

9 March 2011 - During times of vulnerability, keeping kids in school is an important part of society's response, says Donald Bundy from the Human Development Network of the World Bank. Bundy, who spoke to WFP while attending a seminar in Rome earlier this month, said the financial and food price crisis of 2008 highlighted the value of school meals programmes.

Support for School Feeding has grown significantly at the World Bank in recent years. What was the background to that shift?

That change came about when we saw the financial crisis first arising, when food spikes first appeared. The World Bank put in place a \$2.4 billion programme designed to provide the poorest countries with access to early finance. To our surprise one of the main areas that started cropping up was school feeding. We were getting requests for support to school feeding programmes, from countries experiencing the rigours of the financial crisis.

WFP and the World Bank also teamed up for a landmark report "Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development and the Education Sector". What does the rethink involve?

Once we realised there was this demand we wanted to understand why. We began an analysis with the World Food Programme, Harvard University and Imperial College Partnership for Child Development to look at underlying reasons. Two points emerged very strongly: that countries saw School Feeding as a social safety net to support school children in poorest communities and that they saw this as a way of getting children to go to school and stay in school. During times of vulnerability, keeping kids in school is a very important part of society's response.

We are once again in a period of price volatility and vulnerability for many of the world's hungry poor. In this context, what do you see as the role of school feeding?

When we look at countries that already have school feeding programmes they can very rapidly scale up those programmes to reach more children or include more food in the basket. Even countries that don't have sophisticated ways of providing welfare, can use school feeding programmes to rapidly respond.

You attended a recent global school feeding event at WFP headquarters that focused on a

sustainable approach to school feeding. What sorts of challenges are emerging?

WFP has more experience in this area than anyone else. It clearly has a very important role going forward but it is going to be a different role. We see a decline in the availability of food aid so the question now is about buying food and that raises a different set of issues. What is the best way to buy food? Should we be asking questions about how near to the school should we be buying food? In many low income countries in deep rural areas, smallholder farmers (70 percent women) are producing food right next to the schools, so why would you want to ship food around the country if you can buy it next door and inject money into the economy.

How is the World Bank supporting WFP in innovating and adopting this new approach?

I think the great thing about this partnership that WFP has been leading, with the World Bank is that we see different comparative advantages for ourselves and also for other stakeholders. The partnership also involves the African Union framework for agriculture in Africa NEPAD, and other players like the Partnership for Child Development and the Gates Foundation. Clearly the WFP is the key partner in terms of all the technical and operational issues around SF and the others play supporting roles around that central role.

What stood out most for you from the discussions at the seminar in Rome?

It was very refreshing to hear from the 25 WFP country teams reporting on their experiences, and how they are shifting their thinking. They are very much taking a view where they work with the government of a country itself so that school feeding is part of their national development strategy rather than as a free standing food programme. For me, the striking thing was how quickly that change has come about.

Source: [WFP](#)