WASHINGTON/LONDON/ROME – A major contemporary analysis of global school meals practices, designed to help strengthen these vital social investments, has been released by Imperial College London’s Partnership for Child Development (PCD), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank (WB).

The Global School Feeding Sourcebook: Lessons from 14 countries was produced in response to demand from governments and development partners for guidance on designing and implementing large-scale sustainable national school feeding programmes that can meet globally approved standards.

The Sourcebook documents and analyzes a range of government-led school meals programmes to provide decision-makers and practitioners worldwide with the knowledge, evidence and good practice they need to strengthen their national school feeding efforts.

With school meals’ proven ability to improve the health and education of children while
supporting local and national economies and food security, school feeding programmes exist in almost every country in the world for which there is data, for a total annual global investment of US$75 billion. This provides an estimated 368 million children – about one in five - with a meal at school daily. However, too often, such programmes are weakest in countries where there is the most need.

With high-level collaboration with government teams from 14 countries (Botswana, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Chile, Cote D’Ivoire, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Namibia, Nigeria and South Africa) the Sourcebook includes a compilation of concise and comprehensive country case-studies. It highlights the trade-offs associated with alternative school feeding models and analyzes the overarching themes, trends and challenges which run across them.

In a joint foreword, World Bank Group President Dr. Jim Yong Kim and World Food Programme Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said that the research showed how school meals programmes help to get children into the classroom and keep them there, “contributing to their learning by avoiding hunger and enhancing cognitive abilities.”

“Today, national school feeding programmes are increasingly embedded in national policy on poverty elimination, social protection, education and nutrition,” they added.

Lead Editor and PCD’s Executive Director Dr Lesley Drake, said, “The overall message from this research is that there is no ‘one size fits all’ for school feeding and there are many routes to success. Context is key. This sourcebook will act as a valuable tool for governments to enable them to make evidenced-based decisions that will improve the effectiveness of their school feeding programmes.”

The Sourcebook follows Rethinking School Feeding (WB, 2009) and The State of School Feeding Worldwide (WFP, 2013) as the third in a trilogy of agenda defining analyzes produced by the World Bank, WFP and PCD global partnership. These have shaped the way in which governments and donors alike approach school feeding.

“Helping countries to apply this knowledge [in the Sourcebook] to strengthen national school
feeding programmes will contribute to reducing the vulnerability of the poorest, giving all children a chance for an education and a bright future and eliminating poverty,” said Kim and Cousin.

The Sourcebook is free to downloaded at the HGSF document library

**Sourcebook Key Findings**

The analysis examines the 14 national programmes in terms of Five Quality Standards as identified in Rethinking School Feeding (WB, 2009) that are needed for school feeding programmes to be sustainable and effective. These standards include: design and implementation; policy and legal frameworks; institutional arrangements; funding and budgeting; and community participation.

**Design and implementation**

School feeding is most frequently designed as a social protection measure for poor and vulnerable communities with the key outcome being an improvement in education through increased enrolment, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced gender equality. For example primary school enrolment in Nigeria’s Osun State increased by 28 percent since the introduction of free school meals. Increasingly, policy makers are seeing school feeding as a means to tackle health and nutrition issues whether that be stunting and anaemia caused by undernutrition or obesity caused by over nutrition. In Ghana, the government uses a digital school meals planner to develop nutritionally balanced school meals using local ingredients.

Another trend is for countries to connect school feeding with local food production and purchase, also known as Home Grown School Feeding. This benefits both rural economies and school children alike as children benefit from nutritious fresh food and farmers benefit from being able to sell their produce a new market. In Brazil, for example, it is federal law that 30 percent of food for school meals is procured from small family-run farms.

**Policy and legal frameworks**

Effective programmes need well-articulated policy and legal frameworks. Every country reviewed in the study has included school feeding in its regulatory framework. This has been achieved using different types of legislative and executive measures dependent on the national context.
Institutional arrangements
There is no single institutional design, but the key determinants of success include co-ordinating stakeholders from across multiple sectors; ensuring that there is enough government capacity at national and local levels; and creating mechanisms to ensure quality and accountability of the school feeding programmes. The cross-sectoral aspect of school feeding is exemplified by Kenya, where its programmes are coordinated jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Funding and budgeting
School feeding costs usually represent a small fraction of educational expenditure (typically 10-15 percent) with the purchase of food being the main cost-driver. Identifying sustainable and protected sources of funding remains the key challenge for many low-income countries. Analysis shows that there is strong political will to continue to fund school feeding as it is a popular intervention with the public, but not all funding is public, and private sector partnerships are a growing area of financial support. In Cape Verde schools can partner with local businesses such as hotels for extra funds which can be put towards cooking facilities.

Community participation
The strongest and most sustainable programmes are those that respond to community need, are locally-owned and incorporate some form of parental or community contribution. In Namibia, many communities are expected to provide fuel, cooking utensils and storerooms. Indirect benefits of school feeding include employment opportunities for example, in Chile, low-income mothers are given catering training. School feeding can also mean increased income and training for smallholder farmers; as well as complementary school health activities, as in both Mexico and Brazil where parents are taught about the importance of nutritionally balanced diets.