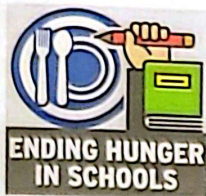


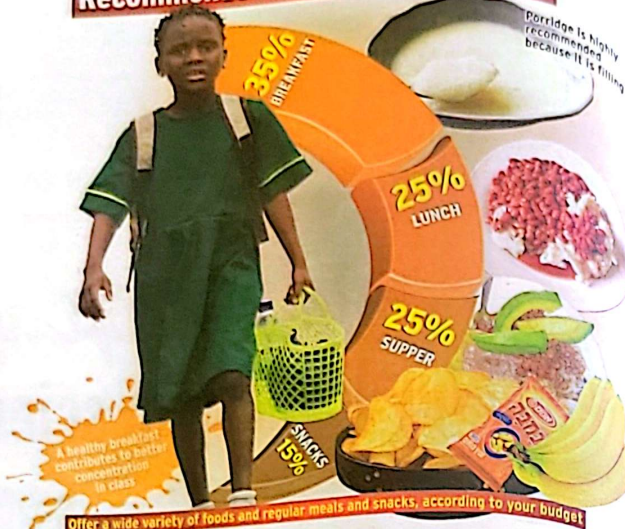
Hunger eats away children's academic grades

The First Lady and education minister Janet Kataaha Museveni, is combing the country with the 'gospel' of parents giving their children lunch while at school. Her message is - "Without lunch, school-going pupils will not do well in their studies".

Conan Busunge explains into the impact of missing lunch on a child's learning process



Recommended daily food allowance



Simon Musiwu, probably at 10 years of age, steps out of his classroom yawning during lunch time at Kaween Primary School in Mubende district.

A few minutes later, he walks to a tap in the school compound and draws water in his palms. He takes about three gulps and moves to a shade under a nearby mango tree to rest. This is his lunch.

After an hour, the bell rings and Musiwu returns to his Primary Five classroom for the afternoon lessons. However, he keeps dozing off during the English lesson.

Musiwa is one of the many pupils in this school under the Universal Primary Education programme, who always go without lunch.

It is no surprise that the school's academic performance has been dismal over years, with less than half of the pupils who sit Primary Leaving Examinations annually passing in Division One.

What studies say
A 2015 study, *Breakfast, midday meals and academic achievement in rural primary schools in Uganda: Implications for education and school health policy*, links lack of school lunch to academic underachievement.

The research published by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information Journal was done by Hedwig Acham, Joyce K. Kikafunda, Marian Makde, Wilna H. Oldewage-Theron and Abdulkadir A. Egal.

Indicators of educational performance show that Uganda has done remarkably well on education, access.

Observations

During the 2015 study on breakfast, midday meals and academic achievement in rural primary schools, researchers

observed that children who did not go home for lunch possibly due to distance stayed in school until the end of the day.

This means they continued attending school while hungry.

"We also

observed often some of the children who went home for lunch did not report back for afternoon lessons. Moreover, 90% of schools in the study did not have canteens where children could buy snacks," reads the report.

Researchers said: "Results indicated midday meals had stronger effects on achievement compared to breakfast. However, the effect was much stronger when both breakfast and lunch were provided."

Teachers interviewed say children

who come to school without taking breakfast are easy to identify. "Their heads are on the desks at 10.00am - the peak learning hour. Chronic poor nutrition may cause more serious learning deficits for children," Anita Akugizibwe, a primary teacher in Fort Portal says.

Moses Opiyo, who has taught for many years in various primary schools in eastern Uganda says: "Hungry children are inactive in class. At times, they spend the whole afternoon dozing and

disinterested in learning."

The 2010 World Hunger series report shows school feeding, involving providing a meal or a snack for students during the school day, improves enrolment and attendance.

The 2014 Global Food for Education Programme reported that enrolment increased on average by 10.4% and by 11.7% for girls in the 4,000 schools surveyed. Other studies have found positive results in Peru, Andes, Malawi and India.

"Deficiency of balanced diet, or always going hungry for long, especially for children leads to reduced cognitive function of the brain," Dr. Matthew Jukes, a developmental psychologist at Oxford University said.

Observing the importance of a balanced diet towards performance, Jukes says: "When children go to school without breakfast,

90% of schools did not have operational canteens where children could buy snacks

their performance goes down". Under-fed children enrol later, they are likely to perform poorly and drop out of school.

Children who are hungry at school are likely to have a short memory span and difficulties in concentrating and performing complex tasks even later in life, according to nutritionists.

"One can imagine what happens to children who miss lunch but have to

sit in the dusty, hot and congested classroom floors in some parts on the country.

Who is responsible?
The Education Act 2008, places the responsibility of providing food for

school children in the hands of parents or guardians.

The education and sports guidelines on stakeholders' responsibilities in the Universal Primary Education, says: "Parents need to make a crucial contribution to the basic child nurturing and support through the provision of mid-day meals, for pupils at school."

Fruits and vegetables boost children's immunity

Under-fed children are likely to perform poorly and drop out of school

Experts explain
Chris Mwanje, a nutritionist, says apart from lunch, parents must endeavour to give their children breakfast, even before they think of lunch.

Mwanje says since kindergarten is primarily for children aged between four and six, they should be given at least three to four major meals of the day.

However, breakfast should be the largest meal for children compared to lunch, supper and snacks.

Mwanje explains: "Breakfast accounts for 35% of recommended daily allowance of food. Lunch takes 25%, supper 25% and snacks 15%."

Breakfast helps jump-start the day, improve mood and concentration.

Research shows that a healthy breakfast contributes to higher level of concentration of children in class than when the meal is missed.

He adds that breakfast of tea, bread, maize, popcorn and matooke only

provide glucose and water, yet that is the common breakfast in many homes.

"It should be enriched with protein sources (roasted groundnuts, eggs, milk) as these enable a child to grow normally," Mwanje says.

Porridge is highly recommended because it is filling especially that which consists of *nyanya* millet and rice. He also suggests *mushie* and amaranthus porridge, which provide proteins and carbohydrates.

On another note, Mwanje says a child can easily carry porridge in cases of packed breakfast.

Besides porridge, Mwanje says fruits and vegetables are important to boost the immunity of the child since they are prone to infections such as fungal one flu and coughs.

Dr Jamiru Mpima, a nutritionist working at Victoria University Health Care Centre, also says since pupils are active throughout the day they need eat food regularly to concentrate while learning.

Mpima urges teachers to a children to eat according to their appetite and without force.

Good grades call for healthy mind and bodies, which makes it a priority for school administrators to pre harmful edibles and intoxicants school premises.

Milk, cereals, butter, fruit juice, carbohydrates like dietary fibre, protein, carbohydrates that Waako says undergoing both physical and development need.

Isma Tamale, a nutritionist at Uganda Limited, says "If porridge can be supplemented milk-skimmed or not that bring to increase on the nutrition Appetizers such as peanut butter and tomato sauce make the for-Waako explains.

"Drinks like milk are rich in calcium which is good for health and development," he Mpima recommends nutritious and healthy snacks children such as wholemeal biscuits that contain vitamins and minerals or alternatively cere

Guide to packing food for children

Parents are expected to pack food for their children or else contribute food or money for lunch through their own association.

This is covered in the new guidelines of school feeding. Children may be permitted to carry supplementary packed food such as fruits and cheese.

All schools should develop guidelines stipulating the type of food packaging.

Clean and air tight containers is emphasised in the packing of supplementary food.

Food vending in and near schools should be regulated according to the education ministry.

In a number of schools, it had become a norm for village or community members to sell any kind of food within the school compound or near the school fences without clearance from school authorities.

The education state minister Dr John Musingo says: "This must stop since the quality of the food being vended cannot be guaranteed."

Schools should also regulate food items sold in the school canteen and keep records of such regulations.

Different schools have different regulations, but most of them do not allow alcoholic or intoxicating drinks or eats

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