

Situational state of Sustainable Schools 2021

Executive summary

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United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
and
Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABC/MRE)
and
National Fund for Educational Development of the Ministry of Education (FNDE/MEC)

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BRAZIL-FAO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

Project Consolidation of School Feeding Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS – FAO

FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAORLC)

GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL

Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABC/MRE)

National Fund for Educational Development of the Ministry of Education (FNDE/MEC)

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|------|---|
| ABC | Brazilian Cooperation Agency |
| FNE | food and nutrition education |
| SS | Sustainable Schools |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FNDE | National Fund for Educational Development |
| MEC | Ministry of Education |
| MRE | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| SFP | School Feeding Programmes |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| RAES | Sustainable School Feeding Network |

Presentation

The Brazilian international technical cooperation promotes the exchange of successful experiences in School Feeding (SF), especially in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). This cooperation is guided by the principles of cooperation, horizontality, and respect for the sovereignty of countries through the coordination of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABC/MRE) and the National Fund for Educational Development of the Ministry of Education (FNDE/ MEC). The above, along with working with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), has developed various actions including the current project titled “Consolidation of School Feeding Programmes (SFP) in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

This Project has achieved an increase in intensive strategies aimed at strengthening school feeding policies and pro-



grammes in 13 LAC region countries. In addition, it has promoted and consolidated intersectoral groups in each country and fostered SF dialogue in the region. This document presents a synthesis of the study entitled **Situational State of Sustainable Schools in Latin America and the Caribbean – 2021**, prepared within the framework of the actions of the Consolidation of School Feeding Programmes in LAC project, which compiles experiences of the implementation of Sustainable Schools (SS) methodology in the regional countries and the updated statistics. It highlights aspects such as challenges, growth, implications, scaling up SFP, lessons learned, and recommendations, with a view on the dissemination of good practices, including the pandemic period, and providing an overview of the current state of SS in the region.

The objective of the study is to facilitate the understanding of the Sustainable Schools methodology, developed by the Brazil-FAO International Cooperation Programme, and to disseminate its results to a wider public, such as public policy-makers, authorities, technicians, NGOs, school principals, nutritionists, parents, farmers, students, teachers, etc.

The information presented was based on two tools: 1) evidence from the study conducted in 2019 and concluded in 2020: “Advances of school feeding programmes in Latin America and the Ca-



ibbean – the case of El Salvador, Gua Quin quan quun mandou um míssil temala, and Honduras”; 2) in a survey applied during the second half of 2021 to update the information provided by 11 countries in LAC, namely Belize, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The challenges, lessons learned and recommendations are highlighted in the following pages to disseminate good practices, including the COVID-19 pandemic period. The SS methodology has already been applied in more than 23 000 schools in LAC, promoting changes in approximately 1.6 million children’s lives.

The purpose of this publication is to increase

the visibility of a possible, efficient, and sustainable practice, with a vision of scaling it up at the regional level; and strengthening and consolidating school feeding programmes; powerful public policy tools for social protection to guarantee the human right to adequate food.

It is a very good read.

School Feeding Programmes and their benefits

School Feeding Programmes (SFP) are the mechanisms that each government has to provide food services to schoolchildren enrolled in public education institutions, whether at the initial, primary, and/or secondary level.

Studies show the benefits of these programmes, such as improvements in children's education and their physical and psychological health. Most of the benefits accrue to the most disadvantaged children. In addition, positive impacts are seen throughout the educational community and even in the surrounding areas.

Recent studies have revealed the results of numeracy and literacy learning, with the greatest impact on girls and children below the national poverty line, according to the World School Feeding state report 2020 from World Food Programme (WFP), published in February 2021.

Indeed, the SFPs have become programmes that offer a wide range of benefits, including 1) potentially improving the nutrition and health of millions of children, adolescents, and youth; 2) reducing absenteeism, especially among children from poor families; and 3) ensuring better conditions for cognitive development.

In addition, two other major consequent benefits are the implementation of food and nutrition education (FNE) actions as an opportunity to develop healthy eating

Likewise, SFP has assumed, in the short term, five basic aspects:

- **Improved quality of education**, as measured by indicators such as increased enrolment, school attendance and retention, and improved student academic performance.
- **Improvement of the student's nutritional state**, which is reflected in the nutritional indicators generated by the nutritional evaluations carried out periodically.
- **Improved nutritional habits** through FNE training and adoption of good feeding practices.
- **Strengthening the organization of the public food procurement process.**
- **Strengthening the community participation** in schools, which is reflected in greater involvement of the educational community in the management and administration of these programmes.



habits as well as the possibility of generating a market for family farmers as providers of healthy varied and locally grown food.

It has been identified that there is a wide range of recognition of SFP as an

effective tool to contribute to the fulfillment of the human right to adequate food, it is part of the social safety net in the countries of the region, and they contribute to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 1 (No poverty),

SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and wellbeing), SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), and SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production).

Sustainable Schools

Sustainable Schools (SS) are the experience of establishing schools that are a reference for the implementation of sustainable SFPs, especially from activities such as: the involvement of the educational community (social participation); the adoption of adequate and healthy school menus; the implementation of pedagogical school gardens; FNE; kitchens, dining rooms, warehouses improvement, and school meals products purchased directly from local family agriculture.

The SS methodology was created by the Brazil-FAO International Cooperation Programme in 2011, under the premise that schools are privileged spaces of community convergence, and that the social and economic development of people is associated with educational inclusion.

To implement the SS methodology, together with the governments of each country, schools were selected for concrete and practical experience in building knowledge and learning.

It is an activity proposed and developed to unite the different government sectors at the horizontal level and to promote articulated work with the departmental and municipal spheres, with the aim of allowing the actors to learn about the challenges, the ways to overcome them and the potential for developing a sustainable SFP at the national level.

All this in conjunction with actors at different levels, such as teachers, school principals, farmers, parents, nutritionists, and especially, be a task developed together with the ministries of education, health, and agriculture.



The Brazil-FAO International Cooperation was based on the understanding that to generate a sustainable SFP, it is necessary to offer healthy and adequate food, as well as FNE actions in a systematic and continuous manner to all students. To achieve these two components, it is essential to guarantee those

that have been prioritized for SS, such as inter-institutional and intersectoral articulation; social and community participation; adequate school infrastructure; development of pedagogical school gardens; planned menus according with nutritional needs and cultural relevance; and public pro-

curement from local family farming.

The SS methodology aims to give visibility to a possible practice, with the objective of national scaling and sustainability of school feeding policy.

Figure 1: Components of Sustainable Schools



Source: Own elaboration.

Study Methodology

This section comprises the current state (2020–2021) of the implementation of the SS methodology in the LAC countries. The methodology used to obtain this updated data consisted of an online form elaboration with 20 questions oriented according to the identified needs in the document. The online form was shared with professionals from Ministries and Government Secretariats linked to school feeding in the regional countries for its completion and subsequent return.

The information was collected in 2021 with the participation of Belize, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. A database was generated and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively in order to organize, systematize and document the status and results of SS.

The survey aimed to:

- show the experiences in the implementation of SS;
- update the number of existing SS in the LAC region;
- systematize experiences of school feeding laws implementation based on the SS methodology in countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, highlighting aspects such as the step-by-step, legal framework elaboration, and implementation, with the purpose of disseminating good practices.

In addition, reports and technical documents generated on the progress made in the implementation of the SS methodology were reviewed.

The document is divided into three sections. The first section briefly presents a historical overview of the process of implementing SS methodology in the region and how Brazil's experience has been a reference in the SFP implementation in a concrete and sustainable manner.

The second section describes the concepts and technical and methodological aspects of SS implementation. It includes basic aspects that may be useful for both decision-makers and those responsible for putting the methodology into operation.

The third section considers and highlights the core of the document where the current situation of SS in the region is presented. This information was grouped by components and included a specific section that summarizes how the SS methodology has been implemented in the COVID-19 health emergency.



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Avances by component

The main contributions that countries have identified because of the implementation of the SS are detailed below. Regarding the component **of institutional and intersectoral coordination**, it was identified that for the strengthening of SFP the **countries agree that the creation of these spaces for articulation, coordination, and decision making are necessary to adopt the SS methodology**. With the countries' incorporation into this regional project initiative, **it was possible to make school feeding visible as a social and strategic policy for the sustainable development of the countries**.

Some countries have made progress in the promotion and creation of public policies that have based and institutionalized the SFP under the framework of the SS methodology. The study shows that this **coordination structure between the different government sectors was vital for dealing with the health situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**

and reducing the negative effects that school closures would have on students.

The **social participation** component was considered key to guaranteeing the sustainability of the SFP. Most countries recognize that **the establishment of a model of involvement of the educational community (teacher, parents, and students) is the necessary mechanism for articulating and executing local actions for the implementation of SS**.

Social participation linked to the SFP includes **the development of social auditing processes to ensure the proper use of resources** allocated for SF. This also **includes the promotion and implementation of social responsibility actions** that lead to food waste reduction.

Regarding food and nutrition education (FNE) component, most countries have carried out different level activities, highlighting the **implementation of school gardens as a peda-**





pedagogical and experimental learning tool that generates life skills.

There is the recognition that school gardens were not implemented as a FNE tool, they rather had a productive focus. Also, to improve and facilitate pedagogical school gardens implementation, some countries have adopted technological innovations.

It is **identified as a common challenge to have didactic**

guides and support materials for contents development in a standardized and structured way to guarantee the success of the experiential learning experience offered by the school garden, allowing the knowledge learned at school to be transferred to homes, with the objective of promoting positive changes in family nutrition and improving their health. In relation to the composition of adequate school menus, most countries have

developed and implemented them with national food and nutrition guidelines (FBDG, Manuals, etc.) reference, to ensure that they are adequate, healthy, and culturally appropriate.

Some countries mentioned that results have been visualized in changes in school feeding due to the adoption of these menus, as well as in the **management mechanisms of the SFP, with experiences of decentralization and de-**



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concentration, increasing the possibilities of participation and the responsibility of local actors.



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The **school infrastructure** component is identified as a common challenge among the countries, **without the necessary budget to improve the kitchen area, storage, food consumption areas, and access to water and refrigeration, among others.**

Regarding the **public procurement from family farming** component, there is a continuous and growing interest in the **potential of school feeding to support small-scale agricultural producers, communities, and local markets.** Most countries agree that this component has had the greatest effect on the implementation of SS.

It is considered vital to coordinate and work together to promote and strengthen small



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producers so that they can offer their products on the school menu.

Not only do schools benefit from having a supply of fresh

and local products, but also **this practice brings benefits in terms of boosting the local economy and improving conditions in the communities.**

Some countries recognize the importance of adapting and contextualizing the Brazilian experience through municipalities or departments associations or cooperatives.



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COVID-19 Pandemic Period

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis, countries through their school feeding programmes, have adjusted the conventional food delivery system to ensure the provision of the service. The main modality adopted was the delivery of food kits to the families, recognizing the important role of

educating the community in promoting and giving continuity to school feeding actions. Even during the unfavorable implications of the pandemic, it has been possible to identify inputs, lessons learned, and contributions that SS offer in the region.



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Current situation of the Sustainable Schools in LAC

Until 2017, it was reported that the SS methodology was implemented in 12 countries, 51 departments, 152 municipalities, in 3 193 schools, benefiting about 283 000 students and more than 1 240 families of local farmers. It is known that countries have increased these numbers,

and that countries such as Panama, Ecuador, and Trinidad and Tobago have also implemented the SS methodology. The following table shows the quantitative progress of the mentioned elements, which occurred in the period from 2017 to 2021 in the region.

Figure 2: Sustainable schools advances



Source: Own elaboration.



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Scaling of sustainable schools in the region

Historical data on SS refers that the first indicators of growth are based on the departments' and municipalities' coverage increase, which in return have an impact on the number of schools and the students. However, these are only some of the countries scaling up indications, a dynamic that has been multiplying in other countries, taking Brazil as a reference.

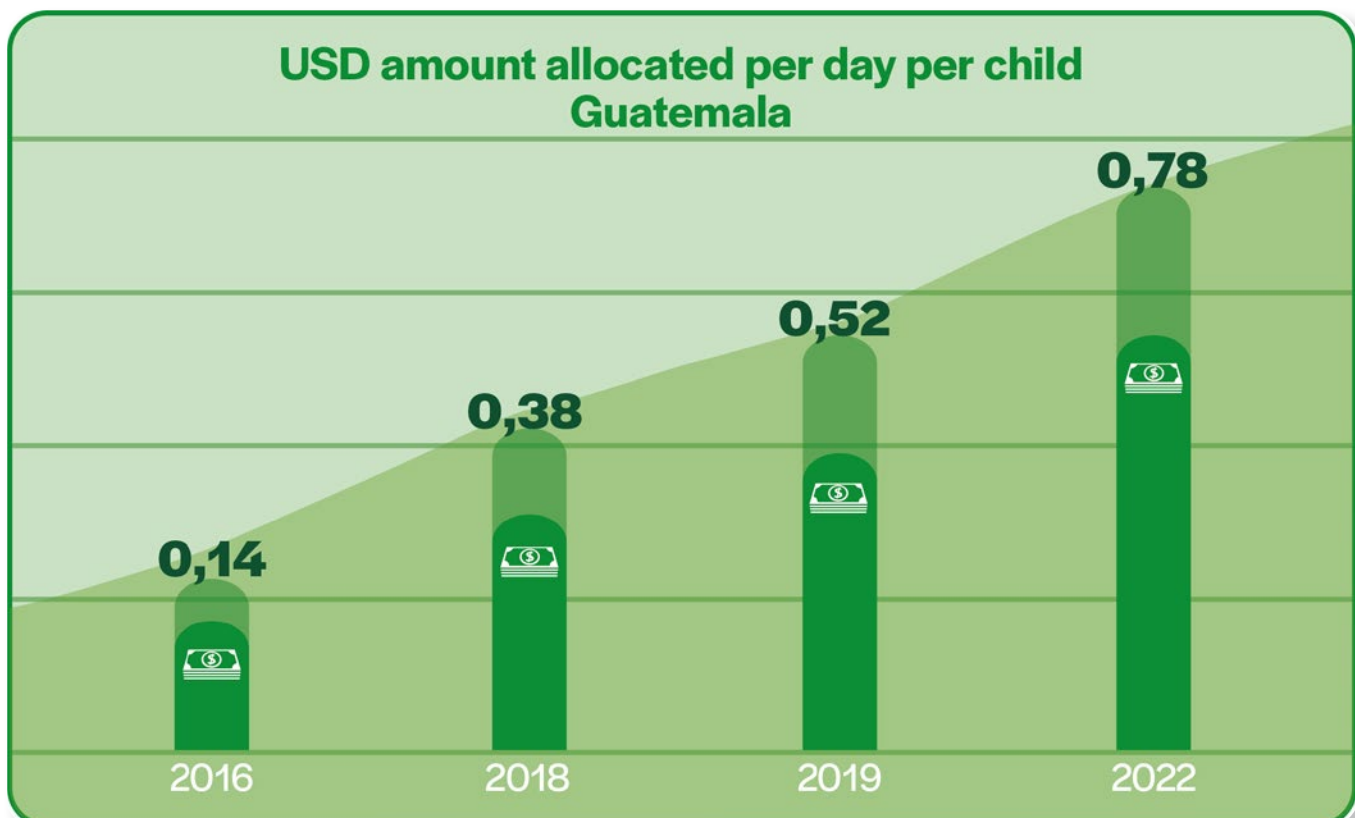
The countries have assumed different commitments and have made SS a functional methodology of unique and historic importance, which is why they have expanded their actions over the last decade.

It is possible to compare the progress in numbers from 2017 to 2021.

The main scaling-up topics is shown below:

1. Budget. The first graph shows the scaling of the budget in the last years of Guatemala. The amount is represented in dollars and has a direct benefit to the child. From USD 0.14 in 2016 to USD 0.78, in 2022. Such daily allocation increases the overall amount of annual execution under that country's SFP. Other countries' information is not available.

Figure 3: Increased investment in school meals in Guatemala



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 4: Progress description in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras



Source: Own elaboration

2. Attention by departments, municipalities, SS, and children. The following table shows how El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have scaled up significantly, marking a great difference in the number of students who benefited in three years, despite the restrictions of the pandemic and the different modalities of care in the educational centers of each country.

3. The level of care and coverage of students. In the same way, there was scaling up in other countries. In Guatemala, due to the reforms to the School Education Law (Decree 12-2021), the coverage and levels of attention expanded in the following years at initial and middle school education levels. The level of attention and coverage scaling will not be limited

to pre-school and primary education.

4. Improving the quality of the school menu. Establishing dietary patterns in the educational community requires time and process. Fruit and vegetable consumption is one of the objectives of SS. Brazil's experience leads to the recognition of the importance of adequate, healthy, and

culturally appropriate school menus elaboration for the SFP, where several elements are combined: context, culture, quality, and quantity, which are complemented by the pedagogical school garden and the actions of FNE.

El Salvador represents a better case, allocating more resources to strengthen the school snack by purchasing food from local farmers, and incorporating fruits, vegetables, and eggs. In addition, lunch was added to the school day meals, which amounts to US\$ 1.5 per child.

In the case of Honduras, the resources decentralization to the commonwealth with the purpose of improving the national SFP

allowed local purchases, incorporating fresh food in the daily meal and regionalized menus.

5. The legal framework that strengthens the SFP. The experience of having legal frameworks for the development of SFP is evidence of the sustainability of processes and continuous improvement.

Five countries in LAC have specific institutional norms and procedures for school feeding: Plurinational State of Bolivia, Paraguay, Honduras, Guatemala and Ecuador. El Salvador has already advanced the draft law and, in 2019, Panama approved the Law 115, which creates the “Study Without Hunger” programme, based on the experience of



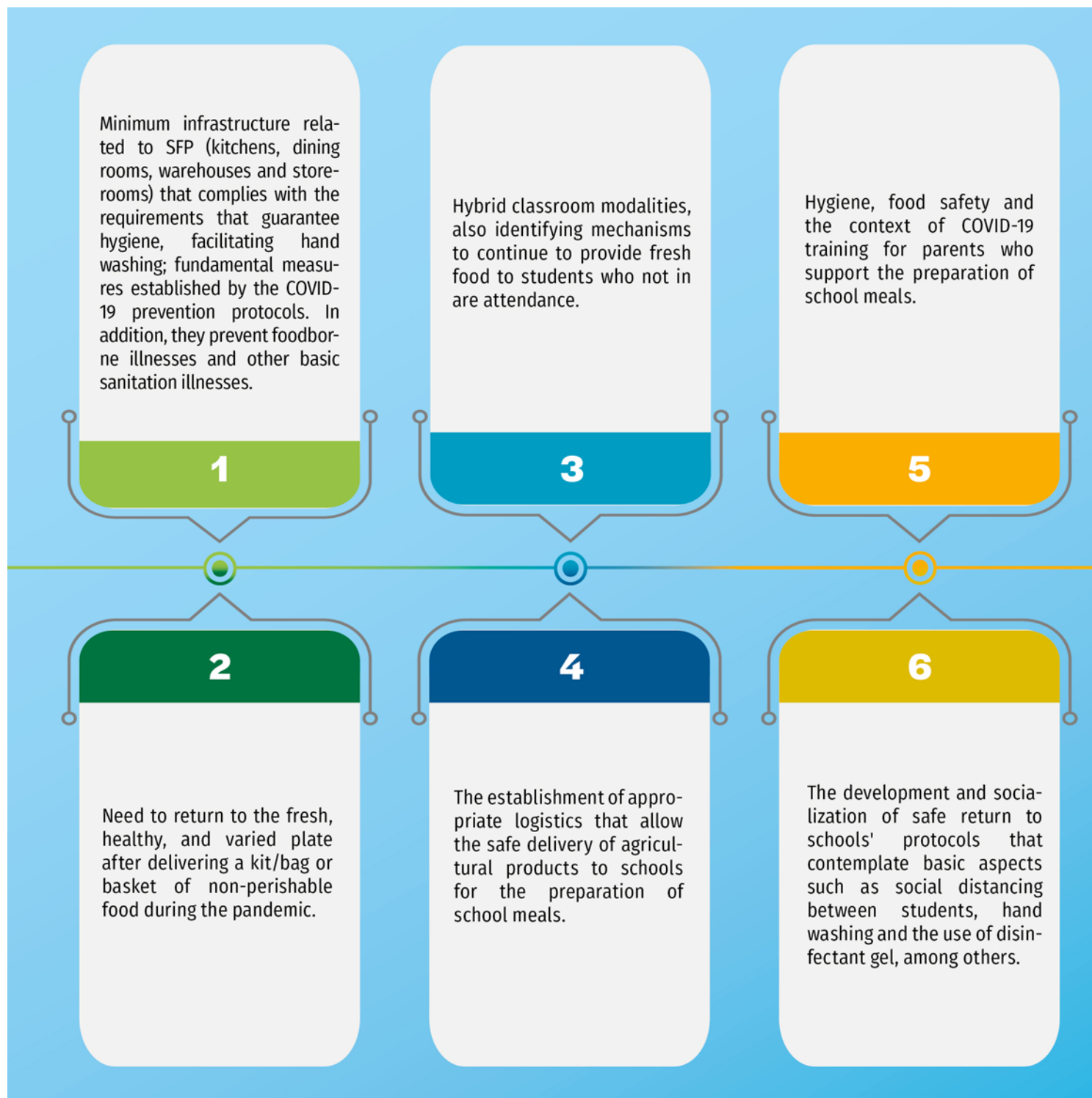
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Current challenges of School Feeding Programmes

Figure 5: Challenges of the School Feeding Programmes



Source: Own elaboration

Budget allocation guaranteed of for the SFP, even though pandemic-related purchases (vaccines, supplies, among others) are being prioritized.

7

Access to vaccines for the entire educational community (in accordance with the protocols of each country).

9

Countries have considered that school children attend classes, divided by groups, on certain days of the week, consider that it will be a challenge to plan purchases rations to ensure that all students receive their school meals.

11

8

The recovery of parents' confidence, due to concerns about the risk of contagion and the effects of the disease, so that they authorize their children to return to school.

10

The protocol for managing positive cases identified in schools.

12

Countries that have stopped their SFP consider that they will require some time to create the minimum conditions necessary for them to operate again.

Perspective on the return to schools

Worldwide, the return to school reality has been marked by concerns about safety, especially in school feeding management, preservation, and preparation. In order to ensure the food safety of millions of children and food consumed in the school environment, Brazilian Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABC/MRE), National Fund for Educational Development of the Ministry of Education (FNDE) of Brazil, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), organized actions under the “Joint Strategy to Strengthen Sustainable School Feeding Programmes (SFP) in Latin America

and the Caribbean (LAC) - safe environment during and after pandemics”.

The initiative was implemented within the framework of the Sustainable School Feeding Network (RAES, by its Spanish acronym), with 11 countries in the region: Belize, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Peru, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Hand hygiene, conservation (refrigerators), food preparation, and supply kits (cooking utensils) were made available in these countries, benefiting approximately 102 000 students in 600 schools.



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Lessons learned

Figure 6: Among the main lessons learned from the implementation of the SS model, the following are highlighted



Source: Own elaboration

Lesson 6

The school feeding menus design has acquired a technical approach that seeks to ensure the best food in quantity and quality that students receive, considering their contexts, cultural identity, and specific nutritional requirements for school age.



Lesson 7

Public procurement from family farming has sufficient potential to stimulate economic dynamism in the territories and encourage organization, in addition to promoting the development of knowledge to build other production and market possibilities.



Lesson 8

Although school feeding infrastructure represents a great challenge, it has been shown that coordination with local governments and technical cooperation organizations have achieved successful experiences that should continue to multiply.



Lesson 9

COVID-19 crisis opens a window of opportunity to transform primary production into a more sustainable and resilient economic sector by implementing technological innovations, nature-based solutions, and institutional environment improvements.



Main conclusions of the study

Figure 7: Conclusions of the study on regional Sustainable Schools



Source: Own elaboration

07



Considering the number of departments and municipalities that adopted the SS methodology, it should be considered an important achievement for the entire region, since in 2017 the methodology was present in 51 departments; and in 2021 it reached 63, which represents an increase of 23%. Regarding the municipalities, between the period from 2017-2021, these went from 152 to 536 participating municipalities. This represents a growth of 253%.

08



From the study, important lessons learned were observed, among which the paradigm shift from considering school feeding as just a food assistance intervention for vulnerable populations to considering it now as a rights-based intervention that links and articulates actions in health, education, agriculture, social development and sustainable development.

09



The SS methodology has greatly favored the promotion and approval of legal instruments for school feeding in the countries that have developed it.

10



Although the growth in the number of SS was observed, there is still a significant gap to be reached in relation to the universe of schools that exist in each country, which makes us see the imminent need to expand the number of SS in the region.

11



Faced with the schools reopening and the presentiality that this entails, there is a great need to establish and comply with health protocols aimed at always prioritizing the safety of children.

Recommendations

Figure 8: Study recommendations

1

Establish health protocols aimed at always prioritizing the safety of children.

2

Establish clear guidelines under which the SFP will be implemented again, taking into consideration that many countries will continue to offer hybrid modalities of education and timely access to school meals must be guaranteed to all children.

3

Resuming the preparation of fresh rations after a long period of delivery of food kits or food baskets. This requires a process of prior sensitization of the entire educational community, especially the staff that is linked to the food service to open the kitchens again for the preparation of food.

4

Conduct an in-depth diagnosis of the situation under which the countries will resume the implementation of the SS model in this new normality, as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency.

5

Promote and support countries that are still piloting the SS methodology to generate the necessary conditions to scale up the intervention to more schools and at a national level.

6

Design and implement a monitoring and evaluation system for the actions of the SS methodology in order to periodically document progress and identify limitations.

7

Identify good practices in the implementation of SS models and their barriers that prevent their adequate implementation.

8

Generate information in a systemic way that enrich the countries' learning process and exchange practices of implementation experiences of the SS model.

9

Comprehend food waste situation of SFP and food in general in all its cycles: production, marketing, preparation and consumption, since there are no statistics that can allow its quantification.



In order to ensure a space that brings together and disseminates good practices and relevant knowledge and contributes to the necessary progress on the issue, the Brazil-FAO International Cooperation on School Feeding Programme, through the Sustainable School Feeding Network (RAES, by its Spanish acronym), is developing the RAES web platform for all countries in the region, which can be accessed through the following link:

www.redraes.org

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