



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AID - ECHO

Unit A5 Food Assistance

**DG ECHO GUIDELINES FOR FUNDING SCHOOL FEEDING**

**4<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

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## SUMMARY

1. This paper has been produced to:
  - a. review the evidence on the impacts of school feeding programmes,
  - b. to provide guidance to DG ECHO staff as to when school feeding may, or may not, be an appropriate intervention, and;
  - c. to provide clarity in our dialogue with other EC services, implementing partners and other donors.
2. These funding guidelines will be adapted regularly to the changing humanitarian environment and knowledge, including any changes in the evidence base as School Feeding is more closely and more extensively evaluated. Constructive feedback and lessons learnt on the practical application from all layers in DG ECHO and external partners is most valuable and needed. Simultaneously, technical consultation with other services of the Commission, donors and partners will take place for coordination and advocacy.
3. School Feeding is defined as meals or snacks prepared and given to children at school. In some cases school feeding may be supplemented by dry take-home rations which are eaten in the household. These guidelines do not cover Food for Schooling Programs, where families are given food if their children attend school.
4. School Feeding objectives have focused on two major sets of goals – education and nutrition. School Feeding programmes have also been formulated to address a range of key policy priorities, including; hunger reduction, education, agricultural production and protection goals.
5. For DG ECHO the potential value of School Feeding programmes must be judged against its' humanitarian mandate<sup>1</sup> rather than against the more developmental objectives often ascribed to school feeding. The financing of School Feeding must be consistent with the Humanitarian Regulation, as well as with the established DG ECHO policies relating to food assistance, nutrition, health and education<sup>2</sup>.
6. In such situations where humanitarian support to educational objectives is considered valid<sup>3</sup>, School Feeding may also be considered as a possible instrument in the humanitarian "toolbox", contributing to short-term educational goals through increased school enrolment, improved attendance and improved concentration.
7. Schools can also be an effective way of protecting children, particularly in a complex emergency, against violence, abuse or exploitation. Where school environments are judged to be safe, school feeding may therefore have a positive impact on child protection.

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<sup>1</sup> These are set out in full in the COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid

<sup>2</sup> Users should refer to the following DG ECHO guidelines: Humanitarian Food Assistance (draft 2009), Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations (Staff Working Paper, 2008) and HIV-AIDS Funding Guidelines (2008).

<sup>3</sup> See Commission Staff Working Document "Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations" (2008)

8. School feeding is not considered an appropriate means of delivering food and nutritional support to vulnerable children in emergencies, except in exceptional circumstances where all other more effective response options are unfeasible. The poorest and most vulnerable are often excluded from those schools, along with nutritionally vulnerable pre-school children. Furthermore, the cost effectiveness of school feeding programmes is questionable.
9. DG ECHO does not endorse the systematic and top-down integration of school feeding into relief and recovery interventions. The decision on whether to support school feeding should be context specific and based on the criteria of:
  - a) the coherence of the intervention's objectives with DG ECHO's mandate and relevant policies ,
  - b) the compatibility of the intervention's objectives with those of the relevant financing decision; and
  - c) an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of school feeding for the specific purpose proposed.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

10. School Feeding is defined as meals or snacks prepared and given to children at school. In some cases school feeding may be supplemented by dry take-home rations which are eaten in the household.
11. School Feeding objectives have focused on two major sets of goals – education and nutrition. However, School Feeding programmes have been formulated to address a range of key policy priorities, including; hunger reduction, protection and longer-term food security.
12. School Feeding has been advocated as a means of contributing to several important international commitments including;
  - i. Achieving the millennium development goals on primary education and hunger reduction.
  - ii. Contributing to the six “Education for All” goals contained in the Dakar Framework for Action, signed at the World Education Forum in Senegal in 2000.
  - iii. Boosting agricultural production as included in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), adopted by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2003<sup>4</sup>.
13. Given this, there is a re-emerging interest in school feeding programmes within the international community. The number of school feeding projects funded by governments, bilateral and multilateral donors, and NGO organisations has increased substantially over the last ten years or so. The growth of school feeding is underpinned in some cases by the need to identify acceptable uses for donor's agricultural surpluses. Policy and budgetary commitments to school feeding have been made by several donors including the US government<sup>5</sup>, the Canadian government and a number of private trusts. School feeding has also been included as a specific intervention in the action plans of the G8 nations and NEPAD.
14. WFP has been the predominant implementer of school feeding programmes over the last 40 years. In 2008 WFP provided food to 22.6 million school children in 68 countries. WFP identifies a potential target group of 66 million children who attend school hungry – of which it currently only reaches one third (WFP, 2009). WFP calculate approximately that it would cost \$3.2 billion per year to feed all 66

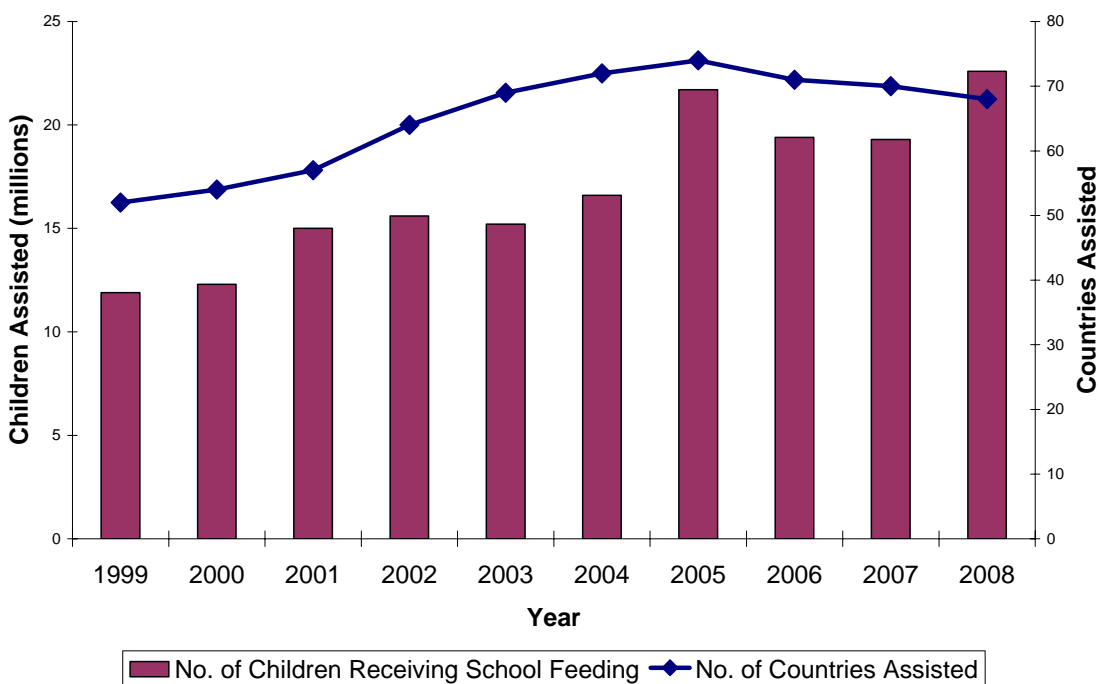
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<sup>4</sup> Later endorsed in the African Union Food Security Summit held in Abuja in 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The largest bilateral programme in recent years has been USDA, in particular through the Global Food for Education (GEF) initiative.

million hungry children at school. It also estimates that an additional 75 million hungry children do not attend school.

15. In addition, national governments and several NGO agencies implement School Feeding either independently or in concert with WFP operations. Major NGO agencies involved in school feeding include; World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Action Contre la Faim, GOAL, CONCERN, CARE and Save the Children (UK & US). UNICEF concentrates primarily on pre-school feeding and in providing complementary inputs (sanitation, health) to school feeding projects.
16. Most recently, school feeding has been incorporated in action plans or declarations responding to the impact of rising food prices<sup>6</sup>. The World Bank Group launched a Global Food Crisis Response Facility that mobilized \$1.2 billion to help countries respond to the food and fuel crises, including by scaling-up school feeding programmes as part of a social safety net response to crisis.



Source: WFP (2009)

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF SCHOOL FEEDING

17. School Feeding has been associated with multiple objectives. These goals are often presented as mutually supportive, given the interrelationship between these objectives. The main arguments for School Feeding can be summarized as:

- i. **Educational.** Increased attendance, enrolment and retention (specifically of girls) are cited in many School Feeding programmes as primary goals. School Feeding may also be designed to improve concentration, cognitive development and educational performance, given that good nutrition helps to develop full intellectual potential.

<sup>6</sup> See the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) Yokohama Declaration and the FAO High Level Conference on World Food Security.

- ii. **Nutrition and health goals.** School Feeding may be designed to meet specific nutritional needs and deficiencies of schoolchildren – of both macro- and micro-nutrients. To improve impact School Feeding programmes may be implemented in conjunction with other health interventions, including; HIV-AIDS prevention, hygiene education and de-worming campaigns. In the long-term, if school feeding increases (female) education this is associated with improved health-seeking, child-care and infant-feeding practices, and ultimately nutritional status.
  - iii. **Improved food security.** School feeding, possibly augmented by take home rations, can be provided as a resource transfer to reduce pressure on household expenditure. This may improve food intake at household level or protect productive assets and livelihoods. The local purchase of food commodities for School Feeding has also been advocated as a means of supporting local food production and markets. In the longer-term, if School Feeding improves nutrition and education, this in turn is associated with increased productivity, incomes and wealth.
  - iv. **Protection.** In crisis situation, schools, formal or informal, can offer a haven of normality. Promoting or maintaining school attendance may be an effective tool to protect children in a period of crisis and to reduce the negative effects on their physical, psychological, social and emotional development.
18. School Feeding objectives may differ with respect to the geographical locality. In Asia the emphasis has generally been on nutritional and cognitive objectives since school attendance is relatively high. By contrast, in Africa School Feeding is typically designed to re-establish or increase school attendance and enrolment.
19. Whilst the objectives of school feeding are mainly developmental, with mid/long-term horizons, School Feeding is increasingly included as part of emergency and recovery interventions. In 2007 only 45% of WFP's School Feeding was presented through the developmentally aligned Country Programmes, with 47% appearing as protracted relief and recovery activities (in PRROs) and 8% in emergency operations (EMOPs).
20. The specific objectives commonly advanced for Emergency School Feeding are closely related to those of more developmental School Feeding programmes. Specifically:
- i. In **emergency contexts**, School Feeding is sometimes proposed as part of a broader food intervention to offset transitory shortages. Addressing short-term hunger is usually a primary objective, along with the prevention of increased school drop-out due to the additional economic strain on families. School Feeding may also be assigned a role in child protection.
  - ii. In a **recovery context** School Feeding is sometimes aimed at reactivating or enhancing livelihoods of food insecure groups. These projects may include 'take-home' rations benefiting families as well as children. Their impact is therefore measured not only in terms of child development, but in terms of income transfers to the household.

### 3. EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF SCHOOL FEEDING

21. Drawing unequivocal conclusions on the impact of School Feeding is problematic given the limited number of rigorous evaluations. Much of the available literature is produced by implementing agencies as evidence to support ongoing projects and policies. Furthermore, the impacts are highly dependent on the School Feeding programme design and implementing context. Hence the effectiveness of school feeding programmes has not been fully resolved.

22. Despite these caveats, a number of more meticulous evaluations and meta-studies have drawn some general conclusions on the impacts against the various objectives<sup>7</sup>. On the basis of these studies and a supplementary literature review, DG ECHO draws the following conclusions on the empirical effectiveness of school feeding programmes as part of a humanitarian response.
23. During an emergency it is rare to find School Feeding introduced in an area that does not have a range of other food-based interventions, such as general food distributions and supplementary feeding programmes. Typically School Feeding is supplemental to food aid provided at household level. Given this, the primary objective is usually to prevent the rapid drop in school attendance associated with emergencies – as children are withdrawn from school to reduce household expenditure and contribute to household income.
24. The empirical evidence suggests that in-school feeding indeed has a positive impact on school participation where initial indicators of school participation are low and food insecurity high. In such situations School Feeding can stabilise and increase school attendance and enrolment – specifically including that of girls. However, in many cases, school enrolment tends to reach a plateau. The example of Bangladesh demonstrated that there are 10% or so of children in poorer areas who simply never go to school, even with a School Feeding incentive (Ahmed, 2002).
25. During emergencies, school may provide children with a sense of normality, unbroken routine and a friendly and structured environment at a time of turmoil. In times of conflict schools can serve as safe havens that, for example, keep children out of the armed forces. However, there is only circumstantial evidence of the impact of School Feeding on protection and related psycho-social benefits, and this can only be deduced as a consequence of the known impact of improved school attendance.
26. There is some evidence of School Feeding improving school performance, principally through alleviating short-term hunger and aiding concentration. However, it is uncertain that it contributes to long-term cognitive improvements (through better nutrition and mental development) and overall learning outcomes; particularly where projects are short-lived or where educational quality is otherwise poor. Educational outcomes are dependent on sustained school attendance for at least the five to six years of basic primary education.
27. In some cases School Feeding can exacerbate educational problems by increasing school attendance without commensurate increases in other educational resources, including teachers, facilities and materials. Therefore effective educational feeding programmes must be embedded in a wider set of actions that improve the quality and accessibility of education, and not delivered as a stand alone activity.
28. School feeding misses the younger, more nutritionally vulnerable, children who do not attend school. School feeding programmes – including most pre-school programmes - fail to reach children under the age of 3, who are most susceptible to nutrition related mortality and irreversible chronic malnutrition. At this age the consequences of malnutrition are most serious, from both a health and cognitive perspective.
29. School-age children are rarely at high risk of mortality from malnutrition, although their growth may be negatively affected by under-nutrition. Overall, School Feeding has demonstrated weak impact on

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<sup>7</sup> Major reviews drawn on include; Adelman et al (2008), Save the Children (2007), Kristjansson et al, 2007, EEFSG (2006), Bennett, J (2003) and Ahmed A (2002).

growth with studies showing only small weight gains<sup>8</sup>, and no significant improvements in height or micronutrient status.

30. At best well-designed school feeding programs, which include micronutrient fortification and deworming, should complement and not replace nutrition programs for younger children, which remain a clear priority for addressing acute malnutrition overall.
31. School Feeding may be used to provide an income transfer to families whose children attend school. The school meal may be reinforced through the provision of take home rations. This often continues into the recovery phase, with the objective of contributing to the protection or restoration of livelihoods. However, the size of the ration is small relative to the needs of the family, which appears to limit the impact on food consumption and livelihoods.
32. A further limitation is that many vulnerable households who do not have children in school are not reached through this mechanism. The elderly, families with pre-school children, the poorest families for whom the opportunity-cost of sending children to school is too high<sup>9</sup>, and families who are displaced and with children too ill or infirm to attend school, are all excluded. A failure to extend health and nutrition services offered in school to out-of-school children risks missing a large portion of the most vulnerable population.
33. Therefore it is unlikely that school feeding is the best use of limited resources for addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in most contexts. Furthermore, there is the real risk that school feeding diverts limited resources away from general ration programmes, or other more appropriate forms of livelihood support.
34. The cost effectiveness of School Feeding requires careful consideration. For logistical and political reasons, school feeding does not target individual children within a school. This raises the cost of achieving program objectives, such as increased attendance rates, because it provides transfers to many children who would have attended school anyway or do not require feeding.

#### **4. FUNDING CRITERIA**

35. Humanitarian aid should be targeted on the basis of needs, to the most vulnerable in developing countries, who are victims of natural or man-made disasters. In such contexts humanitarian aid should primarily be used to guarantee the survival of crisis affected populations through the provision of basic life-saving assistance, such as food, health-care, water, and sanitation. In addition, protection remains an important humanitarian objective<sup>10</sup>.
36. For DG ECHO the potential value of School Feeding must be judged against its' humanitarian mandate<sup>11</sup> rather than against developmental objectives. The financing of School Feeding must be

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<sup>8</sup> "The Cochrane review found that school meals have a small but statistically significant effect on weight gain in lower-income countries. Groups benefiting from a school meal gained on average 0.35 kg more over a period of 19 months (with randomised controlled trials) and 0.71 kg over 11 months (with controlled before/after studies) relative to their comparison groups. Over one year, this works out at an additional weight gain of 0.22 kg to 0.75 kg respectively. The authors conclude that school meals have little effect on height, except in children who are undernourished to begin with" (quoted in Save the Children, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Save the Children (2007) estimate that school enrolment rates vary from 11% in Somalia to 90% in South Africa, with similar contrasts observed in the same countries between rural and urban communities or gender groups.

<sup>10</sup> Commission Staff Working Document "Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations". SEC(2008) 135 Brussels, 5.2.2008

<sup>11</sup> These are set out in full in the COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid



consistent with the Humanitarian Regulation, as well as with the established DG ECHO policies relating to food assistance, nutrition, health and education<sup>12</sup>.

37. The decision on whether to support school feeding will therefore be context specific and based on the main criteria of
- d) the coherence of the intervention's objectives with DG ECHO's mandate,
  - e) the compatibility of the intervention's objectives with those of the relevant financing decision; and
  - f) an analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of school feeding for the specific purpose proposed.
38. In such situations where humanitarian support to educational objectives is considered valid<sup>13</sup>, **school feeding may be used to contribute to educational goals** through increased enrolment, improved attendance and concentration.
39. In refugee and displaced camps, humanitarian resources may have more relevance in supporting education. However, school feeding is most effective in promoting educational objectives (including enrolment, attendance and concentration) where there is a general shortage of food and the nutritional needs of refugees are not already met through other interventions (eg GFD, targeted nutritional support).
40. School can be an effective way of protecting children, particularly in a complex emergency, against being recruited into an armed group or against any other form of violence, abuse or exploitation. **Where school environments are judged to be safe, school feeding, may have a positive impact on child protection in a complex crisis**, by keeping children in the safe school environment and by reducing the necessity to resort to harmful coping measures. Again, school feeding will be most effective as an incentive to attract and keep children in schools, in food insecure environments.
41. **DG ECHO does not consider school feeding as an appropriate means of delivering food and nutritional support to vulnerable children in emergencies, except in exceptional circumstances where all other more effective response options are unfeasible.** School feeding is generally not an effective means of reaching the most vulnerable children during a crisis, since the poorest are often excluded from those schools, and the most nutritionally vulnerable age groups (under-twos and under-fives) usually do not attend school.
42. In the context of a food crisis, general food assistance programmes, supplemented by targeted interventions for infants and other vulnerable groups, are likely to be a more appropriate and cost-efficient means of safeguarding adequate food consumption and preventing malnutrition, than school feeding. School feeding programmes should not divert scarce resources away from general food assistance programmes.
43. Any exceptional consideration of school feeding as an emergency food and nutrition response should be assessed with due regard to targeting (the extent of inclusion and exclusion errors) and cost effectiveness (compared to other response options).
44. **Any support to school feeding for education or protection purposes should always consider the complementary activities necessary to have optimal impact. The cost-effectiveness of the intervention must be compared to other means of achieving similar outcomes.** The decision on

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<sup>12</sup> Users should refer to the following DG ECHO guidelines: Humanitarian Food Assistance (draft 2009), Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations (Staff Working Paper, 2008) and HIV-AIDS Funding Guidelines (2008).

<sup>13</sup> See Commission Staff Working Document "Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations" (2008)

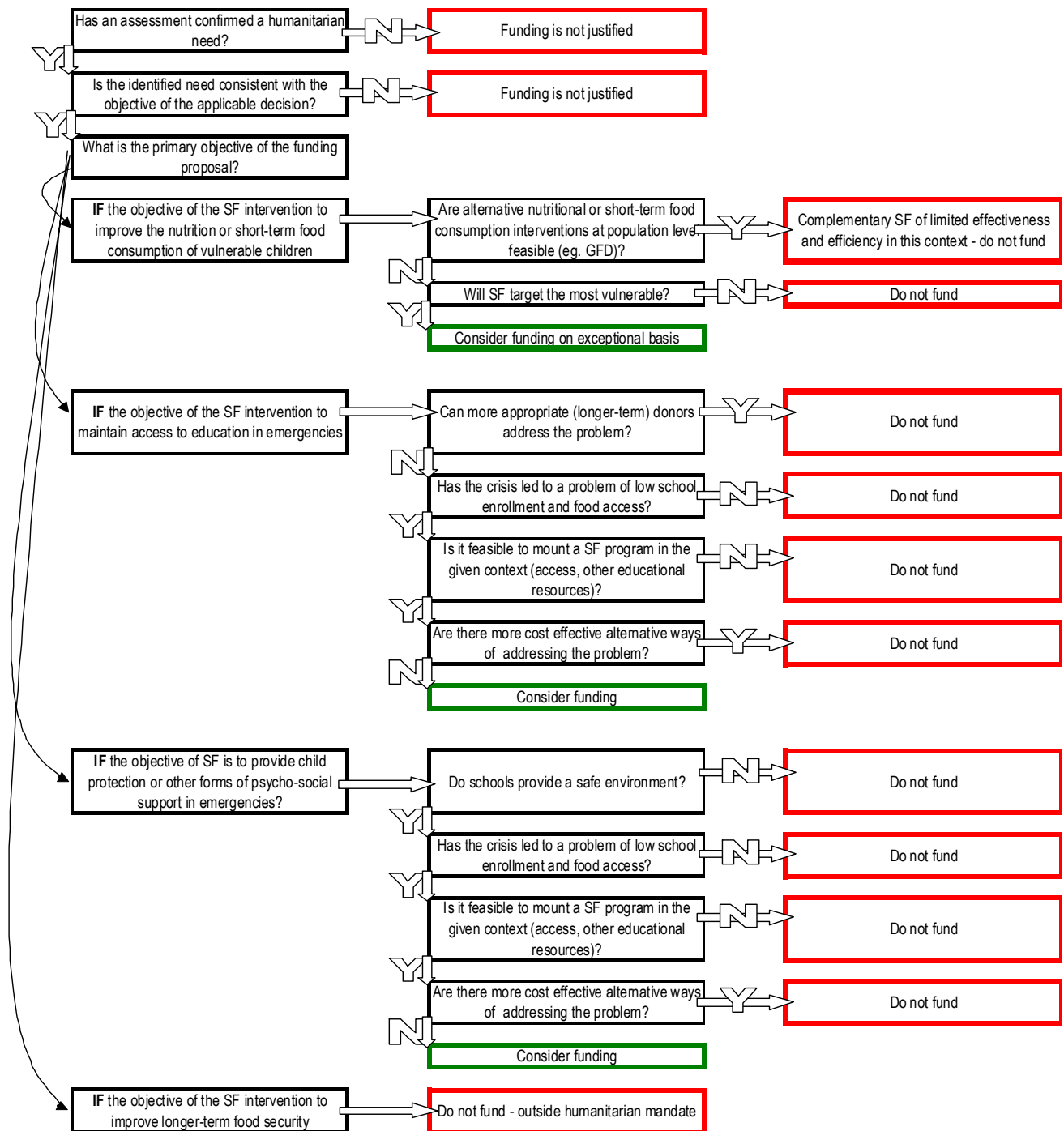
whether to finance School Feeding or alternative education, nutrition, health, food-security, livelihood or protection interventions (depending on the desired outcome) should be based on relative differences in cost-effectiveness<sup>14</sup>.

45. DG ECHO will not support structural actions which are the responsibility of able and willing longer term actors, such as national and local authorities, or which risk undermining the longer-term educational system. Where possible, education should be supported with multi-annual predictability, preferably through nationally owned and on-budget strategies. Actors should not be deterred from this objective by the prospect of easier-to-access, but shorter-term and less predictable humanitarian resources.
46. All School Feeding proposals should articulate the primary objective; whether to improve educational outcomes, improve nutritional status, address food gaps or meet protection needs during emergencies. The proposal should be supported by a needs assessment confirming both the unmet needs and a context where school participation is low and/ or where there are significant nutritional deficiencies.
47. DG ECHO must ensure consistency between the stated objective of the school feeding intervention, and the specific objective of the financing decision that will support it. For example, school feeding justified by an educational or protection intervention logic will not be fundable under a specific objective that aims to improve food consumption or nutritional status.
48. Partners must clearly state whether the intervention logic is based on emergency food needs, emergency education needs, or emergency protection needs. Objectives, outcomes and associated indicators must then be set accordingly, and the project must be monitored and evaluated against such indicators.
49. These funding guidelines will be adapted regularly to the changing humanitarian environment and knowledge, including any changes in the evidence base as School Feeding is more closely and more extensively evaluated. Constructive feedback and lessons learnt on the practical application from all layers in DG ECHO and external partners is most valuable and needed. Simultaneously, technical consultation with other services of the Commission, donors and partners will take place for coordination and advocacy.

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<sup>14</sup> School feeding programmes may be significantly more expensive compared to other interventions aimed at achieving similar outcomes. With the same budget, more vulnerable children may be assisted more efficiently with alternative interventions.

# ANNEX A: DECISION TREE



## **ANNEX B: REFERENCES**

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## **ANNEX C: ABBREVIATIONS**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DG ECHO	Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid
EC	European Commission
FFE	Food for Education
FFS	Food for Schooling
GFD	General Food Distribution
GFE	Global Food for Education Initiative
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IASC	United Nations Inter Agency Standing Committee
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
LRRD	Linking Relief, rehabilitation and Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PEM	Protein energy malnutrition
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WVI	World Vision International