

Media Update

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NEWS RELEASE

Government of Pakistan & WFP join hands for a National School Meals Initiative in the Country

ISLAMABAD, 11 May 2022:

A two-day National Consultation on School Meals kicked off in Islamabad on Tuesday. The consultation follows the signing and endorsement of the “Global School Meals Coalition” by the Government of Pakistan in 2021.

The consultation is intended to lay the foundations for the establishment of a systematic approach to the provision of school meals in Pakistan and develop a road map towards a national school meals policy. The meeting has been jointly organized by the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety and the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

The event was led by Honorable Minister Ms. Shazia Marri, Ministry of Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety (PASS) and Dr. Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, Deputy Chairman, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, along with representatives from the different federal and provincial departments including regional education, health, planning and development & social protection departments.

In his opening remarks Dr. Hamid Jalil, Member, Food Security & Climate Change, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives acknowledged that school meals programmes are globally recognized as an effective tool for

the promotion of children's academic performance and the overall wellbeing of schoolchildren. Similarly, school meals serve as a targeted social safety net that help increase enrolment rates, reduce absenteeism, and provide vital nutrition for children who might otherwise not receive sufficient nutrition at home. It is well documented that well-nourished and healthy schoolchildren are better equipped to learn, fulfill their potential as adults and participate in a country's development process as productive citizens. Governments all around the world are implementing school meals programmes in high, middle- and low-income countries, as the programmes have the potential to be catalysts for human capital development, boosting local economic growth, strengthening food systems and agricultural development.

Dr. Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, Deputy Chairman, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives highlighted that the challenges of education are correlated with poverty. Nutritional deficiencies resulting from poverty have a heavy impact on learning. The resultant learning and nutritional deficiencies persisting into adulthood suppress productivity of the human resources and the country's capacity to be competitive. Therefore, a shift towards school meals through an effective and sustained process is imperative to achievement of Pakistan's goals in fighting against poverty and providing opportunities of quality education to all children, especially girls.

In her concluding remarks Ms. Shazia Marri, the Minister of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to ensure that every child in the country has equal opportunities to learn and thrive. The Government of Pakistan has made investment in the early 1,000 days of a child through the ongoing stunting prevention programme "Benazir Nashonuma" which benefits children under 2 years of age and pregnant and breastfeeding women. In the same way, the Government is equally committed to extend the investment to 8,000 days of a child with improved access to education, nutrition, food and necessary services. The Government has already signed the declaration of the school meals coalition and is fully committed to ensuring that every child has access to a nutritious healthy meal at school by 2030.

Chris Kaye, Representative and Country Director of WFP Pakistan, stressed the importance of an integrated approach to secure the multiple benefits of a school feeding programme. “Pakistan’s experience in the past has been sporadic and project-based, which unfortunately has not created a sustained impact”, he said. However, it was hoped that the combined efforts of the Ministries of Education, Health Agriculture as well as Development and Planning at provincial and federal levels will enable the development of a national school meals policy that can support the context-specific school models across the country.

During the two-day national consultation, the participants will review existing school meals programmes in Pakistan as well as those that are being implemented in countries in Southeast Asia in order to identify best practices and the most applicable models.

In addition to technical experts from Federal and Provincial Government, the consultation was also attended by distinguished guests from donor countries, UN, private sector, non-governmental organizations and media.

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