

# School Meals: a Win-Win Solution to Address Intersecting Hunger, Health, Learning and Climate Crises



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**Investing in school meals is a win-win solution and a no-brainer for governments seeking to build their nations' future. There is overwhelming evidence that well-designed and effectively delivered school meals programmes – especially when implemented with complementary health programmes to maximise impact – can build a nation's human capital through increased years of schooling, better learning, and improved health and nutrition.<sup>1</sup> Despite setbacks during the pandemic, school meals programmes are one of the largest social safety nets in the world. School meal provision also has important economic benefits. They have generated about 4 million jobs in 85 countries, often benefitting local companies in food preparation led by women.**

In addition, school feeding programmes

can be an effective strategy to make progress on climate goals by promoting climate-smart solutions and creating a platform for increasing awareness around sustainability. They can help create sustainable and climate-friendly agricultural practices, predictable markets for local farmers and food preparers, and climate-friendly preparation and distribution practices that will combine to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lift communities economically and provide sustainable and healthy meals to young learners. They can address the global and national equity concerns at the heart of climate justice while supporting the reform of food systems, especially at a local level.<sup>2</sup> As Dr. Rachel Christina writes in her article; Looking Past Recovery to Transformation: Building Resilient, Adaptive Education Systems in the Wake of COVID-19 (page 70 in this volume): 'the pandemic recovery provides a touch point for education system transformation...[including] schooling that supports environmental conservation, attention to biodiversity,



and climate-responsive growth.<sup>7</sup> This greater climate awareness could be built around school meals programmes.

The [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#) report paints a hopeful picture for the expansion of school meals programmes in the post-pandemic landscape. The number of children benefiting from such programmes is now 418 million, which is an increase of 30 million over the level prior to the pandemic in early 2020.<sup>3</sup> This significant gain in the number of children receiving school meals has, in part, been the result of the political commitment of the 78 countries and 86 partners in the [School Meals Coalition](#), a group dedicated to improving the quality of school meals and strengthening school meal systems globally. More than 40 per cent of all primary school children globally now have access to a free or subsidised daily school meal. But coverage varies by income level. While programmes have been restored and expanded relatively quickly in middle- and high-income countries, and coverage stands at 39

and 48 per cent respectively, progress in low-income countries has been much slower despite significant domestic investments. Just 18 per cent of school children in low-income countries receive free or subsidised meals today. The international community must continue to prioritise support to these countries to help them achieve their targets.

Continued support for the expansion of school meals programmes is critical, especially in the current environment of global food insecurity. New data suggest 153 million school-age children have been impacted by the rising food and hunger crisis, and another 23 million children have been pushed into acute food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Climate change will likely aggravate children's food insecurity in the coming years.

Addressing these challenges will require a fundamentally new way of working across sectors and stakeholders. For far too long, the challenges posed by the failure of food systems – hunger, obesity, unsustainable agriculture, precarious rural livelihoods – have been treated

by policy-makers and non-government organisations as separate issues, leading to fragmented responses. School meals programmes have the potential to cut across polarised political divides.

Making progress will also require additional investment. Many countries have made great strides on this front. Over the past 20 years, 44 countries have moved from reliance on external funding towards financing school meals programmes from their own resources, and others are well on their way. However, despite this progress, 60 per cent of low-income countries are currently unable to finance school meals programmes from their domestic revenues.

A recent [school meals financing landscape analysis](#) highlights the need for a new approach to mobilise additional investments.<sup>5</sup>

First, national strategies need to be supported by feasible financing plans. Most countries have adopted school feeding strategies, often delivered by an array of central and local government agencies, but strategies are often not

supported by comprehensive costing estimates or financing strategies. In some cases, especially in resource-scarce environments, this will require setting strategies for targeting. Some countries have opted for targeting based on income (e.g. Bangladesh), while others target by geography (e.g. Ghana).

Second, countries that are not in a position to fund their school meals today could devise a path to self-reliance over time and explore innovative funding strategies to help bridge the gap. A number of strategies have shown the way forward in terms of options to strengthen and scale financing. These include using natural resource revenues and public bads taxation, SDG bonds, debt swaps and earmarked taxes.

Finally, there is a need for a shift in approach from donors and the international development community. Based on reported data, overall aid to school feeding from 2018 to 2020 ranged from \$132 million to \$297 million per year, or just 1.5 per cent of

aid to education (which itself fell by \$359 million). Efforts to mobilise additional financing will need to go beyond the siloed organisation of international financing institutions and innovate to facilitate multi-sectoral financing, prioritising school feeding in the concessional financing of multilateral development banks and in funding from leading bilateral donors and philanthropy, and leveraging scarce donor resources by supporting innovative mechanisms such as the [International Finance Facility for Education \(IFFEd\)](#).

Many Commonwealth countries are already making great strides, both in expanding and implementing school meals programmes and displaying their multi-sectoral benefits. In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame's administration has already met the commitment announced in 2021 of universal school feeding. The country has moved from supporting 660,000 children in 2020 to 3.8 million in 2022. In Sierra Leone, Minister of Basic and Senior

Secondary Education David Sengeh endorsed the new School Feeding Policy in May 2021, developed to reflect the government's increased focus on food security, nutrition, and National Home Grown School Feeding Programmes. Finally, last year, the government of Sri Lanka – facing a budget crisis and inflation - utilised a new menu-planning tool to increase dietary diversity and include local ingredients, keeping costs down without interrupting delivery.<sup>6</sup> The [Sustainable Financing Initiative \(SFI\)](#) for school health and nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition, will begin discussions with several Commonwealth countries in 2023 to determine how national school meals programmes could be used for these multi-sectoral benefits.

It is time to leverage our best and biggest social safety net. School meals programmes could – and should - be part of building adaptable and resilient food, education, and climate systems for future generations. ■



1. Dubai Cares & The Education Commission (2022). [Rewiring Education for People and Planet](#).

2. Watkins, K. (2022). "[School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis](#)", Sustainable Financing Initiative, The Education Commission.

3. WFP (2022). *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*. Rome, World Food Programme.

4. WFP (2022). "[A generation at risk: nearly half of global food crisis hungry are children](#)"

5. Watkins, K. (2022). "[School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis](#)", Sustainable Financing Initiative, The Education Commission.

6. WFP (2022). *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022*. Rome, World Food Programme. ISBN 978-92-95050-16-7



# Covenant University

## *Raising a New Generation of Leaders*

[www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng](http://www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng)

**F**ounded in 2002, Covenant University is a vision-driven world-class university in Ota, Nigeria. The university's campus is uniquely located in Canaan Land, the home of the 50,000-seat capacity sanctuary, the Faith Tabernacle, which was listed in the 2008 edition of the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest Church auditorium in the world with overflow facilities for 250,000 worshippers. The University campus, known as Hebron- the birthplace of Kings and Queens, is an ultra-modern, serene and secured, with beautiful gardens and an array of iconic facilities for teaching, research, sports, and residential purposes.

Covenant University is driven by a compelling vision of raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of human endeavours. The university's departure philosophy and pillars are deeply rooted in Biblical principles and are directed towards effecting change in the recovery process of Nigeria's education sectors and the restoration of the dignity of the Blackman. We are blessed with a transformational leader and Chancellor, Dr. David O. Oyedepo. Covenant equipped students with

practical and life-applicable skills via its custom-built programmes as well as internships and mentorship by experienced professors, scholars, and industry technocrats. Also, our robust campus and off-campus activities, groups, and chaplaincy distinctively bring out the gifting of students, turning them into rare gems. Consequently, Covenant students are uniquely packaged as change agents ready to impact the world and change the unpleasant narratives of Africa. Covenant University is a multicultural community with more than 8,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students representing over 13 nations. The university also has an alumni network of more than 20,000 members across over 50 countries. In Covenant, students pursue 34 programmes of study leading to the award of bachelor, master, and Ph.D degrees in the university's four colleges, namely: Engineering; Management and Social Sciences; Leadership and Development Studies; and Science and Technology. Our unparalleled quality assurance mechanism has earned the University accreditation status for all programmes with the National Universities Commission, the apex

regulatory body for university education in Nigeria, and all relevant professional bodies in Nigeria. Also, one of the university programmes has an international accreditation status, and more are expected in the nearest future.

In just 20 years of its existence, Covenant has become a leading world-class university and the best higher education destination in Africa. Also, within the Nigerian Higher educational system, Covenant is a reference point for its unique pedagogy, innovative curriculum, cutting-edge research engagements, community service emphasis, and administrative excellence. These institutional best practices have earned the University accolades and recognition from government and professional regulatory bodies, the industry, and rating agencies. For instance, the National Universities Commission has consistently named Covenant the best private university in Nigeria and the Number 2 ranked university overall. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board also, in the 2022 policy meeting, named Covenant, "The Most Compliant Institution in Keeping to the Guidelines in 2020 Admission."

# OUR AWARDS

- Top 800 in Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings in 2023.
- The only Private university among all the Nigerian Universities in the 2023 THE World University Rankings, making it the best private University in Nigeria and Africa.
- Led all Nigerian Universities in 5 Subject Rankings in the 2023 THE World University Rankings, and these disciplines are: Social Sciences (Top 300) and Business and Economics, Computer Science, Engineering, and Physical Sciences (Top 500).
- Nigeria's Leading Research University in the 2023 THE World University Rankings and ranked 562 globally.
- Ranked Top 400 globally in 2022 THE SDGs Impact Rankings.
- Ranked Top 200 globally in

Emerging Economies Rankings in 2022 by THE.

- Won Triple Awards at Nigeria Technology Awards.
- Best Private University Award at the Prestige Nigeria Education Awards 2022.
- IAESTE Long Standing Support award.
- Covenant Enactus' Pet City Project Won IFTDO Global Award 2022 in the Innovation in Practice Category.
- Best Tertiary Institution Website/Portal at the 5th Nigerian



Internet Registration Association.ng Awards in 2022.

- Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Abiodun H. Adebayo, was elected as a member of the Council and Trustee of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).
- Africa's Best World Class Private Varsity of the Decade in Quality Education Award.
- First African University to Win the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) Award in nine years under the Whole Systems Approach with its PET City Bricks Submission.
- Ranked 2nd Best in 2022 Webometrics Rankings among Nigerian Universities.
- The United Nation's Award as Climate Champion.

## RESEARCH

Research has been central to the twin missions of Covenant University by offering solutions to critical societal problems and being a leading global educational institution. These ambitions are intimately linked, and their innovations have benefitted the country's health, economy, and political processes and made Covenant increasingly prominent. Also, the university is currently one of Africa's leading research universities. The feat is made possible by our world-class faculty, staff, and postgraduate students who are immersed in innovative and cutting-edge research, including studies in bioinformatics, human genome research, cancer research, renewable energy, IOT-enabled smart & connected communities, biotechnology, as well as leadership, arts, humanities, social sciences, among others. These research activities are coordinated under research clusters and centres of excellence superintended by the University's Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID). The unique funding arrangements of the institution ensure its long-term commitment to the welfare of society. The following are some recent grants the university and its faculty/research groups won to execute different research projects from local and international organisations:

- The World Bank Grant for Research on Applied Informatics and Communications.
- African Translational Cancer Genomics Training Grant from CRDF Global.

- COVID-19 Research Grant Award from Nigeria COVID-19 Research Coalition.
- Optimisation of Off-Grid Energy Supply Systems in Nigeria research grant from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.
- Grant for the Development of a Secure Federated Genomics Cloud Architecture Towards Precision Medicine in Africa (SEC-FEDGEN) - Research Project from Agence Francaise de Development (AFD) ACE Partners.
- West African Sustainable Leadership and Innovation Training in Bioinformatics Research (WASLITBRE) Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Health, Fogarty International Center.
- West African Virus Epidemiology (WAVE) research project grant from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- "Early Life Aflatoxin B1 Exposure and Epigenetic Programming in Nigerian New Borns" grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The university's projects are chiefly targeted toward solving health challenges, global food security problems, climate change, waste management, electronic governance, business, and poverty eradication. Although these are the "big picture" challenges, each issue has a local aspect, which provides relevance and impetus.

## COVENANT UNIVERSITY'S ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Covenant University continues to enjoy and benefit from collaborations and active partnerships with many highly reputable organisations and higher education institutions across the globe, including:

- United Nation
- UNESCO
- African Development Bank Group
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
- Nottingham Trent University, UK
- University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA
- Royal Holloway University of London, UK
- Witten/Herdecke University, Germany
- University of California Davis Campus, USA
- University of Johannesburg, South Africa
- Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa
- The Africa-America Institute, USA
- Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada
- Science Po, France
- École pour l'informatique et les techniques avancées (EPITA), France
- Morgan State University, USA
- Ecole Centrale De Nantes, France
- Landmark University
- OLLMOO Limited, UK
- OBTranslate, Germany
- Riga Technical University, Latvia (Erasmus+)
- University of London, UK
- Skyline University, Kano
- ABM University College, Botswana