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WORKING PAPER

School Meals Case Study: Ethiopia

**Prepared by the Research Consortium for School Health
and Nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition**

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Country profile

Population and economics

Table 1: Key data on population and economic indicators

Total population	Population aged 5-19 (% of total)	Proportion of population employed in agriculture sector	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita	Proportion of women in the workforce
120,283,026 ¹	38.5% of total population	67% ¹	925.1 USD ¹	46.31% ¹

Education

The education system in Ethiopia is rapidly expanding. With a primary level net enrolment of 100% in 2019/2020, education accessibility has become a top priority for the government. In 1994, the introduction of the Education and Training Policy has led to a steady increase in the construction of schools and facilities². With this, the national Alternative Basic Education (ABE) strategy developed in 2006 aimed to respond to the differing needs and contexts of students in primary education, improving the enrolment of disadvantaged and under-served ethnic groups. The education system, as can be seen in Figure 1, has four distinct levels: Pre-primary, primary, middle, secondary, which is then followed by higher education. The focus on primary education has improved the enrolment and completion of primary and middle education. The completion rate for grade eight, the last grade of middle education, has increased from 52.1% to 69.8% in a 10-year period².

Secondary education covers general education topics, but it also allows students to specialize in a topic. The first two years in grade 9 and 10, all students learn 'general education'. When reaching grade 11, students can choose between social and natural sciences. This is meant to prepare the students for higher education and their future career. Although the net enrolment rate for secondary education has increased over the last 10 years, it is still quite low at 29.5%². This rate is drastically different between regions and gender. Nationally, the gross enrolment rate is higher for males compared to females, with an average gender parity index of 0.92 in 2021. Accessibility to required textbooks and school facilities is also low for secondary education, with a textbook to pupil ratio of 8 (the average student has access to 8 textbooks from a total of 18 subject books)².

¹ World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ET>

² Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education. 2021. Educational Statistics Annual Abstract. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Available at: <https://moe.gov.et/storage/Books/ESAA%202020-21%20Final.pdf>

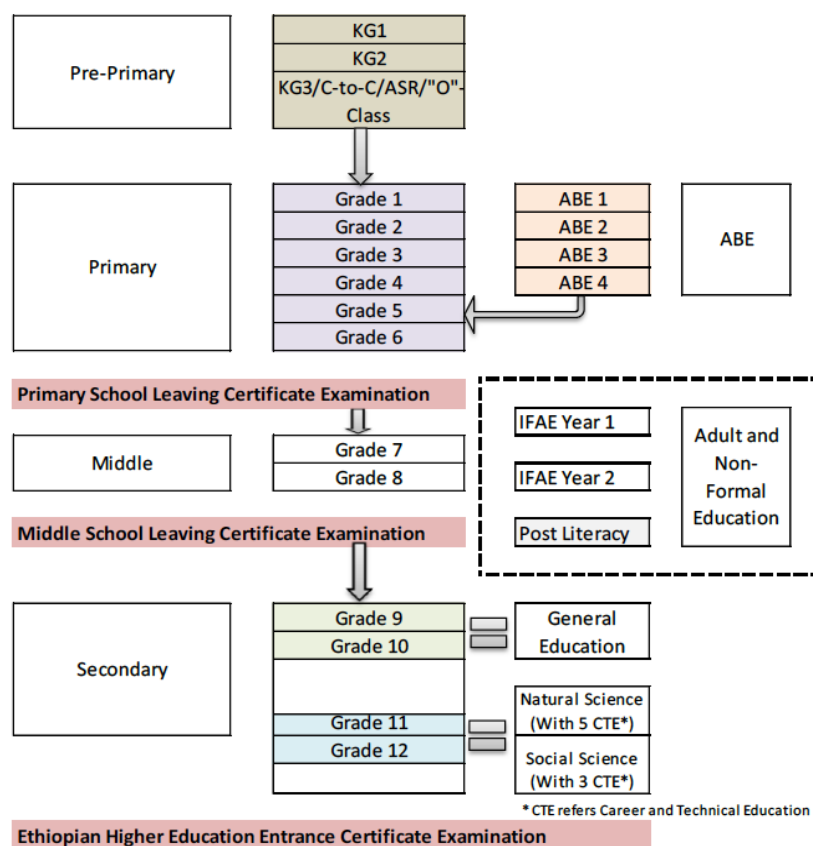


Figure 1: Education and training system in Ethiopia²

Food security, nutrition and health

Food insecurity: The hunger prevalence indicator or prevalence of undernourishment in the total population is 24.9%³

Stunting:

- 24% of children between the ages of 5 and 14 experience stunting⁴; 35.3% when looking at children under the age of 5 years³.
- 17.7% of children between the ages of 5 and 19 experience wasting⁴; 7.2% when looking at children under the age of 5 years³.
- By location:

Table 2: Stunting and anemia prevalence among school children (5-14 years), DHS 2016.

	Addis Ababa	Afar	Amhara	BG	Dire Dawa	Gambela	Harari	Oromia	SNNP	Somali	Tigray
Stunting (%)	23	29	34	19	20	11	13	18	26	25	41
Anemia (%)	4	30	33	17	20	25	25	18	25	27	22

BG is Benishangul Gumuz; SNNP is Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples'.

³ FAO. 2022. The state of food security and nutrition in the world. Available at:

<https://www.fao.org/3/cc0639en/cc0639en.pdf>

⁴ Assemie MA, Alamneh AA, Ketema DB, et al. High burden of undernutrition among primary school-aged children and its determinant factors in Ethiopia; a systematic review and meta-analysis. Italian Journal of Pediatrics. 2020;46:118. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13052-020-00881-w>

Micronutrient deficiency:

- 24-25.8% of children ages 5-14 are anaemic⁵.
- 10.9% of children ages five-14 have a vitamin A deficiency⁵.

Soil-transmitted helminths prevalence⁶:

- Ascariasis 11.2%
- Hookworm 10.4%
- Trichuriasis (T. trichuria) 3.6%

Obesity:

- 5.2% of the overall population in Ethiopia are overweight, 1.2% of which are obese⁷.
- In children under the age of 5 years, 2.6% are overweight³

Design and Implementation of the school meal programmes

Objectives

In Ethiopia, nearly 7 million primary school children (almost 39% of the total primary school children in the country) live in food-insecure areas and often go to school hungry⁸. The government of Ethiopia has launched a national nutrition program to address undernutrition with school feeding as an important component. To implement the school feeding programme, the Ministry of Education has drafted a national school feeding policy and strategy⁸.

The objectives of the school health and nutrition (SHN) program in Ethiopia are as follows⁹:

- To improve the quality of education by ensuring the development of child-friendly school environments.
- To promote the provision of safe and sanitary school environments which includes clean and potable water that is well maintained and with gender-segregated hygiene and sanitation facilities.
- To promote the provision of health and nutrition services that can be readily delivered through schools and close to the children's locality.
- To complement policies and strategies which define how health and nutrition is to be addressed in schools.
- To promote skills-based health and nutrition education that is delivered by trained teachers and health personnel at all levels.

⁵ Ethiopian Public Health Institute. 2016. Ethiopian national micronutrient survey report. Available at: <http://repository.iifphc.org/handle/123456789/1075>

⁶ Alemu G, Mekonnen F, Nega M, and Muluneh C. Trend of Soil-Transmitted Helminths in Ethiopian Children: a systematic review and meta-analysis (2000-2018). Journal of Parasitology Research. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/5638836>

⁷ Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI). 2016. Ethiopia steps report on risk factors for non-communicable diseases and prevalence of selected NCDs. EPHI, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

⁸ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education. 2021. Education Sector Development Programme VI (ESDP VI). Federal Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Available at: <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fspublic/document/file/2021-11-education-sector-development-plan-ethiopia.pdf?VersionId=eCE8EO7S11XRa806tewLkhRcQfQ6yU2B>

⁹ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education. 2012. National School health and nutrition strategy. Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- To ensure mechanisms are put in place for ownership and sustainability of SHN programs (such as school feeding programs and other promotive nutrition interventions, cooking demonstrations and school gardens) thereby, increasing access and completion rates by reducing dropout and absenteeism prevalent in chronically food insecure areas of the country.

Targeting and coverage

The target group for school feeding in Ethiopia is all school children from pre-primary to primary (grade 1-8) level. The long-term target coverage of pre-primary, primary and middle level school children with the school feeding program is 100% by 2030⁸. In 2027, the government of Ethiopia is targeting to reach 21 million school children.

In the country, the World Food Programme (WFP) sponsored school feeding program was started in 1994 in chronically food insecure and low education performing areas¹⁰, an effort which was taken up by other development partners such as Save the Children and the Education Cannot Wait Multiyear Resilience Program (ECW MYRP) recently. The support from development partners has benefitted nearly 800,000 school children from 9 regions in Ethiopia in 2022/23.

The government-owned school feeding program was initiated in Addis Ababa in 2019 after initial piloting in SNNP and Oromia regions (2012-2014). Afterwards, the government owned SFP was adopted by all other regional states and Dire Dawa city administration. In 2022/23, more than 6 million school children have benefited from government sponsored school feeding programs; the highest number in Oromia with more than 5 million beneficiaries followed by Addis Ababa city administration with over 700,000 beneficiaries. The Addis Ababa City administration allocated 75.5 million USD for the school feeding program during the last academic year (2022/23).

The government is actively involved in improving access to quality education. Specifically, the Ministry of Education and the Regional Bureaus of Education have been keen to implement a school feeding program¹¹. The Ministries of Agriculture and Health are also important supporters of the school feeding program.

Meal type and nutritional norms

Different menus are provided in the school feeding programme across Ethiopia depending on the regional context. Most provide some sort of fortified grain or cereal, oil, and salt. These foods are served as a cooked meal during the school's mid-morning break or before the start of classes. Children in the targeted schools receive a meal five times per week for the duration of the 10-month school year¹³. The meals are meant to provide each child with at least one-third of their daily energy requirements.

In drought affected and conflict areas, the food ration per child that was provided as a cooked meal on every school day and mostly consisted of 120 g of corn-soya blend (CSB), 8 g of fortified vegetable oil, and 3 g of iodized salt.

¹⁰ WFP. 2020. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020. Rome, World Food Programme.

¹¹ Program Report: Ethiopia'. (2018). Gcnf Global Survey. PDF https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CR_Ethiopia_082719_r2.1.pdf

In the home-grown school feeding program in the southern Ethiopian region SNNP, each school child would receive a daily hot meal prepared from 150 g of dry cereals and beans in different forms with vegetable oil and iodized salt. As of 2022, a fresh food pilot was launched which has been scaled up to reach over 15,000 school children in 45 schools. Under the fresh foods pilot, fresh fruits, vegetables, and animal proteins such as eggs and animal meat are added to a rotating weekly menu to contribute to improved nutrition and diversity of the school meal.

The Addis Ababa school feeding program serves breakfast and lunch to pre-primary and primary students (Grade 1-8). The meal menu is provided as a separate document.

Food procurement

A focus of the school feeding programs is to enhance the local economy. To do this, Ethiopia has connected its school feeding program to the local purchase of food or agriculture development, otherwise known as Home-grown School Feeding¹². This is a key element of enhancing the national social protection systems. Targeted procurement of food items from local markets provides opportunities to small-holder farmers. This stimulates the economy at the community level and incentivizes diversified and increased agricultural production by providing a structured, reliable demand. This also improves the cost-effectiveness of the program, as locally produced food purchases decrease the cost for purchase and transport of food commodities compared to imported food options¹⁴. Local procurement also allows for inclusion of fresh food items, such as fruits, vegetables, and animal proteins, in the school meal, contributing to improved dietary diversity and improved nutrition of school children.

Legal framework and public policy evolution

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has developed the national school feeding policy and strategy which was endorsed in 2021 [8,9]. School feeding is now embedded in the Government's policies, institutionalised with a directorate to lead the programme at the MoE, paving the way for the transition towards nationally owned school feeding.

WFP in collaboration with other UN Agencies such as FAO and UNICEF is supporting the school feeding program in Ethiopia. WFP with other UN agencies such as FAO have supported the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) to establish policies on public food procurement for Government-led HGSF initiatives and diversified diets.

Costs of implementation

The allocation of costs of the home-grown school feeding program can be seen in Figure 2, disaggregation based on HGSF program in SNNPR. The total cost of the program ranges from 28 to 70 USD per child per year with the highest allocations in Addis Ababa where the full cost of the SFP in public schools is borne by the government. This equates to 0.16 to 0.4 USD per child per day. This estimate is based on 176 feeding days. The program aims to provide a meal for these 176 days based on the Regional Bureau of Education information for the most recent semester.

¹² Desalegn, Gebremedhin, & Stoecker. (2022). Successes and challenges of the Home-grown School Feeding Program in Sidama Region, Southern Ethiopia: a qualitative study. *Journal of Nutritional Science*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9554426/>

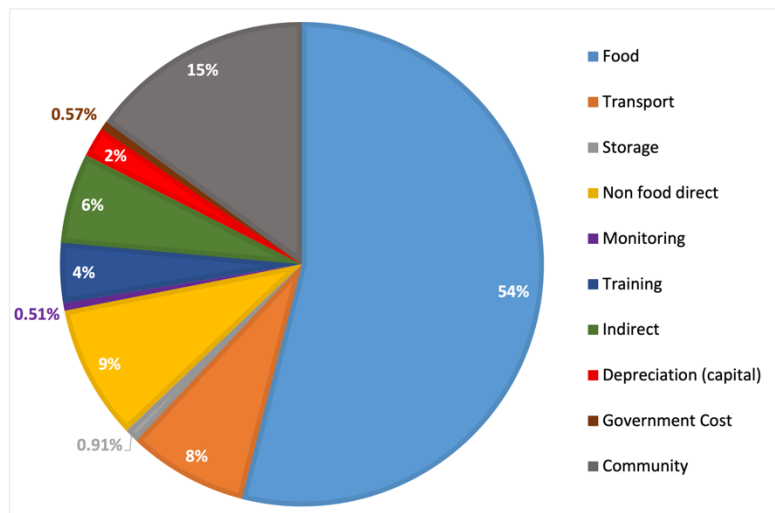


Figure 2: Cost per child per year of Home-Grown School Feeding¹³

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are key components in both the school health program of the Ministry of Health and Ethiopia national school health and nutrition strategy (MoE)^{9,14}. Among the indicators to monitor school health include:

- Percentage of students screened for malnutrition
- Percentage of malnourished students managed
- Percentage of schools providing nutritional counselling services
- Percentage of students who received deworming drug
- Percentage of schools with school gardening service
- Percentage of students supplemented with Vitamin A
- Percentage of schools with functional hand washing facilities
- Percentage of school with functional latrine facility as per the national standard
- Percentage of schools with safe drinking water as per the national standard

In addition, the assessment of the implementation of a school feeding program and nutrition status of the school fed children in selected government primary schools in Addis Ababa found that the school meal service has a high acceptance rate by beneficiaries. The percentage of users, dropouts, and non-users of the service was 92%, 6.76%, and 1.66% respectively¹⁵.

¹³ The Partnership for Child Development. 2014. Costing analysis of school health and nutrition interventions. The ESHI case study 2014. PCD Working Paper Series-No 4. Imperial College, London.

¹⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Health. 2017. School health program framework. Ministry of Health, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁵ Tefera GG. 2020. Assessment of the implementation of school feeding program and nutrition status of school fed children in selected government primary schools in Addis Ababa. PhD thesis. Available at: <http://etd.aau.edu.et/handle/123456789/22201>

Lessons learned and best practices

The Addis Ababa school feeding program that has adopted HGSFP is fully sponsored by local sources (Addis Ababa City Administration) is an important development that has been replicated in all the other regions. Besides, the Addis Ababa SFP provides two meals on each school day.

Challenges

Some challenges that were encountered during the implementation of the home-grown school feeding programs are outlined below:

- Food procurement and supply challenges
- Food price inflation
- Poor infrastructure
- Weak intersectoral collaboration
- Poor quality of food
- Lack of ownership and transparent and accountable management
- School closure due to conflict, COVID-19
- Inadequate understanding about national school health and nutrition strategy among SFP coordinators at different levels
- High staff turnover presents a challenge to the efficiency and reduce effectiveness program management
- Limited resources, sustainability
- Weak monitoring and evaluation

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Related resources and data sources

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