

UNIT FIVE

Good nutrition for learning

Introduction

Research confirms that there is a close relationship between good nutrition, school attendance, and performance at school. There are thousands of vulnerable learners in our schools whose growth and development is severely compromised because they do not have food security. As discussed in previous units, schools cannot close their eyes to this social challenge since it directly affects the ability of many learners to learn and develop their potential. Lack of good nutrition may be considered the single most important factor that hampers effective learning in schools in South Africa. By implementing a good nutrition programme at school, management can significantly improve the performance of learners, particularly those who are vulnerable.

We start off Unit 5 with a story that encourages you to reflect on a key question: Why should the provision of nutritious food for vulnerable children be a central concern for school management? We look to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to understand the link between nutrition and learning. His theory suggests that higher cognitive levels of performance depend on basic needs being adequately met. This is backed up by evidence from research that shows the significant benefits to learners who receive regular meals at school. The importance of meeting a basic need such as food prompted the establishment of the National School Nutrition Programme in South Africa in 1994. Since 2002 this national programme has been the responsibility of the Department of Education. We examine critically what this programme is expected to achieve and how it is working in practice. Examples from our research show what can be done to supplement the nutrition programme and to make it work in different contexts. The concluding section in this unit gives guidelines on key aspects of managing a good nutrition programme at your school.

Key questions

This unit explores at the following questions:

1. Why should schools get involved in managing a nutrition programme?
2. What are the objectives of the National School Nutrition Programme?
3. What difficulties do schools experience with the implementation of the national school nutrition programme?
4. How can you manage an effective nutrition programme at your school?

Outcomes

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the link between nutrition and learner performance.
- Recognise the need to become involved in managing an effective nutrition programme at your school.

- Understand what the aims and the norms for implementing the National School Nutrition Programme are.
- Analyse and identify common problems experienced by schools in implementing this programme.
- Describe practical ways in which you can supplement the national nutrition programme.
- Explain what is involved in managing an effective nutrition programme at your school.

Food and learning

Principals and teachers would generally agree that there is a strong connection between nutrition and school performance. In general, research has shown that the existence of a school nutrition programme serves to:

- increase enrolment rates
- improve the learner's intellectual capacity
- decrease the school drop out rate
- decrease absenteeism
- generally improve learner's health.

Equally, we know that setting up and implementing a successful school-based nutrition programme can be fraught with difficulties. There may even still be some who are of the opinion that it is not one of the core functions of a school to provide for the nutritional needs of learners. What is your view?

Read the story of a principal who made food security for vulnerable learners in her school one of her main concerns.



Activity 1

What are some of the issues in caring for the nutrition needs of vulnerable children?

In Unit 2, Case Study 2, (page 44) we read about Mrs Ndukwana's strategies for action at Vuwani Lower Primary School. We will now revisit Vuwani Lower Primary School and Mrs Ndukwana in Case Study 6. This time, however, we will be focusing on a different aspect of school management, namely the actions that she and her nutrition task team have taken to respond to the nutritional needs of vulnerable children in the school. It also highlights some of the difficulties in implementing the school nutrition programme.

1. Why was it not easy for the school to implement the nutrition programme?
2. Do you agree that food security is a key area of concern for school management?
Discuss this with your management team.



CASE STUDY 6 – FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mrs Ndukwana says that the majority of learners at **Vuwani Lower Primary** are vulnerable because of their poor home backgrounds. She claimed that most learners stay with their siblings or with relatives, and as a result, regular food supply is a challenge. Mrs Ndukwana knows that her school cannot get down to teaching and learning while the children are hungry. That is why she has made food security one of her key concerns. The SMT at Vuwani has set up a school-based task team that is responsible for the nutrition programme. This includes taking responsibility for the school food garden, and for administering the national nutrition programme. The school has sought and received assistance from the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Water Affairs to support the development of the school food garden.

Working on the National Nutrition Programme, however, is not always easy. There is a lot of paperwork involved. According to the programme children should receive a hot meal every school day. The school is required to keep records of invoices from suppliers, payments to cooks, and the number of learners who are fed every day. The school also has to provide a list containing details of all learners considered needy. Information such as the full names, birth certificate numbers, the parents' name and home address, identity number, state of employment, income etc. must be furnished. 'When you have limited resources, how do you decide which child is needy and which child is not?' asks Mrs Ndukwana. 'That can be a tricky business. Also, if a child is really needy, they need food over the weekend, too. The department does not provide for that.'



Comment

Mrs Ndukwana runs a nutritional programme at the school because she believes that nutrition is the foundation for sound development and growth. In her eyes, lack of nutritious food may be the single most important factor that gets in the way of effective learning in schools in South Africa at present. Teachers in several schools that were part of our study confirmed this view. They reported that learners looked more alert and participated better in class after a meal. Our study also revealed that good nutrition is a key factor contributing to learner attendance at school, especially for vulnerable children including those living with HIV and AIDS. Children tended to stay at home if food was not provided. We came across an example of just this at Madiba Combined School in the North West Province, another of the schools in the SAIDE study, At Madiba, there was no school meal on Fridays, and the principal reported a high absenteeism rate on that day. If hunger is a barrier to learning, schools cannot ignore this. That is why the DoE has set up the National Nutrition Programme, and has given each province the mandate to implement it.

But implementing a nutrition programme is not as straightforward as it first seems. Unfortunately we discovered that the programme implementation falls short in many ways and this leaves schools with challenges they have to face on their own.

Here is a list of some of the most common problems experienced by schools that try to implement and manage nutrition programmes.

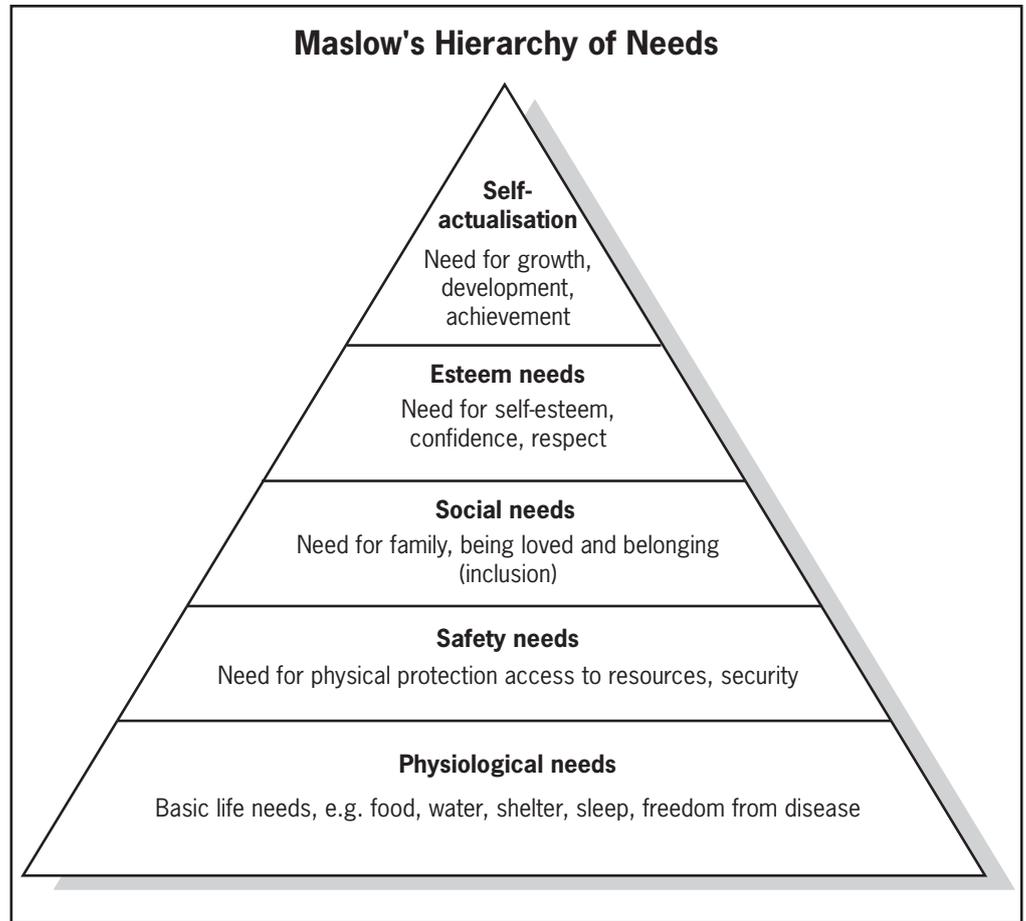
MOST COMMON PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMMES WORLD-WIDE

- irregular supplies
 - food lost through spoilage or the black market and theft
 - inadequate rations in calories and nutrients
 - disruption of teaching for meal preparations
 - unacceptable food
 - burdensome reporting/monitoring
 - burden on school staff
 - logistical difficulties of transporting large quantities of food with poor transportation and poor communication systems
- (Department of Health: 1999)¹

The critical questions for every school principal and school management team (SMT) are twofold: first how do you identify hungry children, and second how do you make nutrition programmes work in partnership with the education department, the families and the community? These questions are discussed in detail in other sections.

Some people are concerned that school nutrition programmes can set up a cycle of dependence and there is evidence that the programme is open to abuse. Good management will be sensitive to these issues and will find suitable ways of managing the programme responsibly.

A useful framework for understanding the link between nutrition and learning was developed by the American psychologist, Abraham Maslow. You are probably familiar with his *Hierarchy of Needs* model depicted in the diagram below.



According to Maslow all humans experience different levels of need and these needs have to be met for full development. The basic survival needs come first and include the need for food, water, sleep and shelter. Our safety needs are the next most important. Safety needs are not only about personal safety and the safety of the family, but also about a safe, crime-free environment and financial security. The third level of need is the need to belong and to be accepted and loved. Maslow calls this the level of social need. It includes a supportive family, but also friendship and acceptance in the larger social group. These first three levels of need are critical for our wellbeing and if they are not met, we will show signs of deficiency. Research into child development has found overwhelming evidence that children who suffer severe malnutrition especially in the first 6 years of life show stunted growth and development, not only physically, but also emotionally, psychologically and cognitively. If our basic need for acceptance and belonging is not met, it will be very hard to develop a healthy self-esteem, which is the fourth level of need.

Maslow argues that the top two levels of need are not about survival, but about the fullness of life. The fourth level is about our self-esteem, our need to be respected and to achieve something in life. Finally, the last level of need is self-actualisation, which is driven by the motivation to realise one's own potential and be the best one can be in life.

When our survival, safety and belonging needs are met, other needs and interests will arise as part of our natural development and growth. However, if these needs are not met, their deficiency will undermine the fulfillment of need on the higher levels.

In the previous units we have discussed the significant role that schools can play to alleviate the effects of social issues. Maslow's hierarchy needs framework confirms the importance of nutrition as a basic need that has to be met for development to take place. By working in conjunction with government and community initiatives, schools can organise a nutrition programme that benefits vulnerable learners and their families.

Another basic need for children to develop and prosper is a safe and secure environment. Principals and SMTs have to do everything possible to make schools safe. It is their responsibility to ensure the physical safety of learners while they spend time at school. This includes managing the safety of buildings and playgrounds, and keeping the place clean. However, the safety needs of children go beyond the physical and emotional environment of the school. Poverty keeps children financially insecure. Abuse and crime make it hard for them to feel safe in their homes and communities. All of this will undermine their healthy social development. Schools are part of the larger community and as such have a responsibility to work with other organisations to combat the effects of poverty and crime since it directly has an impact on the learners and their development.

In short, learning is most successful in a holistic environment, in which principals and teachers see it as their responsibility to take care of the whole child, not only of the mind. We can see how a caring and supportive school environment in which there is a well-run nutrition programme and where learners feel safe and secure, can contribute significantly to their growth and development.

Although Maslow's model is a helpful instrument for thinking about how children become vulnerable and struggle to learn, it would be a mistake to use it as a tool for predicting development. It would also be a mistake to 'think small' and ignore the possibilities of esteem, achievement and self-actualisation simply because children have a rough start to life. There are many examples of people who have started life off in the most appalling and difficult situations yet who have managed to overcome all obstacles and have become successful individuals who manage to lead a full and meaningful life. In many cases they have gone on to help others who are in situations similar to those that they experienced when they were young.

When we create an environment in which these needs can be met, we open opportunities for healing and growth.

The National School Nutrition Programme

Do you know how the national nutrition programme operates? Here is some information derived from the Department of Education publication, *National School Nutrition Programme, A Guide for Secondary Schools*, (DoE: 2009).²

Since its launch in 1994 the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) had covered only learners in primary schools. In April 2009 the programme was extended to include certain secondary schools.

The programme is funded through a conditional grant that is transferred to provinces four times a year. National and provincial departments of education are responsible for the utilization and management of the funds as well as the monitoring of the programme.

Purpose of the programme

The NSNP aims *'to provide meals to the most needy learners. Good food provides energy for the brain. The meals, which are provided at schools, are intended to give energy for mental and physical activities for the body and brain to function and to make the learners alert and receptive during lessons.'* The objectives of the programme are to:

1. Contribute to improving the learning capacity
2. Promote self supporting school food gardens and other production initiatives
3. Promote healthy lifestyles among learners

Who is it for?

'Currently meals are provided to all learners in Quintile 1, 2 and 3 public primary schools from Grade R to Grade 7. The programme will be extended to Quintile 1 secondary schools in April 2009. All Quintile 2 and 3 public secondary schools will be included in 2010 and 2011 respectively.'

What to include in meals?

Schools are advised to provide nutritious and tasty meals. Each meal must fulfill at least 30% of the child's daily nutritional requirements. The meals must be balanced and include:

- Protein
 - o vegetable protein, e.g. dried beans and peas, soya products, lentils, and nuts;
 - o animal protein, e.g. meat, milk, eggs and fish depending on affordability.
- Starch: e.g. maize meal, samp, mealie rice, rice, bread, potatoes. Maize meal, bread or flour products should have the logo depicting that they have been fortified with essential macro nutrients.
- Vegetables: at least one green and one red or yellow or orange vegetable per meal.
- Fats and oils must be used in moderation.
- Iodated/iodised salt must be used in moderation.
- Learners must be encouraged to drink at least 8 cups or glasses of water per day.

WHEN TO OFFER MEALS?

Learners should eat before 10h00 to enable them to be alert and have enough energy to concentrate in class.

(Extract adapted from the *National School Nutrition Programme, A Guide for Secondary Schools*: Ibid pp 3-5)³



TOOLKIT

Tool 15 National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP): Key management requirements



TOOLKIT

Tool 16 Analysis of needs, strengths and threats: Setting up your school nutrition programme

Although we will be working with **Tools 15** and **16** only towards the end of this unit, you may want to have a brief look at them now. **Tool 15** provides an overview of the management requirements of the national nutrition programme in the form of a handy checklist. **Tool 16** helps us think about the critical components necessary for implementing a successful school nutrition programme and for conducting an analysis of needs, strengths and threats to setting up an effective school nutrition programme.

How does the programme operate in schools?

Having looked briefly at how the programme is intended to work, let's now look more carefully at what actually happens. As we noticed in Case Study 6, (page 98) principals often experience difficulties in making the programme work in their schools. Most typically we have found that the funding provided by provinces for the nutrition programme falls far short of the needs of the particular school. In our study, we actively sought examples of schools that had developed strategies for dealing with this challenge. Here are two examples of schools located in poor communities that have managed to respond proactively to the needs of hungry learners.



ACTIVITY

Activity 2 How are schools responding to the nutrition needs of vulnerable learners?

The first example, Case Study 7 (on the following page) is set in a rural primary school, Ndlovu Primary School, while the second example, Case Study 8 (page 105) comes from an urban secondary school, Hlope Secondary School, which we have already referred to in Unit 4 when we explored setting up support networks. In this instance we will be looking at the school specifically in terms of the nutrition initiative. As you read the case studies take note of the differences in the way the two programmes are run.

1. How is Ms Nkuna's approach at Hlope Secondary different to that of Mrs Zami at Ndlovu Primary?
2. What will happen if Ms Nkuna becomes ill or leaves the school?
3. Can you think of a sustainable way of responding to the nutritional needs of vulnerable learners at Hlope Secondary School?



CASE STUDY 7 – REACHING OUT FOR SUPPLEMENTARY SUPPORT

Ndlovu Primary is located in northern Kwazulu Natal and is a quintile 1 school. This makes it a no fee paying school. The school is in a very poor community where water is scarce and agricultural activity is limited. Most, if not all of the learners may be considered vulnerable and the rate of HIV and AIDS infection in this region of rural KwaZulu Natal is known to be high.

The school's participation in the National Department of Education's Nutrition Programme is vital for the basic survival of many of its learners. All 855 children enrolled in the school receive a midmorning meal at 10h00 on each school day, but the nutrition programme does not operate on weekends and during school holidays. The principal, Mrs Zami, is a passionate and visionary educator. She responded to these limitations by getting outside support. She was able to negotiate that NOAH, an NGO, with support from Phinda Game Lodge (a very upmarket private game lodge that has demonstrated its commitment to developing the local community) set up a nutrition programme for vulnerable children as part of the NOAH/Phinda Ark aftercare programme. The supplementary nutrition programme is offered not only for Ndlovu Primary School, but it also serves vulnerable children in a cluster of surrounding schools. They all meet at the school in the afternoon to participate in activities, which are part of the Ark aftercare programme. The aftercare programme begins with a meal served first to primary school learners, followed by a meal served to secondary school learners. Importantly, this programme runs during the school holidays when the National Education Department Nutrition Programme does not operate and it serves the learners from secondary schools in the area (which the National Nutrition Programme did not do at the time of this research).

CASE STUDY 8 – ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Hlophe Secondary School in Gauteng is a quintile 3 school. It has an enrolment of 1762 learners. The principal estimates that at least a third (500) of all learners would fall into the category of vulnerable children, but the national nutrition programme does not serve secondary schools.

There is only a small nutrition intervention in the school. This was started by Ms Nkuna, a concerned teacher, who noticed that some learners in the school were too hungry to learn. She set up a group of peer counsellors in the Grade 9 class who donated 50c per week towards the cost of supplying food for these learners. In this way she now gets around R15.00 per week for food. Ms Nkuna herself provides the stove and utensils to prepare the food. She also contributes money of her own. The peer counsellors assist with cooking. This modest scheme provides soup, rice or pap with soya mince or meat, and peanut butter sandwiches to 12 learners twice a week.

Note: At the time when the research was conducted secondary schools were not part of the National School Nutrition Programme. As from April 2009 the programme has been extended to include Secondary Schools in quintile 1.

Comment

Mrs Zami runs a systematic and well-sponsored programme that receives help from a Game Lodge located in the community and from an NGO. As a result it reaches many children, even those who are not in the school. By comparison the programme at Hlophe Secondary is small, informal and helps only 12 out of the 500 vulnerable children in the school. The problem at Hlophe is that the nutrition programme depends entirely on the goodwill of a few people, who themselves have limited resources. Without outside assistance they will probably not be able to meet the growing needs of the learners for long. The initiative at Hlophe is a good beginning, but if it continues like this Ms Nkuna could soon become tired and burnt out and in the long run the financial burden on her will be too much.

By networking with outside organisations that can fund the project it can become systematised and sustainable. It is the responsibility of the SMT and the principal to support Ms Nkuna and use her example to reach out to more children in the school. There are many ways in which they could build on Ms Nkuna's ad hoc initiative and draw it into a core initiative of the school. The SMT could:

- *do a simple needs assessment survey among learners and set up a system for recording their needs;*
- *plan an internal project to respond to the nutrition needs of vulnerable learners;*
- *identify and contact businesses and organisations that may be able to fund the school's own nutrition programme or provide equipment and food. (Remember Hlope is the school in which the principal had managed to set up a good network to ensure safety and security measures at the school.);*
- *find volunteers from among parents and the community to offer services such as cooking and gardening;*

- find information about external organisations such as NOAH or others which have initiatives and programmes for vulnerable learners after school and over weekends. Refer vulnerable learners to these programmes and identify how the school can collaborate with external after care programmes;
- link up with the National School Nutrition Programme in 2011 since some Secondary Schools will then be able to participate in this programme.

Challenges and limitations of the National School Nutrition Programme

The three case studies discussed in this Unit have drawn attention to the huge challenge of responding to the nutrition needs of vulnerable learners in schools.



Think about the benefits of strengthening individual initiatives into becoming part of a systematic, school-wide intervention.



Activity 3 What difficulties do you have in implementing the National Nutrition Programme at your school?

Reflect on the following questions and make short notes of your answers.

- Is your school part of the National Schools Nutrition Programme?
If yes, how does it work?
If no, how do you provide nutrition for vulnerable learners at your school?
- Describe the difficulties you have in implementing the nutrition programme at your school if applicable.

You can draw on your written notes when you compile your school care and support plan in Unit 8.

Comment

In a colloquium dealing with education and poverty reduction strategies coordinated by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Cape Town during 2008, it was concluded that although the National Schools Nutrition Programme is a crucial strategy for alleviating hunger and simultaneously enhancing learners' intellectual capacity, there exists significant evidence to suggest that it is not well co-ordinated. The extract from the colloquium proceedings reflects some of the difficulties experienced by the primary schools that formed part of the HSRC research into this matter.

Read the extract on the next page. Have you found that you have experienced similar difficulties in making the nutrition programme work in your school?

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMME

According to principals and teachers in this HSRC study conducted in KwaZulu Natal, the greatest challenges and limitations are:

- Grade 7 not participating not because they are not hungry but because of peer pressure and stigma felt as they approach puberty or adolescent stage.
- Human resource capacity – only one person assists and this poses problems since learners are often asked to help out with washing dishes and cleaning. This consumes teaching time.
- Structural capacity – storage space and preparation area not conducive because the schools were not erected with programmes such as these in mind.
- Meals are few, only one at mid-morning.
- Meals are incomplete in terms of nutrients since fruits are not included in the meals.

The following challenges were experienced by those who had won tenders to provide nutrition to learners:

- Inadequate funds – these women claim to receive R1 per child, which is not sufficient for a complete well balanced diet, even if they improvise for affordable nutritious items. Soya is the most favoured form of protein. The department expects them to provide a fruit in season at least once a month.
- Salaries for co-operatives – the standard salary for the co-ops (set by the department) is a meagre R300. This often becomes a contentious issue with the women since they feel it is inadequate. At times they resort to augmenting these salaries from their own coffers, a move which depletes their negligible profits.
- There is a lack of community participation and integration of the programme into the broader developmental agenda of the community, which would alleviate lack of capacity and other associated problems.
- Fuel presents a major problem. Two of the schools in this study do not have access to electricity. The gas that is required for cooking costs R600/48l cylinder, whereas the department allocated only R300 for fuel.

(Kiti, Z. in Maile, S. (ed): 2008)⁴

In addition to the problems and limitations mentioned above, our research uncovered the following:

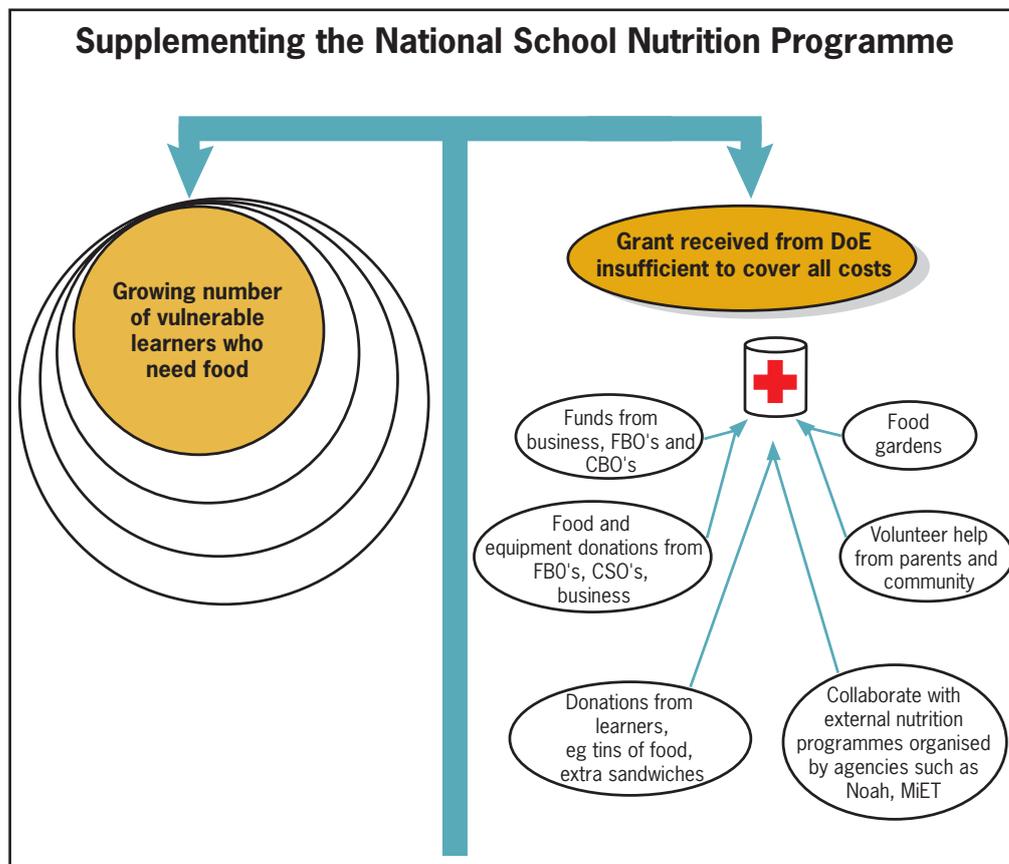
- The nutrition programme does not operate over weekends and during school holidays, and many learners go hungry at these times.
- At the time of our research vulnerable learners in secondary schools were not part of the national nutrition programme. The programme is being rolled out from 2009 and will include all quintile 1, 2 and 3 secondary schools by 2011. Until then, the situation remains problematic for large numbers of young people.
- Nutrition programmes in some provinces or districts are ad hoc and diminishing.

- There are no set criteria for deciding how many children are eligible to receive food in any given school. It seems that schools find it difficult to update the information they provide to the Department of Education concerning the growing number of children who require food.
- The quintiles in which schools are placed are often inappropriate. For example, a Primary School located in Motherwell, a township adjacent to Port Elizabeth, serves a poor community with many learners coming from a sprawling informal settlement, yet is designated a quintile 5 school. We found the same problem with Oxford Girls Primary School (Case Study 1 in Unit 2). The school is categorised as being in quintile 4, but it serves a predominantly poor, refugee population.
- The food provided in the programme is unvaried and often of poor quality. Examples were cited of consignments of food which had to be destroyed because they were contaminated and of sub-standard quality.

Our challenge therefore is to find doable ways of addressing some of these limitations of the existing nutrition programme and to strengthen what already exists.

How are schools supplementing the National School Nutrition Programme?

The dilemma that faces most schools that participate in the National School Nutrition Programme is that the grant they receive from the Department is not sufficient to meet the nutrition needs of the growing number of vulnerable learners. Principals are responding in a variety of ways to cope. Some use the money provided to reach more learners by reducing the number of meals provided. For example learners get food only on four, three or two days of the week. Others cut down on the cost of food by providing more basic meals that have little variety and nutrition. Our research also revealed that each province has a slightly different approach to implementing the National School Nutrition Programme and each comes with its own challenges. However, the majority of principals we visited recognised the importance of providing adequate meals for the learners who need it and took the initiative to supplement the grant in a variety of ways as shown in this diagram.



There are also many principals whose schools are not eligible to participate in the nutrition programme. They too are challenged to think innovatively about strategies that will help them meet the needs of the hungry learners in their schools. As we can see from the diagram above, the most common activities that principals use to supplement and procure food for their learners are the following.

Fundraising

Local businesses, Community Based Organisations (CBOs), and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) were approached for monetary donations. Some fundraising was a once-off only for specific projects or events. The principals who were most successful in getting a continual stream of funding were those who managed to establish formal links with businesses and organisations that provided sustained support.

Setting up relationships with external agencies

There are three main categories of external agencies that schools contacted and collaborated with.

1. The first category involves setting up relationships with local government agencies like the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) which can be approached for a range of support including child grants and food parcels. Other examples in this category include the Department of Health (local clinics) and the Department of Agriculture which, in the context of nutrition, may assist schools both by providing technical support as well as material support. This point is exemplified below in the section dealing with school-based food gardens.
2. The second are agencies (mainly NGOs) that manage aftercare and nutrition programmes, often, despite collaborative agreements, with very little actual management input from the schools themselves. Examples include NOAH (Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity), MiETA (Media in Education Trust Africa) that operate a programme called Schools as Centres of Care and Support (SCCS), and Save the Children (UK) and many not mentioned here but doing equally good work. Such organisations typically provide the majority of the resources – funding and personnel that run the aftercare and nutrition programmes.
3. The third category is external organisations that provide a range of support services including donations in the form of funds, food vouchers, food, equipment, clothes, and school uniforms. Principals contacted representatives from these types of organisations:
 - NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations)
 - CBOs (Community Based Organisations)
 - CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) such as Round Table and Rotary
 - FBOs (Faith Based Organisations) such as various churches.

Typically, in these instances, the school is responsible for administering and managing the donations (in cash or in kind) themselves.

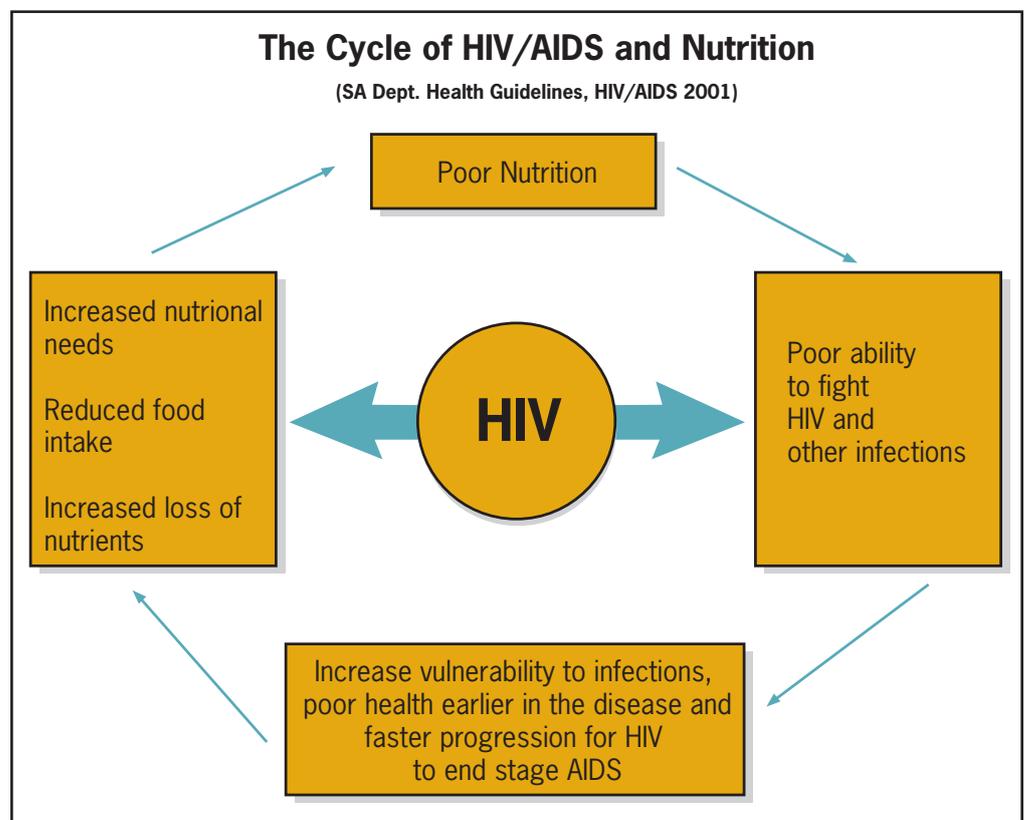
One of the important activities that any school needs to undertake, is to develop a data base, of all the organisations operating in their area.

This will be more fully discussed in Unit 8.

Food gardens

In communities where many are poor and unemployed, have no access to land, and where the levels of HIV and AIDS are high, school-based food gardens can be an important way of maintaining the health of families. In some communities the principal approached extension officers of the Department of Agriculture to run workshops, to test the soil and water, and to provide fencing, poles, seedlings and fertiliser to assist the school to start the gardens. We noted that in schools which do not receive the benefit of training, equipment and advice from the Department of Agriculture or an NGO involved in with supporting schools to make food gardens, these gardens do not seem to thrive and do not sustain a high level of productivity. The viability and sustainability of food gardens must be considered if this option is included in your Nutrition Programme.

To sum up, a well-run and sustainable nutrition programme has the potential to have a significant positive impact on the lives of vulnerable learners and their families. For learners who live with HIV infection good nutrition can help to boost their immune system so that they are able to fight infections and live healthy lives. The close link between nutrition and the HIV and AIDS cycle is clearly depicted in the diagram below.

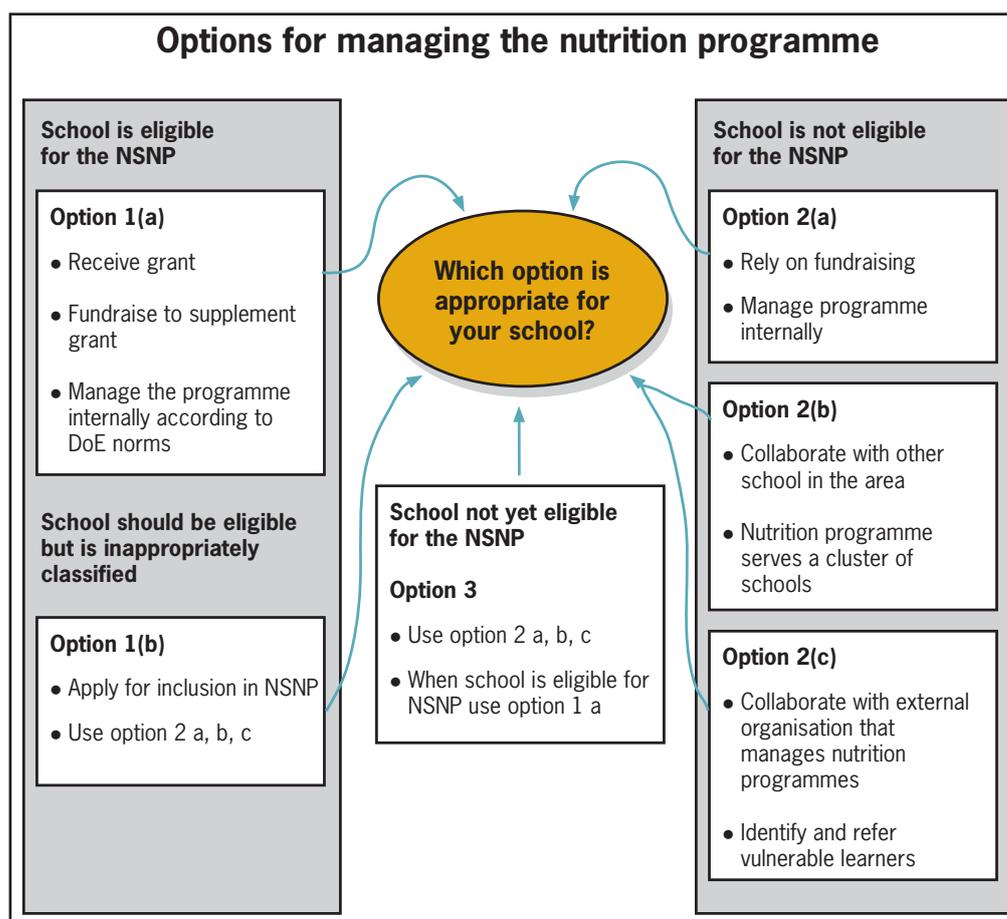


(Source: UNISA,; 2009)⁵

Managing a nutrition programme in your school

We have already established in previous units that the school is a site that is well placed for delivering a nutrition programme for vulnerable children. The learners are there, the management and teachers are in place and the infra-structure, no matter how basic it may be, is available. The approach we have been promoting throughout this guide is that the school can play a vital role in alleviating the effects of social issues such as HIV and AIDS, poverty and violence. A nutrition programme meets one of the most basic needs of vulnerable children and increases their capacity to learn and develop.

Given the different contexts in which schools are located there are different options open to schools as depicted in this diagram. We will therefore first examine some different options and then go on to examine how best to manage these various options in the context of the environment you find yourselves in.



These options are not fixed and inflexible but must rather be seen as strategic possibilities. For example if your school fits into option 1, the focus is obviously on working with the National School Nutrition Programme according to the norms set by the Department of Education. But this does not preclude you from collaborating with



external organisations that offer nutrition programmes in your area to enhance the delivery of the nutrition programme. We have added Option 1 (b) because we found instances in our research of schools that are not classified correctly according to the most recent demographic profile of the learners who attend the school. It is up to the principal to contact the Department and supply information that shows the school to have large numbers of vulnerable learners. Getting reclassified is then part of the overall strategy which also includes other arrangements reflected in Options 2 a, b, and c. Option 3 applies to secondary schools that are not yet eligible for the NSNP. They can already start with strategies from Option 2 until they become part of the NSNP.

Schools that are not eligible for inclusion in the NSNP have a number of strategies open to them. They can raise funds and get outside support to organise a nutrition programme internally. Another strategy, which might be practical in an area where there is a cluster of schools, is for principals to collaborate in organising one nutrition programme that serves vulnerable learners from all the schools. A viable option might be to link up with nutrition programmes that are run by external organisations such as NOAH and MiETA and other such like organisations. The school then identifies vulnerable learners and working collaboratively with the relevant NGO or CBO refers them to the programmes being offered.



Activity 4

What are your concerns about managing the school nutrition programme?



Whether you are already managing a nutrition programme, or whether this is a new venture for you, identify what you are most concerned about.

Jot down the issues that concern you and keep these ideas in a file, you will need to refer back to them when you start working on your school care and support plan (Unit 8).

Comment

Among the biggest concerns that principals have are the time demands that running and managing an effective nutrition programme make on management and teachers. Teachers are already struggling to cope with their current workload and giving them additional responsibilities is usually met with resistance. In addition there is the fact that the school was not designed to run a nutrition programme and so facilities such as adequate cooking and food storage areas may not be available. An added burden is the need to get additional funding through fundraising and other related activities. But we have reflected on these difficulties in an earlier section and saw how they can compromise the quality of the nutrition support to learners. Daunting though the task is of delivering a well-run nutrition programme it remains crucial. We therefore need to find the right strategies for making it work. The first step is for the school leadership to take responsibility for managing the overall plan and to get the right people to do the actual work.

Here are some guidelines drawn from practice on key areas that you need to manage.

Provide strategic direction, manage and support the overall strategy

As leader and manager, you and your team's role is to have a clear and realistic vision of the school nutrition programme and what you expect it to achieve. Having a clear idea of the direction you want to go enables you to create a viable plan to translate the vision into practice. You will need to involve all stakeholders to successfully implement the plan. Communicating the vision is another key function of the leadership role. Communication needs to happen internally and externally. Internally, the buy-in of the teachers and learners needs to be secured. Externally, you need to communicate with individuals and organisations that you think can support the implementation of your nutrition programme plan.



Tool 15 gives an overview of the main areas to be managed.

Appoint the right people

All successful endeavours start with a clear vision, a realistic and well thought out plan and the appointment of the right people who can give practical expression to the plan. The guidelines provided by the Department of Education specify who should be appointed (refer to Tool 15). The day-to-day operations are taken care of by the NSNP School Coordinator. This person does not have to be a teacher but can be an administrative staff member. The food handler and gardener could well be parents who are appointed to provide these services in lieu of school fees or for an agreed upon stipend. You might also appoint someone from the community to collect food from a central point and transport it to the school. It is critical for the success of the programme to appoint capable persons so that you can rely on them to carry out their tasks well. Why not invite parents and out of school and unemployed young people to assist with the programme? They could help with preparing food and cleaning up. You could give them food or a small stipend to make it worth their while. This type of involvement also means that the programme has a knock-on effect on the community and that even those beyond the school walls can benefit.

Plan nutritious meals

The NSNP guidelines state that school meals are supplementary and are not necessarily expected to meet the full daily nutrition requirements of learners. It is however common cause (and well evidenced in our research) that for many vulnerable children, the food provided at school is the only food they may receive for the day. The challenge is, therefore, how to maximise the nutritional value of meals with limited resources.

The department's guidelines indicate that meals must include a variety or combination of food options from the main food groups: protein, starch, vegetables, fats and oils. Nutritious meals do not necessarily have to be expensive. For example a cup of rice cooked with a cup of brown lentils will provide enough starch and protein for 5 children, and does not cost more than a loaf of bread. Not all food has the same nutritious value, and so the planning of school meals is critical. The following three Tools (18, 19 and 20) provide important information about food types, planning balanced meals and how to work with what you have available to enrich your school nutrition menus.



TOOLKIT

Tool 17

Fact sheet: Food groups and what they do in the body

Tool 17 gives a good overview of the different groups of foods, what kinds of nutrients they contain and how they work in the body.

The NSNP School Coordinator is responsible for the meals planning process and the information contained in the various tools can be helpful resources. The coordinator in conjunction with the food handler can prepare a number of menus that are kept in a file. In this way they can build up a set of menus that can provide the diversity and nutrition that learners need.



TOOLKIT

Tool 18

Ideas for menus



TOOLKIT

Tool 19

Easy ideas for enriching menus

This tool provides some ideas for cheap, nutritious meals as well as giving ideas of how simple menus can be enriched at low cost.

Part of the SMT's management role requires SMT members to be involved in the monitoring and support of school-based initiatives. With regard to the nutrition programme, monitoring the planning of menus, that the menus conform to acceptable standards and that the people involved in running the nutrition programme have the ability to carry out their responsibilities and that they get the resources they need to carry out their tasks, are all aspects of this monitoring role.

Another feature of efficient school nutrition programmes is that food is not wasted. Careful planning around quantities goes a long way to providing healthy meals at low cost.



TOOLKIT

Tool 20

Calculating quantities and cost

This tool shows how to approach the calculation of quantities and costing of meals.

Keep accurate records

We have already touched in Units 3 and 4 on the importance of collecting reliable data, analysing the data, using the information to make decisions and take actions, and communicating pertinent information to relevant people.

The department expects schools that are part of the NSNP to keep the following records:

- number of learners who need food per day
- number of meals served per day
- invoices showing quantities of food purchased and delivered.

This is another example of a monitoring role that needs to be played by the SMT. Your role is to ensure that the NSNP School Coordinator keeps accurate records and to monitor the information gathering process by carrying out regular checks. Since the SMT is ultimately accountable for how the money is spent you will have to keep a watchful eye on the budget. As overall manager school manager, the principal must take final responsibility for the nutrition programme. You are required to submit a monthly report to the District/Circuit Office. While you may involve the coordinator in drawing up a draft report, you will have to check it and finalise it before submitting it. You can also use this report to keep all members of the SMT and SGB (School Governing Body) abreast of how the nutrition programme is progressing.

Manage viable food gardens

Many schools respond to the growing food insecurity in their communities by starting food gardens. This is an especially popular and effective option, if schools have a regular water supply, as well as enough vacant land on their property to produce a reasonable crop. The aim of developing food gardens is usually to produce an affordable source of food to supplement the meals of learners in the school as well as benefit others in the surrounding community. Some schools also use the gardens to teach parts of the natural science curriculum. In communities where rates of HIV and AIDS are high, and where many are people are poor, unemployed and have limited access to land, food gardens can be an important way of maintaining the health of households.

During our school visits, it was interesting that one of the most successful gardens we visited was at Oxford Primary in the middle of Johannesburg. Other examples in rural areas were also encountered, although in some instances access to water was a significant problem. The principal at Oxford Primary set up a clear roster of gardening duties involving parents. Two or three parent volunteers were required to commit themselves to tending the food garden for one term at a time. At the end of the term, another two or three parents would be appointed to take over the gardening responsibility and so on. This was done particularly to involve unemployed parents who were unable to afford the school fees.

While food gardens can go a long way toward supplementing school nutrition, running an effective food garden requires careful planning and ongoing maintenance. If at all possible, it is advisable to appoint a permanent gardener who takes full responsibility for the garden and coordinates the input made by parents or other community volunteers. However, if it is not possible to employ a gardener, a volunteer system, like the one instituted at Oxford Primary can be implemented. Again, this will be really successful only if it is properly managed and monitored by the SMT.

While in some schools learners are required to assist with the school garden, this also needs to be very carefully managed. Whereas the learner's participation in food production can be structured to create a positive learning experience, it is important that learners are not exploited and it is unrealistic to expect them to shoulder the full burden for maintaining the garden.



As mentioned in an earlier section the gardens of schools that received the benefit of training, equipment and advice from the Department of Agriculture or another service provider were able to sustain a high level of productivity and the vegetables grown contributed significantly to supplementing school meals.

Manage food budgets

A budget is simply a financial plan. In it you record your expected income and expenses. A basic principle is that once you've drawn up your budget, you have to work within it. That is why it is so important to make sure that your budget reflects real income and expenses that are based on realistic costs. The NSNP School Coordinator can compile the budget, but again, ultimate responsibility falls to the principal who is accountable and has to monitor the budget carefully to ensure that accurate records are kept and that the money is spent responsibly.

In order to draw up a realistic budget you will need information about your sources of income, variable expense items related to food and fuel (wood, gas, electricity) and fixed expense items such as equipment and stipends for the food handler, gardener and any other person who may be appointed to offer a specific service.



TOOLKIT

Tool 21 Budgeting for the nutrition programme

This tool provides guidelines for accurate budgeting and a template that will help you to draw up your budget and monitor spending.



TOOLKIT

Tool 22 Selected organisations that offer assistance with school food gardens

Tool 22 gives information about organisations that you can approach to assist you in setting up a garden.

Our visits to schools showed that schools that run successful school gardens usually have the following structures and resources in place:

- A gardening 'champion', who is enthusiastic, keeps an eye on things, encourages participation and makes sure that all the activities around the vegetable garden are properly coordinated and ensures that the garden is watered and weeded regularly.
- Enough gardening tools to allow for people to work in teams.
- Fencing to protect the crops.
- An appropriate system for water collection and storage (especially in areas where water is scarce).
- A good sowing guide, to ensure the best crops are sown for each season, and also a regular harvest throughout the year.
- A strategy for feeding the soil with compost, and crop rotation to make sure the harvest is good every time.

Manage collaboration

We dealt extensively with support networks in Unit 4. Your ability to harness support from individuals and organisations can help to establish and maintain the school nutrition programme.



ACTIVITY

Activity 5

Making the nutrition programme work – analysis of needs, strengths and threats

Now that you have a good idea of what is involved in planning and organising an effective nutrition programme at your school, you can analyse your own context to identify:

- what you need
- what capacity and resources you have internally
- the potential support that is available from external sources, and
- obstacles that prevent you from organising a well run nutrition programme.

This is a SMT activity. Use **Tool 16** to record your ideas. Resources that you can draw on include: the diagram showing nutrition programme options, **Tool 15**, and the guidelines contained in the preceding section: managing the nutrition programme in your school.

A contextual analysis is an important part of any planning process. Since the nutrition programme is so critical in alleviating the negative effects of HIV and AIDS and other socio-economic problems that render learners vulnerable, it is important to have a good idea of what is required and how you can access the necessary resources to make your school nutrition programme a viable and sustainable project.

You can refer to the record of your analysis when you prepare your school's care and support plan in Unit 8.

Comment

There are many examples of nutrition programmes that do not provide the support envisaged or that have stopped altogether because there was insufficient capacity and resources to make them sustainable ventures. A critical analysis of the environment in which a nutrition programme has to operate helps management to pinpoint what they have at their disposal and where they need to take action to procure additional capacity and resources. This will inform the planning and implementation of a realistic and achievable strategy.

Key points

We explored in some depth reasons why the provision of nutritious food for vulnerable children should be a central concern for school management. Numerous examples from the field show the benefits of providing nutrition for those learners who are most vulnerable.

In Unit 5 we explored:

- Why it is necessary for schools to get involved in managing a nutrition programme.
- The requirements and intended objectives of the National School Nutrition Programme.
- What difficulties schools experience with the implementation of the national school nutrition programme.
- How to strengthen the existing National School Nutrition Programme in schools where it exists.
- How to manage a nutrition programme at your school effectively.

Some important insights we gained:

- There is an undisputed link between good nutrition and a child's capacity to grow and develop to their full potential.
- The school is well placed to offer a nutrition programme that meets a significant basic need that increases the capacity of vulnerable learners to learn.
- Principals face a number of severe challenges in implementing the National School Nutrition Programme. A major problem is funding because the grant received from the Department of Education usually does not cover the costs of providing meals for the increasing number of vulnerable learners in schools.
- The main ways in which principals are supplementing the National Nutrition Programme include fundraising, securing food donations, collaboration with external organisations and managing food gardens.
- Principals and SMTS are expected to provide strategic leadership by creating a realistic vision for the nutrition programme and communicating this vision to both the school and the wider community. Principals are also responsible for appointing the right people who can give practical expression to the strategic vision and plan and for monitoring and supporting the implementation process.
- A critical analysis of the school context enables principals and the SMT to establish what capacity and resources which are required to make the nutrition programme work in their school, what the threats are, what capacity and resources they have internally, and what support they can get from external sources.

