies can determine a much more significant direction and vision for the country – specifically what reality reflects and not just the written law. Exploring a government's history in the areas relating to food security, particularly for children, and understanding the reasons behind the decisions made can provide a much clearer idea of how and why the country arrived at their current status. Equally important are the current context and circumstances that would have influence over the government's priorities and decisions of today.

It is only at this point that a realistic discussion on the government's political will to take the necessary steps can begin. The current leadership and the principal interests of that leadership will be key to understanding whether there is long-term commitment, strong national political will and dedicated leadership to move a national school feeding program forward. The need to ground a school feeding program within or as an institution is particularly crucial when facing the obstacle of frequent turnover between administrations as is often the case in developing countries. It is imperative to look at creating strategies that maintain institutional capacity lines across administrations.

2. DESIGNING NATIONAL POLICIES

Multiple factors need to be taken into account when determining the basis for the model of school feeding that the government will use. Haiti, for example, adopted a model that coordinates directly from the national level to the school level. In Kenya, the design is more segmented where all levels are involved (local, state and national), yet the school is still the center point for reporting, financial flows and program guidance. Mali has created an even more segmented structure that integrates more government actors at all levels.² It is imperative for a country to tailor its program to the structure that will work best.

² Source: Burbano, Carmen and Emilie Sidaner, *Emerging Issues from the Field* (WFP school feeding policy informal presentation), June 2011.

A. TARGETING

Targeting is one of the most controversial areas when designing national policy, usually due to the financial constraints of the country. The question the government must ask is: “*Who should receive publically-funded school feeding?*” Answering this question requires consideration of the following: universal coverage or targeting the most vulnerable (either socioeconomic or most food insecure)? Pre-primary, primary and/or secondary school (often secondary yields less coverage due to high dropout rates)? Regional targeting (this has significant cost implications)? Intra-school targeting (this can be very sensitive and difficult to implement)? There are many options, and sometimes they are chosen in combination. Governments prioritize and decide what is feasible based on budgets as well (see No. 4 below). Yet it is advisable for governments to prioritize when taking the time to consider and weigh the needs of the country within a greater long-term vision for improving food security throughout the country. The result could be a plan that contains both a short-term strategy for immediate hunger solutions and a long-term vision for sustainable food security.

There is not one formula that works for all countries, but rather there are numerous political and economic factors that influence the answers to these questions respective to each country. Another stumbling block is the lack of accessible information. Census data may be either outdated or incomplete, and sometimes governments may need to rely on privately sourced data (i.e. from a donor, NGO or other stakeholder).³

B. FOOD PROCUREMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

How food gets from the producer to the consumer (e.g. in this case children, teachers and administrators) is a complex process. For school feeding, it is necessary to ensure food is appropriate and accepted in schools. Cultural norms have significant influence over dietary habits, as do the geographic characteristics of the country. Cost structures, nutritional gaps and in-country capacity for procurement and distribution all help determine how and from where food will be procured - local vs. imported and/or public vs. private,⁴ as well as the type of procurement and distribution model best suited to each country. Often one type of model may be best for short-term planning and another for longer-term planning. It may vary by region as well, so that more than one model might be employed within a country.

It is imperative to involve key players at every step – for procurement and distribution matters, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health, for example, should be involved and accountable for their part of the shared program responsibility.⁵

Other considerations are the current market structures in the country and what capabilities and needs there might be for future growth. Tied to this is the existing

³ WFP does periodic VAM analyses – Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping – demonstrating levels of severity of food insecurity worldwide. Many governments rely on this data for use in targeting.

⁴ Chile’s school feeding programs relies almost entirely on the private sector, which is a different model from many other countries. For further information on the Chilean model, see http://www.junaeb.cl/prontus_junaeb/site/artic/20100129/pags/20100129183436.html.

⁵ See sample table of roles for Ministries as part of a national school feeding program in Section 6.

infrastructure for food distribution and its capacity to deliver. Less commonly considered is the ambition level of the program, in that the plan for the national school feeding program may seek to promote additional goals such as economic growth, strengthening the agriculture industry, better health through nutrition focused consumption, etc. Benefits can be gained from school feeding in a number of sectors, not just education (e.g., small scale farmers). All of these challenges can be both potential areas for new opportunities and/or areas of constraint in which the government will have to look at ways to work within the current structure.

WFP in general and through its school feeding programs has traditionally provided staple foods to vulnerable populations, while running the risk that countries could end up depending on these food commodities. In order for a government assume full responsibility of a national school feeding program, it will need to take on this role of supplying these basic foods (rice, flour, oil, etc.) and incorporate this into their overall strategy so that there is not a shortfall or break in the supply to schools.

C. ENSURING QUALITY STANDARDS FOR FOOD

Creating regulations on the safety and quality of food and food products, either produced locally or imported, is essential to a successful national school feeding program strategy. There is little to no controversy regarding the need for such standards. However, not all governments have established these prior to a national feeding intervention. Here foreign organizations can be of great technical assistance when governments lack the nutritional background to set such standards, in particular as many of these standards are tailored to the differing beneficiary age groups. The Ministry of Health may also play a substantive role.

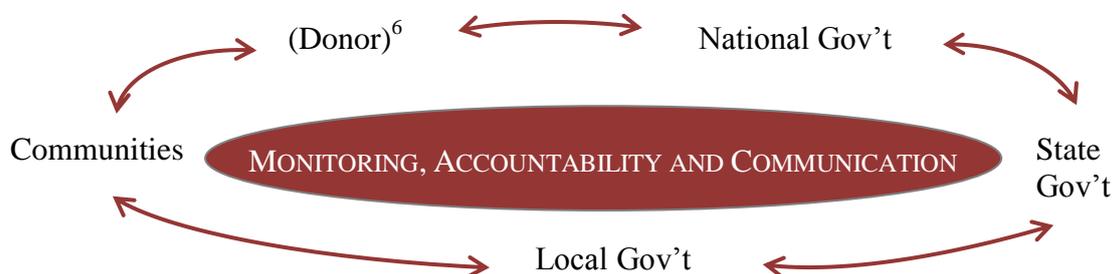
These standards may also determine procurement practices due to either a capability for or lack of quality control and means of in-country production. For accountability purposes, it is necessary to back up these nutrition and safety regulations and policies created with an enforcing body of government authorized to do so.

3. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

As the national government assumes responsibility for school feeding, it needs to put in place the administrative framework to support these services. Specifically, a managing body to oversee the school feeding program must be integrated into the already existing government structure. This body could be housed under the Ministry of Education, Health or other ministry, or as an independent entity, but ensuring that it possesses the legal and political authority necessary to run and govern a program is crucial. This body, or school feeding unit, should be dedicated entirely to school feeding.

Accompanying this is also a system of monitoring and evaluation, which can observe the advancement of the program and make recommendations for necessary adjustments along the way to better execute a successful implementation. This includes the creation of a knowledge management system so that data collected and monitored can be accessed in a systematic way for long-term program evaluation.

Similarly, there needs to be a system of accountability so that not only can the government monitor that the food is being delivered but also that all procedures and steps in the process are being carried out properly. This system of accountability needs to take place across the different levels of implementation, where each level is accountable for its part in the program so as to ensure clear communication. One sample model is illustrated below:



Governments are often aware of where they need strengthening and where they have experience. Here, donors and international institutions can play a role in providing advisory or technical services to help bolster weaker areas identified by governments. However, this must be done in a way that instills ownership on the part of the government: ensuring its leadership gives direction to the process, getting its buy-in at every step and conforming to cultural and political appropriateness.

All of these efforts are crucial in forging an institutional framework founded on and driven by sustainable approaches, thereby ensuring a national school feeding program that will continue to grow and thrive.

4. COST-EFFECTIVE AND STABLE LONG-TERM FUNDING AND BUDGETING

As mentioned in No. 2 above, the program design will have larger implications for national policy and economy. School feeding programs usually aim towards high levels of coverage or even universal coverage, inclusive of all school-age children in the country. Reaching this goal requires cost-effective planning. When a country is new to school feeding or has never implemented it on a large-scale, there could be a pilot phase where costs are usually higher, followed by a scaling up of the program where costs decrease. In this case, donors and international institutions might play a significant role to support costs and funding at the beginning, tapering off as time goes on.

An analysis of the financial capacity within the ministry or government entity that will house school feeding is necessary in order to begin short- and long-term program design.⁷ Here, the Ministry of Finance or other ministries that might have a stake in the benefits from school feeding should be involved in the process from the beginning. Long range funding needs to be built on stability, and inevitably, there will need to be a budget line dedicated (either at the state and/or local level) to school feeding in order to ensure

⁶ The donor is denoted here in parentheses as they could play a significant role here or a minor one. If the country had graduated through a complete transition process, the donor could potentially disappear.

⁷ This analysis could be conducted either within the government or in collaboration with the government, not so much as an evaluation but as a way to find where government funds could be accessed.

universal implementation. This does not discount the possibility of communities or local level governments contributing in-kind to the process (possibly in administrative services, manual labor or even goods). To reach universal coverage, governments need to draw on all pertinent resources and entities that can benefit from school feeding programs, even if indirectly.

School feeding can be expensive or affordable for governments depending on how it is structured, but how much it *will* cost is not always the right question to ask. A country's capital worth is not wholly reflected in its current financial status, but rather by its overall financial planning and vision for the future. A better question is "How much will it cost in the long run if the government does *not* create a national school feeding program? The intergenerational cycle of poverty will continue without hunger relief, reduced malnutrition rates and a better educated population (where this population is the workforce of tomorrow). No country has ever progressed in terms of human development without steady investment in education.

5. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP

Most of the challenges in the transition process listed here are presented with the national government's actions in mind. However, vital to this chain of planning and design are the end recipients: the communities, families and children. They are the voice of the source of the vulnerability, food insecurity and malnutrition and they are the ones to know better than government what is lacking. When conceiving of different possible models, government ought to ensure *their* participation and ownership in the planning and implementation of school feeding programs.

The Food Programming and Management Group of World Vision International did a study, inclusive of a literature review, in which one of the major insights was "Parental/community involvement is key to success."⁸ General studies on school feeding have reported mixed results in terms of the impact a program has; however, the value of local involvement is indisputable across research. It is unanimously agreed that when there is strong household/community involvement in planning and implementation from the beginning, the likelihood for program success is greater.

As governments are faced with major design and planning decisions, for example whether to structure the program in a centralized or decentralized manner (or a hybrid), it is necessary that they take into account the household level and guarantee a sense of ownership in communities.

6. MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

A crucial point to highlight is that school feeding programs in isolation cannot achieve hunger eradication and human development. They must rely on collaboration and support from partners and efforts to strengthen government systems to move towards these goals.

⁸ http://wvifood.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56:school-feeding-is-making-a-difference&catid=37:our-story&Itemid=58

There are a number of ways that a country can receive assistance in moving a school feeding agenda along.

One principal way is from within government through national level coordination. As mentioned earlier, the government will need to decide where the school feeding unit is housed, either in a ministry or as an individual governing body. Often governments choose to include it as part of the Ministry of Education as the objectives of the program are primarily education-based. For the purposes of the model below, we will assume school feeding is part of the Ministry of Education. School feeding encompasses complementary activities yielding wider socio-economic benefits and leads to outcomes that are mutually reinforcing, such as the development of economies, improved opportunities for producers, better access to services, and improvements in infrastructure, to name a few. As such, the Ministry of Education must gain the support of other relevant ministries that have a stake in school feeding benefits.

Another option is creating new kind of partnerships with NGOs, donor governments and the private sector, to ensure an integrated approach toward hunger and education developmental goals. These partnerships should be government-led with technical support as needed. An emerging type of collaboration becoming more and more valuable to countries is South-South cooperation. Countries in the stage of developing their own school feeding programs can learn a lot from each other, often things that donors and international institutions, based mainly in the developed world, cannot provide. Below is a model showing what coordination amongst these groups of actors might look like.

SAMPLE MODEL FOR COORDINATION AMONG SCHOOL FEEDING ACTORS

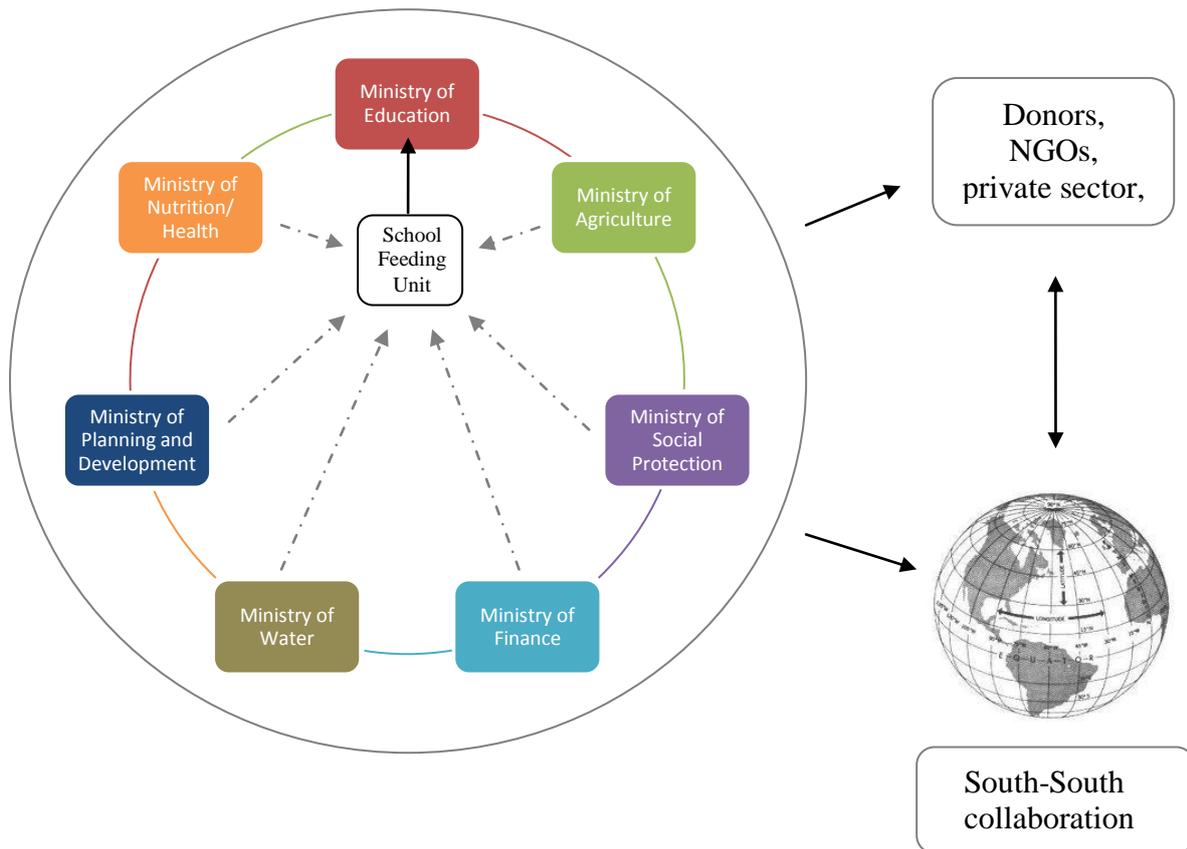
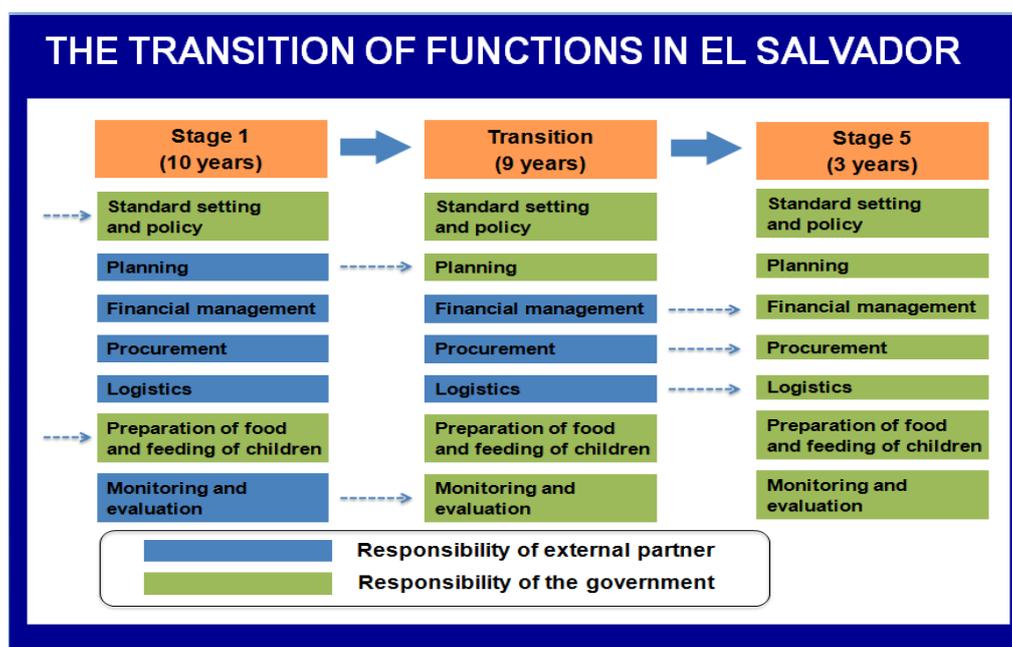


TABLE OF POTENTIAL ROLES FOR MINISTRIES

Ministry	Potential Role for involvement in National School Feeding Program
Education	Administration, management and oversight of school feeding program; monitoring and evaluation of program impact on education, specifically, and on other related results; ensure appropriate infrastructure and services necessary in schools
Health/Nutrition	Creation and maintenance of appropriate nutritional and health standards for food preparation and consumption; menu design and quality control
Agriculture	Technical body on production, procurement and distribution options for a school feeding program; explore linkages to incentivize small farmers and stimulate market economies
Water	Coordinate with Ministry of Education and Health to ensure provision of adequate water services for hygiene and food preparation and consumption
Social Protection	Contribute to policy discussion on ensuring that laws for children regarding food security, education, health, etc. are being carried out and enforced
Finance	Manage or assist Ministry of Education/School Feeding Unit to manage finances for program execution
Planning/ Development	Assist in selecting and ensuring success in school feeding program model and program design with a long-term vision in mind; contribute to program oversight

Another way to look at roles is in the larger context of the whole transition period. El Salvador is a country that has recently transitioned to a national government ownership model, and the graphic below depicts the shift in responsibility of the transition over time.



Source: Burbano, Carmen and Emilie Sidaner, *Emerging Issues from the Field* (WFP school feeding policy informal presentation), June 2011.

Conclusions and Policy Next Steps

The table below summarizes the policy challenges to and actions needed for a successful transition from a donor on international institution-led program to a national school feeding program.

POLICY CHALLENGE	POLICY ACTIONS FOR CHANGE
1. ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING NATIONAL POLICIES AND POLITICAL WILL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify existing policies ● Identify policy gaps for future action ● Verify the government's long-term commitment and leadership regarding school feeding
2. DESIGNING NATIONAL POLICIES A. TARGETING B. FOOD PROCUREMENT AND DISTRIBUTION C. ENSURING QUALITY STANDARDS FOR FOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gather necessary data to back up decisions ● Weigh and prioritize short-, medium- and long-term needs and formulate a vision ● Create national plan for improving food security ● Compare production and procurement models ● Forecast mutlisectoral benefits and effects ● Determine country's capacity of in-country quality control of production ● Create legal standards and enforcing body
3. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a government-led School Feeding Unit ● Design M&E and information management systems ● Establish accountability mechanisms
4. COST-EFFECTIVE AND STABLE LONG-TERM FUNDING AND BUDGETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop short- and long-term funding plans and structures ● Integrate school feeding program costs into annual budget line
5. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop school feeding program by including households' participation into design and implementation
6. MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mobilize inter-ministerial and government coordination ● Ensure advisory/technical support from donors, NGOs and private sector ● Foment South-South collaboration

The path to effective development is filled with challenges. Yet the roadblocks to effective development are not always the most obvious, nor the tangible ones commonly referenced, such as conditions of poverty. In the case of school feeding, the main roadblock to sustainable programming has been the leadership design. As the world becomes increasingly more global, there are now more channels for countries to access and draw on resources, support and shared knowledge.

Some developing countries that are fast becoming examples of successful national school feeding programs are Cape Verde, Ecuador (still in progress) and, most famously, Brazil, among others. Each of these countries has spent a great deal of time adapting its model to its particular circumstances and may still need time to see how the new model is working. Yet as this is a new way of functioning for governments, time will allow each country to modify and hone its execution to ensure a thriving school feeding program.

To reinforce this new way of thinking about school feeding programs, where governments take the lead with technical advice and assistance from international partners, an attitudinal shift from both parties will be required. This transition is one where governments need to assume leadership and ownership in a way that was previously donor-dependent; one where it only receives guidance when requested.⁹ Similarly the international partner needs to relinquish its program objective and goal-led mentality and provide support in a way that it is not imposed, but nor should it create a situation where the country government feels abandoned. This is a fine balance for both actors – hence the term “transition,” rather than handover, since it is the government creating a new program of its own and not taking over what has existed. This is not a process that can be achieved overnight, but over a long, steady journey. However it is one that, with great attention paid to the details of planning for the long-term via sustainable means, can accomplish a great deal.

“For us, school feeding is a public policy approach for the maintenance of an educational environment that fosters the personal growth of the individual, promotes the healthy habits and sustainable socioeconomic development that consequently improves the quality of life of the population.”

Daniel Balaban

President of FNDE
(Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação in Brazil)
School Feeding Consultation, Rome, Italy
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⁹ This paper does not expand on this point but one area for further reflection is the psychosocial side of leadership, where a government needs to build confidence in itself, and its population in the government, in order to take on a national program without reliance on an international presence.