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## The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program

The federal McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is named after former Senator George McGovern (D-SD) and former Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) for their long-standing commitment to U.S. government efforts in school feeding and child nutrition around the world. Congress first authorized the program as part of the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, better known as the 2002 farm bill. It has always had bipartisan support.

The McGovern-Dole program's purpose is to reduce hunger and promote literacy and primary education, especially for girls. It does this by providing school meals and by carrying out other activities that boost the impact of providing these meals. So far, McGovern-Dole has reached 40 million children with food at school.<sup>1</sup> It is currently active in 24 countries.

Americans are generally familiar with school meals, which help ensure that millions of our country's low-income children get enough to eat by offering free and reduced-price meals. The concept is similar in countries with fewer resources. McGovern-Dole supplies U.S. commodities, such as corn, soybeans, and vegetable oil, for school meals. The program both reduces childhood hunger and gives families a reason to send children to school rather than have them work to help support the family or do household chores. To boost the impact of providing school meals, they are often complemented with safe drinking water, improvements in sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, medications for children with parasites, books, school supplies, and/or training for teachers.

Over the years, the McGovern-Dole program has led to important improvements in children's food security and nutritional status and in school enrollment, attendance, and gender parity. A top priority is to make programs sustainable by transitioning them to the authority of local government to continue independently.



Joseph Molteni/Bread for the World

- **McGovern-Dole feeds hungry children.** In Kenya, for example, the school lunch is the most substantial daily meal many children from food-insecure families will get. McGovern-Dole also provides nutrition education. One result is that Kenya saw a 44 percent increase in children who arrived at school having eaten breakfast.<sup>2</sup> Many school feeding programs also offer take-home rations, enabling families to stretch their food supplies longer.<sup>3</sup>

McGovern-Dole has also explored ways to improve nutrition through school meals. In 2012, it launched a pilot program to use micronutrient-fortified foods in school meals.<sup>4</sup> Three countries – Cambodia, Guatemala, and Haiti – have already noted improvements in children's nutritional status, including a lower risk of acute malnutrition (wasting), increases in vitamin A levels, fewer cases of illnesses such as diarrhea, and reduced severity in cases of malaria.

- **McGovern-Dole strengthens education.** Programs in both Kenya and Ethiopia found that school feeding increased student enrollment. In one district in Ethiopia, school enrollment increased from 64 percent to 100 percent, meaning all school-

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age children were enrolled.<sup>5</sup> Ethiopia's school feeding program also helped prevent children from dropping out of school during the country's 2016 drought. School feeding can also increase teacher attendance, as was the case in Kenya.<sup>6</sup>

Alleviating short-term hunger enables children to pay closer attention in school.<sup>7</sup> Children simply have better comprehension and are more engaged when their stomachs aren't growling.

The impact of school meals increases when school systems receive complementary services. As earlier noted, these can include educational materials, teacher training, and school infrastructure such as clean drinking water and improved sanitation.<sup>8</sup>

- **McGovern-Dole empowers girls.** The program prioritizes activities proven to increase girls' enrollment and attendance. For example, in Ethiopia, providing extra take-home rations to female students led to improved gender balance in schools: girls and boys enrolled in nearly equal numbers.<sup>9</sup> Another study found that school meals and take-home rations can increase girls' enrollment in school by 46 percent each year.<sup>10</sup>

Girls' education in itself also improves nutrition, especially for the next generation. The risk of child-

hood stunting decreases by 4 percent to 5 percent for every additional year of education that the mother received.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, this is a long-term strategy, but one critical to improving nutrition over generations.

- **McGovern-Dole focuses on sustainability.** As noted earlier, McGovern-Dole is designed to ensure that school meal programs can, after a transition period, be transferred to a national or local government to operate on its own.<sup>12</sup> McGovern-Dole trains local civic organizations in how to run school feeding programs and works with local government to ensure that meals continue to be provided as usual during transitions. In Kenya, 20 districts to date have transitioned to national school authorities; an agreement is in place to transition an additional county each year.<sup>13</sup>

McGovern-Dole has been proven effective in getting children, particularly girls, into school and helping them stay in school. School meals improve students' ability to concentrate and learn. They also strengthen food security for the children's families. In the longer term, educating girls is critical to ending hunger and malnutrition in future generations.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (2016). The Global Effort to Reduce Child Hunger and Increase School Attendance: Report to the United States Congress, Fiscal Years 2012-2014. Accessed at [https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2016-07/8169534\\_mcgovern-dole\\_report\\_-\\_june\\_2016.pdf](https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2016-07/8169534_mcgovern-dole_report_-_june_2016.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> World Food Programme & USDA (2015). A Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP's USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program's Support (2013-2015) in Kenya from September 2013 to December 2014. Accessed at <https://www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/WFP-SFP%20Kenya%20Mid%20Term%20Evaluation.pdf/>.

<sup>3</sup> USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (2016). The Global Effort to Reduce Child Hunger and Increase School Attendance: Report to the United States Congress, Fiscal Years 2012-2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (2016). USDA's School Feeding Program in Ethiopia is Making a Difference. Global Agricultural Information Network Report. Accessed at [https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/USDA%E2%80%99s%20School%20Feeding%20Program%20in%20Ethiopia%20is%20Making%20a%20Difference\\_Addis%20Ababa\\_Ethiopia\\_2-5-2016.pdf](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/USDA%E2%80%99s%20School%20Feeding%20Program%20in%20Ethiopia%20is%20Making%20a%20Difference_Addis%20Ababa_Ethiopia_2-5-2016.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> World Food Programme & USDA (2015). A Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP's USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program's Support (2013-2015) in Kenya from September 2013 to December 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Bundy, D., et al. (2009). Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector. World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>8</sup> USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (2016). USDA's School Feeding Program in Ethiopia is Making a Difference. Global Agricultural Information Network Report.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bundy, D., et al. (2009). Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector. World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service (2016). The Global Effort to Reduce Child Hunger and Increase School Attendance: Report to the United States Congress, Fiscal Years 2012-2014.

<sup>13</sup> World Food Programme & USDA (2015). A Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP's USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program's Support (2013-2015) in Kenya from September 2013 to December 2014.