Agencies call for a global push for school health and nutrition

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For the first time since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, UN and multilateral agencies from across health, education, agriculture, WASH, and social welfare sectors have come together to make a renewed commitment to school health and nutrition. The partnership, Stepping up effective school health and nutrition aims to advance the health and nutrition of school-aged children and adolescents, so they are ready to learn and thrive, and can contribute meaningfully to the future of their communities and countries.

The joint call for action comes as the COVID-19 pandemic pushes 90% of the world’s student population out of school and brings to light the important role schools play in protecting the health and well-being of learners. Millions of children are now missing the one nutritious meal a day they received through school feeding programmes. Millions more can no longer access the basic health services and critical health education provided in schools across the world.

Through united action, the partnership, which includes FAO, GPE, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNSCN, the World Bank, WFP, and WHO, invites governments and other partners to join them in renewing their own commitments to school health and nutrition and to increase and better align investments and efforts to bring proven interventions to scale and respond to children’s learning and growth needs holistically, and ultimately build the human capital of countries.

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Stefania Giannini, said health and nutrition form a foundation for education. “The Covid-19 crisis has more than ever highlighted the links between health, nutrition, well-being and learning. We can only achieve inclusive and equitable quality education by investing systematically in school health and nutrition. We know this has decisive influence, especially for the most disadvantaged and marginalized learners,” Ms Giannini said. “UNESCO welcomes this new partnership, and we reiterate our commitment to school health. This is about committing to leave no one behind, tackling inequalities early on and setting the foundations for healthy, productive lives.”

Clearly, increased cross sectoral collaboration and coherent investments that bring together health, nutrition and education are urgently needed for a big push on school health and nutrition. The partnership’s priorities are:
1. Advocating jointly to raise school health and nutrition on national, regional and global agendas, and mobilize funding and support to scale national programmes;
2. Generating and disseminating more and better data on school health and nutrition, to critically monitor global progress and inform policy and programming at all levels;
3. Providing coordinated and evidence-based guidance and standards based on country needs; and
4. Providing coordinated policy advice and support for advancing multisectoral policies and programmes that are embedded in national education systems.

Investing in learner health, nutrition and well-being through programmes that link education, health and food systems, is at the heart of the 2030 agenda. A key strategy to build the human capital of countries through better health, nutrition and education, it contributes to at least ten of the SDGs, poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, economic growth, reduced inequalities, peace, justice and strong institutions, and strengthened partnerships.

The partnership includes the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Standing Committee for Nutrition (UNSCN), the World Bank Group, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Read more [1]

Links
[1] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373431