

October 5-6, 2024

Regional Consultation on School Health and Nutrition in Africa



Students at DEC Primary School in Falaba (Sierra Leone) with their daily meal of rice and lentils.



Nourishing Minds,
Empowering Futures:
Building Stronger
Communities through
School Nutrition.

Introductory Background

Since 2018, *Africa Nutrition Society (ANS)* has had a special focus on determining how best nutritionists in Africa can contribute directly to enhancing the School Health and Nutrition Agenda. It established a group to work with the *International Union of Nutrition Sciences (IUNS) Task Force*, which include the *International Malnutrition Task Force (IMTF)*, the *International Collaboration on Nutrition in Relation to Cancer (ICONIC)* as well as special interest groups working on school nutrition and forged strategic engagement with the *International School Meals Coalition and the Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition*. A thorough assessment of national-level activities through a gap analysis was conducted, providing valuable insights to AUDA-NEPAD's report for the African Union. This analysis highlighted varying levels of national engagement in addressing school health and nutrition, setting the stage for strategic interventions. During the fifth Annual Federation of African Nutrition Societies (FANUS) Conference, held in November 2023, in Dakar Senegal, the ANS approached *Catholic Relief Services (CRS)* following a joint panel session on School Feeding in Africa to propose the need to co-convene a two day *Africa Regional Consultation on School Nutrition* to be held in October 2024, during the *Africa Nutrition Epidemiology Conference (ANEC)* in Ghana.

Integrated school nutrition programs provide a hot meal every school day usually prepared using fortified food commodities to school age children and improves school retention, nutrition education literacy, water-sanitation-hygiene practices, micronutrient supplementation, and deworming. Priority focus actions on health and nutrition in WASH friendly school environments ensures menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls, helping to reduce school drop-out rates linked to challenging menstrual management. School nutrition interventions also incorporate market-based approaches to compliment direct food distribution in communities at risk of food insecurity and relocating schools for internally displaced populations in conflict affected countries. Local regional procurement activities are strengthening the capacities of women cooperative in the agricultural value chains for guaranteed markets while increasing their productive assets for improving nutrition outcomes.

Goals and Key Deliverables

The consultation will focus on reviewing progress at local, national, and international levels and plan for the next phase of coordinated actions on school health and nutrition across Africa.

Emphasis will be placed specifically on:

- Evaluating the current status of school nutrition programs in Africa, highlighting positive experiences and identifying challenges faced in different regions.
- Exploring the role of nutritionists in resolving challenges related to school health and nutrition programs and develop strategies to enhance their engagement.
- Planning and implementing measures to strengthen school nutrition initiatives in countries where establishing secure nationally supported activities has been difficult, with the aim of improving overall effectiveness.



Credit: Duff, Michael

Students at DEC Primary School Sinkunia Town (Sierra Leone) each receive a bowl of rice and lentils.

Key Deliverables



Informed policy recommendations to improve school health and nutrition programs across Africa.



Aligned technical approaches for effective partner strategies for school health and nutrition program implementation.



Enhanced collaboration among national nutrition professionals, international institutions and fostering networking among experts for knowledge exchange and collaboration.



Publication of key findings through a comprehensive report which will highlight key recommendations and next steps for scaling up impactful and sustainable school health and nutrition in Africa.

Relevance and Benefits for co-Convening Partners

The School health and nutrition consultation will seeks to unite key stakeholders, experts, and practitioners in nutrition, education, and public health experts to tackle the pressing issue of malnutrition among African school-aged children. The consultation will concentrate on examining impactful strategies for the successful implementation and sustainability of school health and nutrition programs thus enhancing nutritional outcomes and fostering long-term health benefits as well as human capital development.



Credit: Stulman, Michael

Students having lunch at their primary school in Kumala community in Koinadugu District, Sierra Leone

Africa has combined its efforts in health and school nutrition to create a prosperous continent. This year's Africa School Feeding Day focused on the theme of transforming education systems through local school feeding for an inclusive and prosperous future of the continent. Sustainable programs in education, health, nutrition, social protection and agriculture, among others, can be achieved through local school nutrition. Schools provide an entry point and opportunities to engage multiple sectors and stakeholders to improve education, health and nutrition outcomes. Poor health, among learners/students from disadvantaged communities, has a significant effect on education and is the cause of absenteeism which contributes to grade repetition, early school leaving and poor academic performance. Integrated package of health and nutrition services and interventions contribute to overall integral human capital development and socio-economic outcomes. The school system is potentially a cost-effective platform for providing an integrated package of health and nutrition services to school children.

Funding and actively co-convening this regional consultation will reinforce partners visibility for innovative integrated school nutrition programming and contribute to sustainability and replicability in the Continent. Participating partner countries will understand and learn from the global and regional institutional frameworks governing the development of school health and nutrition programs in countries. This will ensure understanding of current advantages, opportunities, challenges as well as potential innovations for multi-sectoral initiatives to advance sustainable school nutrition programs at scale. Innovations include the promotion of safe, nutritious, and sustainably produced foods, and locally sourced foods being mainstreamed into policies and programs for funding by countries across the Continent.

Structure and Target Audience

The two-day consultation on the margins of the Africa Nutrition Epidemiology Conference in October 2024, is designed for dynamic engagement. It encompasses sessions dedicated to sharing experiences, interactive discussions, and expert insights, focusing on successful models, challenges, and effective national-level implementation strategies. Sessions will include:

- **Plenary:** Featuring keynote speakers and expert panels.
- **Concurrent or parallel:** focusing on specific school related health and nutrition thematic areas.
- **Posters** (also as part of the wider Africa Nutrition Epidemiology Conference): Providing a platform for stakeholders to showcase their work.
- **Networking:** Facilitating collaboration and partnership building.
- **Closing Ceremony:** Summarizing key takeaways and setting the agenda for future actions.

Target Audience:

- Representatives from NGOs and international organizations.
- Government officials and policymakers in the education and health sectors.
- Nutritionists, dietitians, and public health professionals.
- Academics and researchers.
- Corporate partners interested in corporate social responsibility and sustainable development.



The women of the village of Zirable are organized in a cooperative around a market garden that they cultivate together.

Resource Requirements

A detailed budget has been developed that covers key aspects and logistics requiring financial contributions of partners and stakeholders. These include resource requirements for:

1. **Venue and logistics** for the two-day consultation, including arrangements for conference halls, accommodation, catering, and transportation.
2. **Speakers and facilitators** including experts in nutrition, education, and public health to lead informative sessions during the workshop.
3. **Publicity and communication** including promotional materials, and media outreach or coverage to maximize participation, stakeholder commitment and engagement.
4. **Documentation** covering preparation of materials, presentations, and information dissemination. This will also involve recording and transcription services, photography, and videography.
5. **Publication:** design and print workshop report and materials to disseminate key findings and recommendations post-event.

Partners and stakeholders are encouraged to combine efforts on resource mobilization to complement a combination of registration fees, sponsorships from government bodies, NGOs, and corporate partners, and grants from international organizations supporting nutrition and education initiatives to successfully implement the regional consultation.



First grade pupil at the Kondjado primary school in northern Togo's Kara region smile as they come to pick up their bowls during lunchtime.

Credit: Prod, Orivas

On-going follow up actions and conclusions.

The co-conveners of the regional consultation will explore opportunities for ongoing collaboration and support for the implementation of identified strategies post-workshop. A follow-up mechanism, such as a working group or online platform, will be established to ensure continuous dialogue and information sharing among participants.

Potential partners and funders supporting the consultation are encouraged to contribute to the improvement of school health and nutrition programs across Africa and ensure active participation which is crucial for fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and sustainable school health and nutrition initiatives.

This consultation represents a crucial step in fostering collaboration, sharing experiences, and strengthening the role of nutritionists and key institutions in advancing school health and nutrition across Africa. It aligns with Partners commitment to address challenges and seize opportunities in this critical area.