



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# Supporting Caribbean School meals

There is a long-standing tradition of school meals programmes in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. These programmes reach over **3 million children** and adolescents in the region. While coverage is not universal, most programmes are consolidated, state-funded, community-based and recognized by some national institutional framework. Skyrocketing food inflation, high levels of imports, fragile local food systems, and exposure to shocks, have contributed to rising food insecurity and to some of the highest costs for meals in the world. Globally, the region has the **highest cost for a healthy diet** (USD \$4.41 per day)<sup>1</sup>. **Forty-three percent** of people in the English-speaking Caribbean are estimated to be food insecure<sup>2</sup>.

While most countries have set up decentralized school meals programmes, these approaches often have not led

schools and communities to purchase more local, fresh foods from farmers. In a number of countries, weak institutional frameworks are a barrier to consolidating and scaling up programmes, and poor information management often prevents countries from appropriately advocating and taking informed decisions. These barriers prevent most countries from expanding and improving the quality and impact of school meals programmes.

## WFP's Vision and Strategy

WFP designed and implemented some of the first Caribbean school meals programmes between the 1970s and the 1980s. All were transferred to national authorities in the 1990s. Today, building on its extensive experience, WFP is a strong advocate and resource partner for strengthening school-based programmes. Through investing in advocacy efforts, technical assistance and

<sup>1</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean - Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023

<sup>2</sup> Caribbean Food Security & Livelihoods Survey (April 2024)

WFP Caribbean was opened in 2018 and covers 22 countries and territories across the English and Dutch Caribbean. Aligned with the United Nations Multi-country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, WFP is guided by its 5 year Caribbean Multi-Country Strategic Plan (MCSP) which began in March 2022.

WFP works with national governments and regional institutions like the CARICOM Secretariat and the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency, to strengthen disaster management, social protection and food systems. These investments place the most vulnerable at the forefront with the aim of strengthening resilience at the individual, community and systems level.

strategic guidance, WFP seeks to help Caribbean countries in three priority areas. First, **strengthening programmes and systems**, enhancing quality, sustainability, impact, and shock-responsiveness, including by using innovative, and climate-smart solutions. Second, **promoting linkages with national and local food systems**, primarily through supporting the design, testing and scaling up of home-grown school meals initiatives. Third, **enhancing policy and advocacy frameworks**, contributing to the creation of strong national and regional communities of practice.

### IMPACT OF SCHOOL MEALS

#### *School meals can*



reduce micronutrient deficiencies and anaemia, as well as prevent overweight and obesity by diversifying diets and changing behaviours



contribute to increased school enrolment, reduced absenteeism and improved educational outcomes



cover 10 – 15% of household expenditure



create 500 new jobs for every 100,000 children who eat meals



improve market access and productivity of smallholder farmers.



contribute to post emergency assistance for children and families

### Current support across the region

In 2022 several Caribbean countries engaged WFP to explore optimizing their national school meals programmes and related systems. WFP completed analyses and consultations across the region to identify challenges, opportunities and tailored solutions.

WFP has since consolidated technical and strategic support to multiple countries. In Jamaica, WFP has joined forces with UNICEF, UNESCO and FAO in a three year initiative to support the **digital transformation of the education system**, by prioritizing digitalization of key processes in the education sector, including the national school meals programme. In Guyana, WFP and FAO have joined efforts to help the Ministry of Education **design, test, and scale up**



**a home-grown school meals initiative** in two districts of the country, and to strengthen national monitoring and evaluation systems. In Suriname, WFP supports the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in the design and operationalization of school meals initiatives, as well as on supporting the **development of a new national school meals policy**. In Belize, WFP is providing technical support to the Ministry of Education including exchanges with other governments, **facilitating access to external partners' expertise** and supporting the review of national policies. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, after supporting national authorities with the adaptation of the national school meals programme during the 2021 volcano eruption, WFP is helping the Ministry of Education to **identify key structural and programmatic gaps and potential solutions**. In other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, WFP has provided **on-demand guidance and technical support**. WFP also engages with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)\* on the alignment and definition of strategic priorities and opportunities for national school meals programmes in the subregion. Between 2021 and 2024, Belize, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname joined the Global School Meals Coalition, a state-led global initiative established in 2021. The coalition's membership comprises of 98 countries and over 130 partners, uniting to drive actions to improve and scale up school meal programmes by 2030.

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Photo page 1: WFP/Fedel Mansour

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