



World Vision

SCHOOL MEALS

Lebanon
Case Study

CHILD-LED SCHOOL FEEDING BECOMES A LIFELINE

How a child-led school feeding programme sustained learning, nutrition and well-being through conflict in Lebanon

NUTRITION | EDUCATION | CHILD PROTECTION & PARTICIPATION | COMMUNITY RESILIENCE | LIVELIHOODS

Context

Lebanon's prolonged economic pressures and recurring instability have placed considerable strain on children, families and schools. Within this environment, hunger during the school day can affect concentration, participation and children's overall experience of learning.

The Child-Led School Feeding programme was introduced in six semi-private schools in Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel to support school retention, learning and well-being. Children received one nutritious snack during the school day, produced by community-based kitchens and bakeries operating in the same areas as the participating schools.

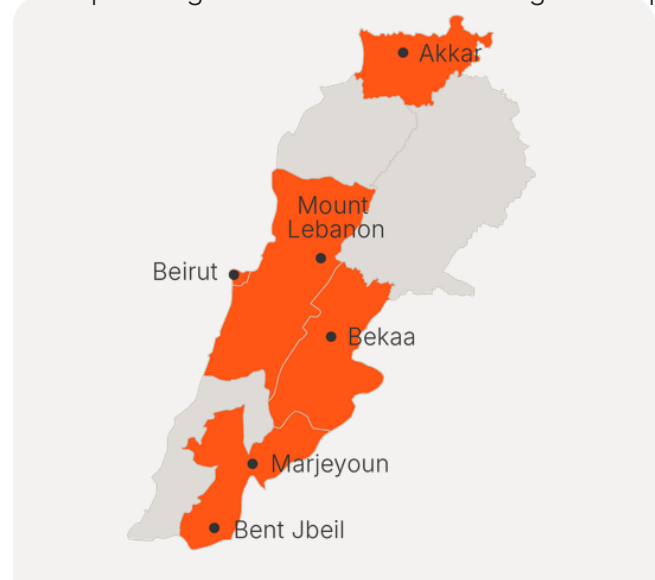
The programme was designed around two connected principles. First, children should have a meaningful role in decisions that directly affect them. Second, local communities should be part of the delivery system, not merely recipients of assistance. Those principles would become particularly important when the context deteriorated.

**When Schools Became Shelters:
Keeping Children Nourished, Learning
and Connected**

A conventional school feeding programme might begin with a standard menu and a central supplier. The challenge was to create a school feeding model that children would use consistently by combining nutrition with choice, local relevance and practical delivery in a constrained school environment.

There was also a wider question of dignity. Receiving assistance can make children feel visibly different from their peers. The programme therefore sought to create an experience that resembled an ordinary school shop. Children used vouchers to select from the snacks available rather than receiving a predetermined item.

The operating environment then changed sharply.





238 children across
four locations assessed
51 recipes



19,000 newly arrived
Syrian refugees assisted



Four community kitchens trained
and provided technical coaching
along with equipment

In March 2026, hostilities escalated, public schools became central to Lebanon's collective shelter system, and four of the six participating schools either closed or moved to online learning. The programme had to maintain support while schools, shelters and displaced families were moving through rapidly changing circumstances.

Putting Choice, Nutrition and Dignity First

Designing the menu with children - The programme began by establishing nutritional standards with support from a registered dietitian. Children then helped determine which snacks would be produced through tasting sessions involving **238 children** across **four locations**.

Participants assessed 51 recipes based on taste, texture, appearance and familiarity, leading to the selection of 31 nutritionally appropriate recipes that children preferred.

Producing food locally - Four community kitchens and bakeries were assessed against food safety and nutrition standards, trained, and supported with **technical coaching** and **US\$10,000 in equipment**. The investment expanded production from an initial target of two snack varieties to 11 products, strengthened local capacity and created opportunities beyond the programme.

In Deir El Ahmar, families continued purchasing snacks after programme activities ended, while snacks produced by contracted suppliers were later incorporated into assistance for approximately **19,000 newly arrived Syrian refugees** through the World Food Programme.





111 children
supported



232 caregivers
given psychological
first aid sessions



18 facilitators trained
in child protection
and safeguarding

Making nutrition practical at home - The menu emphasised protein-rich ingredients and was adapted to align with local tastes. Recipes used ingredients commonly available in households, enabling caregivers to prepare similar snacks at home. Some mothers began making the recipes for the whole family, extending programme benefits beyond participating children.

Adapting through conflict

When hostilities escalated in March 2026 and four participating schools either closed or shifted to online learning, the programme adapted rapidly to maintain support.

Snack distribution continued in schools that remained open, helping sustain local supply chains and community partnerships, before resuming across all six schools in May 2026. With donor flexibility, resources were redirected to support displaced children and families through psychosocial support, child-friendly spaces and caregiver assistance.

The programme supported **111 children** in shelters, provided **Psychological First Aid** and **information sessions** to **232 caregivers**.

It also trained **18 facilitators** in **protection, safeguarding** and **inclusion approaches**, surpassing the original target of eight facilitators.

Equipment purchased for emergency child-friendly spaces was later donated to schools to support learning and recreation.

Rapid donor approval and budget flexibility enabled the programme to respond effectively as displacement patterns and school operations changed.

Digital continuity during displacement

Technology produced mixed results. While electronic cards proved impractical during short school breaks, paper vouchers provided a simple and effective alternative. During displacement,

WhatsApp enabled psychosocial support to continue remotely, supporting **1,374 children** and **845 caregivers** through structured sessions despite restrictions on in-person access.

Facilitators used reminders and follow-up messaging to sustain participation while applying safeguarding protocols throughout the intervention.





3,612 children
received snacks
in six schools



290,182 snacks
distributed



USD 669,643
fully expended



1,485 children and 1,077
caregivers were reached
through psychosocial support



Four community kitchens
and bakeries participated
in production

Results That Matter for Children

Nutrition and hunger	Post-implementation monitoring found that 73.4 per cent of surveyed students said the snack kept them full until the end of the school day.
Learning	<p>Schools observed improved concentration and a noticeable reduction in hyperactivity after high-sugar snacks were replaced. Children also associated several of the snacks with reduced hunger and an improved ability to focus during lessons.</p> <p>These observations indicate promising changes, although the available programme account does not provide an experimental measure of the snacks' direct effect on educational attainment.</p>
Psychosocial well-being	The psychosocial component recorded the programme's strongest reported results. Improved well-being was reported by 98.5 per cent of participating children and 97.7 per cent of participating caregivers .



What Changed

Beyond providing nutritious snacks, the programme strengthened local food systems, expanded child participation in decision-making and demonstrated how community-based delivery models can remain effective during crisis.

Children directly influenced programme design, local producers gained skills and market opportunities, and existing community partnerships enabled a rapid shift towards supporting displaced children and families when conflict escalated.

The programme showed that child-centred, locally led approaches can continue delivering value even in highly volatile environments.

Lessons to Inform Future School Feeding Programmes

- **Give children a consequential role -** Consultation is most meaningful when children can see how their views affect decisions. Preference testing informed the final menu and helped identify products children were willing to eat.
- **Test delivery systems in real conditions -** The electronic card worked technically but not operationally. Testing against the short duration and pace of a school break revealed the need for a simpler approach.
- **Treat local producers as programme infrastructure -** Assessment, training, equipment, longer-term agreements and monitoring enabled four local kitchens and bakeries to increase production variety and access opportunities beyond the programme.
- **Use familiar ingredients -** Recipes based on everyday foods allowed caregivers to reproduce nutritious snacks at home, widening the potential benefits beyond enrolled children.
- **Build flexibility into donor agreements -** Activity-level flexibility enabled the programme to respond to displacement, school closures and changing shelter arrangements while preserving core services.
- **Pair flexibility with an exit plan -** Demand for psychosocial support continued beyond the programme period. Future interventions should establish transition or referral arrangements from the outset, particularly when short-term emergency activities address continuing needs.





Looking Ahead

In a period marked by school closures, displacement and uncertainty, the Child-Led School Feeding programme demonstrated that school feeding can deliver far more than nutrition alone. By combining child participation, local procurement and adaptive delivery, it supported learning and well-being, strengthened local food systems and maintained assistance during conflict.

The programme reached **3,612 children**, distributed **290,182 snacks**, and provided **psychosocial support** to **1,485 children and 1,077 caregivers**. Its experience highlights the value of flexible, locally led approaches that can continue meeting children's needs as circumstances change.

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