

School nutrition reduces stunting and obesity

Research conducted by the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), in partnership with the Tiger Brands Foundation (TBF) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), has found that both lunch only and lunch and breakfast in-school nutrition programmes significantly improve the health outcomes of children living in poor conditions and have promising educational effects.



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The study assessed the impact of two school nutrition programmes in South Africa: the government's National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) - delivered to approximately 8.8-million children nationally daily and the Tiger brands foundation's in-school breakfast feeding programme - delivered as a complementary meal to the NSNP lunch to over 45,000 learners in nine provinces. The study was conducted in the Lady Frere district of the Eastern Cape.

Lower rates of wasting

In particular, the study found that learners receiving one or both of the interventions had lower rates of wasting than the provincial average for children 0-15 years suggesting that the interventions substantially improve the nutritional intake of children in this poor region of South Africa.

What is particularly interesting is that learners in the schools receiving the additional breakfast had significantly lower stunting levels than children receiving only the lunch. Traditionally, stunting has been shown to be impervious to change once children are older than three years although this has been the subject of debate. The study, in addition to a previous study on the effects of the TBF in-school breakfast feeding programme in Alexandra, Johannesburg, suggests that the additional nutritional intake in the form of breakfast does seem to be shifting stunting levels amongst children in some of the poorest schools.

Overconsumption of nutritionally deficient foods

Another exciting finding is that learners at schools receiving one or both interventions were far less likely than children not receiving an intervention to be overweight or obese. Children who started receiving the NSNP in the course of the study had significantly reduced levels of overweight and obesity over a five-month period. This suggests that the introduction of a well-balanced meal is protective for childhood obesity - currently a major health challenge in South Africa that is driven feeding not by overeating, but the overconsumption of nutritionally deficient foods. It is also exciting to note that children

who receive the additional Tiger brands Foundation's in-school breakfast feeding programme were the least likely to be overweight or obese. This was particularly the case for girls who are more vulnerable to being overweight.

Successful public-private partnership

This is an example of a very successful public-private partnership, genuinely benefitting South Africa's children. For continuous monitoring and evaluation of the programme, The Tiger Brands Foundation uses up-to-the-minute real-time reporting, which provides detailed reports on food delivery, food preparation, hygiene, performance and helps the foundation to build a profile on each school. This is administered by the monitors and food handlers who are employed from the surrounding communities. While there are a range of in-school nutritional interventions funded by businesses, this is the first time that such an intervention has been assessed for impact. In addition, it is the first time that the NSNP - one of the most significant state poverty alleviation programmes - has been assessed for impact; and the story is a good one.

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