

QUALITY EDUCATION

The Role of Dietitian-Nutritionists in Contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL #4

Target: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (1)

Quality education can break the cycle of poverty, eliminate social inequality (2), reduce gender inequalities, and empower individuals to live healthy lives (3). Education is a powerful vehicle for sustainable development (1, 4). This brief will demonstrate how nutrition and food systems play a role in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, how quality education can contribute to nutrition and food systems, and the role of dietitian-nutritionists in this relationship.

GLOBAL TARGETS

- ▶ By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to effective learning outcomes

- ▶ By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- ▶ By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy
- ▶ Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

How Does Quality Education Impact Nutrition, and Nutrition Impact Quality Education?

Quality education provides children with the nutrition and health knowledge that is integral to leading healthy lives into the future. Quality education prepares a child for employment as an adult that can help them break the cycle of poverty, increase their social status, and afford a healthy diet. These impacts can be intergenerational, as a mother's education is a predictor of their child's nutritional status (6). At childhood, malnourishment affects cognitive development and intellectual capacity and comprises a child's ability to learn (7). In some countries schools use physical size as an indicator of school readiness; children with stunted growth start school later, receiving less education and lowering their expected lifetime earnings (8). Inadequate nutrition increases an individual's risk for infection, disease, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies, all of which may prevent a child from maintaining good attendance at school (9,10). For example, iron deficiency causes reduction in attention and comprehension, and iodine deficiency affects brain development.

These challenges are most common in low-income countries (6).



750 million adults
(2/3 of which are women)
remained illiterate in 2016 ⁽¹⁾

Quality education impacts several other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well, having a massive impact on sustainability. Quality education can improve maternal health outcomes (SDG 3), impacting the ability for future generations to achieve higher education (2,10). Quality education improves one's ability to achieve decent work and contribute to economic growth (SDG 8) (11). Achieving decent work can decrease poverty rates (SDG 1) and improve food security, helping achieve zero hunger (SDG 2). Lastly, providing inclusive and equitable education for girls helps create sustainable gender equality (SDG 5).

Framework for Action

Providing inclusive and equitable quality education requires action at the policy, health-systems, academic, and community levels, and there are opportunities for action from dietitian-nutritionists in each. Establishing trusting relationships with colleagues and clients at all of these levels is key to success at all levels.

Academic Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can work with stakeholders in schools to create conditions where children's nutrition supports their access to education and learning. Dietitian-nutritionists can also be involved in teacher and kitchen staff training and advocate for the implementation of adequate infrastructure such as cooking space and equipment (9). In post-secondary institutions nutrition educators can teach future generations about the relationships between education and nutrition status, developing courses and course content that explore the relationship and complex factors

SEEDS FOR A BETTER FUTURE IN SRI LANKA⁽¹²⁾

A school in a small community in Sri Lanka is showing how education, nutrition, and food systems interplay to benefit students and the community. There are many recently resettled families in the community who have left home due to conflict in the area, and many face food insecurity. The school of just over 70 students has planted gardens with the help of the United Nations Development Programme and students are learning how to grow their own vegetables. Since the program launch, students' nutrition and school attendance have improved. Developing such skills can reduce their risk of long-term food insecurity, and they can use these skills later in life to sell food and create an income. The program is run in partnership with many organizations, including the Department of Agriculture and ERR Ceylon.

involved. Inspiring future dietitian-nutritionists to become involved in childhood nutrition work could create increased interest and change in the field (9).

Policy Level

Dietitian-nutritionists can help design policies that prioritize the nutritional needs of school-aged children (13), such as policies for school food programming or policies to provide nutritional support to parents and community members. Examples of such are the Think and Eat Green at School program in Vancouver, Canada, that creates healthier, sustainable food systems in schools (14) and the Toronto Food Policy Council that implements programs in communities rooted in food sovereignty (15). Such policies support the cognitive development and learning abilities of children and their families.

Health-Systems Level

Poor health is a major obstacle for many children in obtaining quality education and dietitian-nutritionists play a key role in overcoming this. Dietitian-nutritionists can educate struggling families and work on implementing nutrition care plans that can improve a child's school attendance, participation, and ability to learn. Since adequate nutrition plays such a key role in a child's cognitive function and development, children in countries with low primary-school enrollment rates would especially benefit from seeing a dietitian-nutritionist.

Community Level

Supporting food access at the community level can have a major impact on educational outcomes. Community nutrition programs developed for children can reduce the impact of food insecurity on their school attendance and ability to learn. Dietitian-nutritionists

can create, advocate for, and support, programs that make nutritious food more accessible. This could include implementing programs like school or community food gardens, supporting the installation of school kitchen facilities, or providing school food service workers with the knowledge and skills needed to provide nutritious meals to children.



2,000,000,000
primary-aged workers
are **unemployed** ⁽⁵⁾

THE NUTRITION AND ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION (NAPE) PROJECT IN MALAWI

The NAPE project, a program that provided healthy meals to school-aged children in Malawi, has revolutionized school food and made a massive impact on previously high drop-out rates (5). In 2016, 180 primary schools within 10 districts took part in the NAPE project, co-funded by the European Union under the Afikepo Nutrition Programme. In addition to providing healthy meals, 150 energy-efficient school kitchens and training for volunteer cooks were provided, and schools have maintained these nutrition practices (5). NAPE has empowered schools to provide students with the nutrition needed to thrive.



KEY POINTS

- ▶ Education is key to escaping poverty and empowering individuals to live healthy and sustainable lives (3).
- ▶ Quality education provides children with the nutrition knowledge required to maintain lifelong health.
- ▶ Inadequate nutrition increases the risk of nutrient deficiencies, infections, and diseases, reducing childrens' school attendance and ability to learn (9).

Key Roles for Dietitian-Nutritionists

- ▶ Implement nutrition programs in schools such as feeding programs and food gardens.
- ▶ Support school staff in obtaining the infrastructure and skills needed to create a healthy food school environment.
- ▶ Promote and create policies that support nutritious food in schools.

Recommendations for Further Reading:

Healthy diets for all: A key to meeting the SDGs:
<http://glopan.org/sites/default/files/SDGPolicyBrief.pdf> (16)

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<http://glopan.org/sites/default/files/SDGPolicyBrief.pdf> (16)

Malawi: Afikepo Nutrition Programme – Nutrition and Access to Primary Education (NAPE):
https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/20190701_impact%20fact%20sheet_Afikepo-NAPE_final.pdf (17)

Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656> (18)

Seeds for a brighter future: Sri Lanka- United Nations Development Programme: <https://stories.undp.org/seeds-for-a-brighter-future> (12)

Organisation for Elangai Refugees Rehabilitation (ofERR)
<https://www.oferrceylon.com>

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