

Blog Summary of the Webinar: **Germany's School Food Program: Funding, Underlying Policy Mechanism and Implementation**

Description

As part of the webinar series *School Food Around the World: Lessons for Canada*, the webinar on 26th October 2021 covered essential aspects of Germany's school food programs (SFPs). The presenters shed light on how the program is implemented and monitored in alignment with SFP's policies of the EU, how they are funded, and their underlying policy mechanisms.

Participants:

Hosts:

- **Debbie Field** - Coordinator of the Coalition for Healthy School Food
- **Suvadra Datta Gupta** - Ph.D. Candidate of University of Saskatchewan
- **Alessandra Manginelli** – Post-Doctoral Researcher of HafenCity University of Hamburg

Panelists:

- **Ulrike Arens-Azevedo** - Chair of the scientific presidium of the German Nutrition Society
- **Ernestine Tecklenburg** - Leader of the Department for Communal catering and Quality assurance at the German Nutrition Society
- **Tim Björstrand** – Professor in Education for Sustainable Development, Intercultural Pedagogy and Systems Thinking & Food Activist

Summary of Presentations

Part One: Ulrike Arens-Azevedo

- Germany has little experience in school food catering – they only started 20 years ago. But more and more parents are asking for all-day schooling, hence school food is in the discussion.
- The 4 goals that Germany keeps in mind when discussing sustainable nutrition:
 - **Health:** Health-promoting food consumption contributes to higher life expectancy, higher healthy life expectancy, and greater well-being for all.
 - **Social Aspect:** Food consumption that guarantees minimum social standards along value chains.
 - **Environment:** Environmentally and climate-friendly food consumption that fits in with Germany's medium and long-term sustainability goals.

- Animal Welfare: Food consumption that supports greater animal welfare and thus meets the changing ethical demands of society.
- Lunch offers are only compulsory in all-day schools. In some federal states, all-day schools are the rule (Hamburg, Berlin), while other states only have 50% of schools that are all-day schools. 3.4 million out of 8.6 million students in Germany are in all-day schools, which means only 3.4 million are receiving lunches from their school.
- 5 ministries of Germany are involved in designing healthy and sustainable meals: Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Environment and Nature Conservation, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women & Youth. Specific departments of each minister in 16 federal states develop their strategies independently. If other resources have to be involved, ministries will exchange content.
- Germany does not have a school food program on a national level. However, the country has a program to support school expenses called “Education and Participation”, which includes free lunches for children who live in households at risk of poverty. Only 25% of eligible people applied and redeemed for free lunch in this program in 2020, due to many reasons: difficulty, time-consuming, unclear or unknown information, etc. The Education and Participation program has its quality management take place on the part of the provider in their own company, while school or daycare providers are responsible for clear structures to look after frequently on external quality assurance.
- The federal states are responsible for establishing educational curriculum, philosophy, and requirements of nutrition in schools. Meanwhile, the communities are responsible for building schools, designing eating rooms, contacting caterers, school room financing, and personnel management. The national government sometimes provides investments in school infrastructures and buildings.
- On managing the local school food programs, the school authorities (including parents, students, teachers) and the community (including networking centers, supported by regional and federal states) work closely together, yet do not have an established workflow.
- Only in Berlins school meals are for free. In other federal states, the parents have to pay for it.
- In terms of supporting measures and initiatives for good, healthy, and sustainable meals in schools and daycare centers:
 - On federal state level: networking centers for school food in 16 states
 - On a national level: National Quality Center for Nutrition (NQZ) in Daycare Centers and Schools (founded in 2016 with headquarter in Berlin)
- Germany’s school food philosophy:
 - Increase in mental and physical performance during the school day

- Avoiding or reducing nutrition-related to chronic disease
- Contributing to enjoyment and well-being of the students
- Improvement of the immune system
- Improvement of quality of life
- Promoting sustainable eating behavior
- Eating rooms in Germany: quiet, comfortable, well-ventilated – the students and school directors are satisfied.
- In terms of Food literacy, nutrition education is not the central subject in schools in Germany. In some schools that have kitchens (only around 44.6% of schools in Germany), the students have weekly learning sessions in which they are taught what kind of food is healthy and how to prepare them.

Part Two: Ernestine Tecklenburg

- Most of the funding is covered by the school authorities on the community level.
- Only 47,5% of schools in Germany have dining rooms. A lot of schools still cannot offer or prepare school meals in school, instead of depending on caterers and contract providers.
- Around 30% of the schools do not have proper contracts with caterers or lunch providers. These schools do have providers, but with no commitment to the quality of the food, therefore they cannot control the food quality. Even for schools that have contracts, meal quality is still not specified clearly in the contracts.
- The most important requirement for school food:
 - Varied food offer
 - DGE compliant according to the German Nutrition Society
 - Price – the most important factor: it is really important to get good quality food at a low price (low costs).
- In terms of quality management of school food:
 - If it is self-management: the local school authorities have frequent commissioned inspections and discussions with the kitchen staff.
 - If it is (partly) external management: the local school authorities only have a few discussions with meal providers, school staff, and committee. Incoming good inspections and sample meals are carried out. Contract specifications are done poorly.
- In terms of service personnel for school food services:
 - Around 60% of schools are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.
 - Around 40% of schools are paid by the parents or people who paid for the students' school meals.
- In terms of furniture for the dining room, around 98% of the schools are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.

- In terms of furniture for the kitchen, around 93% of schools are paid or paid in part by the local school authorities.
- 56% of the operating costs (such as electricity and water) are paid by the schools. The remains are in discussion between the schools and the meal providers.
- Local school authorities pay for operating costs, personnel costs, investment costs, and administrative costs. The parents pay for food costs, partial personnel costs, and partial operating costs.
- School catering management is still not being considered seriously.
- Germany focuses on bringing sustainability in school food quality standards and school food management. The German Nutrition Society is discussing different projects on action plans to improve school foods and how to implement them in some federal states.

Part Three: Tim Björstrand

School feeding in Germany:

- In Germany, there is no national school food programme. All-day schools, on the other hand, are required by the KMK (conference of federal education secretaries) to provide heated meals. Cafeterias (where hot meals are provided) and bistros/kiosks are often seen together.
- Because bakeries, supermarkets, and fast-food restaurants are generally nearby, competition is inevitable. These competitions actively market soft drinks, sweets, or lower-cost meal alternatives to students.
- Low cafeteria lunch attendance, particularly among older students, puts economic pressure on caterers to optimize their meals or offer desserts.
- Germany also has student-run businesses that serve as a platform for kids to gain ownership and experience with food literacy.
- School kiosks are led by kids, parents, and teachers, with some focusing on fair trade products or organic food. This is also where hands-on food literacy is established, as well as ownership.

Transformation to 100% organic food at Bioregio's Cafeteria (EMG Hürth)

- Parents, kids, and teachers manage the organic snack bar. BioRegio, a non-profit organization, took over the cafeteria with the aim of upgrading to 100% organic sourcing.
- BioRegio faced difficulty when it had to compete with caterers from throughout the EU in an open request for bids (EU procurement law)
- "Grassroots initiatives" in the school food transformations result in opportunities such as: Team building, ownership, food literacy (learning-by-doing), freedom in decision-making, and non-profit. But there are limitations to this initiative such as Difficulty of scaling, EU procurement law, the commitment of individuals and local policymakers, and the ineffective lack of governance.

- Other programs/institutions that are promoting sustainable school feeding in Germany are InForm initiative (guidelines, even for snacks!), School Food Networking Hubs („Vernetzungsstellen“), KEEKS-Schulen (Climate-efficient kitchens at schools), Field-to-school (European) network, and EU Farm-to-Fork project “SchoolFood4Change”

- Because it is a school under a system that is continuously under pressure to meet all of the requirements, it is difficult for programs or efforts to promote healthy school eating in such a changing environment. Increased centralized testing following PISA 2000, Reform and rollback of education patterns (G8/G9), Inclusion and individualization, Digitalization, whole-day schooling (yet not completely implemented), and inadequately defined SDG learning are among these requirements.

- A holistic approach to school feeding, such as growing your own food, assisting with lunch preparation, creating healthy and sustainable dishes, tracking food waste and packaging, participating in cafeteria decisions, and exchanging food ideas with people all over the world, has the potential to address a variety of issues. Working with school food, as well as the SDGs, will assist with problems like gender equality, proper nutrition, education, climate change, and many more.

-The following are some of the recommendations for Canadian school food programs: adequate funding, investment in kitchen staff and teacher training, the introduction of mandatory organic and local sourcing standards, strong participation of all stakeholders, particularly students and teachers, and a whole school approach and integration of SDG learning.

Questions and Answers (Q&A) Section:

- Scientific advisory board recommended to the German government to make school meals free for all. The calculated amount of money that would cost to give free meals at school, and per year was 5.5 billion. This amount includes food, personnel, and the environment. Children are important to our future so giving them free meals and making sure they eat will ensure that their future will be bright.

- The amount spent on school food fees varies geographically. Parents usually pay 3-4 euros per school meal per day.

- In the last 10 years the Paris ministry has tried to come together and discuss how to implement a common strategy for all. But it depends very often on the people involved, of the interests, of the motivation of different persons. It is not established in the infrastructure, but everyone is very motivated in the ministries and on the level of

networking centers. Right now, it is difficult to come together and form and try to implement a common strategy for everyone.

- Networking hubs for school food in Germany which they have in every federal state, are providing guidelines and helping documents in how to deal with European procurement.
- Not every local authority has problems with the EU law level constraints because some are under the amount of money their school food offers.
- The Swedish school food program is a role model in school food because there are free school meals for everybody. The high quality also influences the perception of food in schools. Also, in Sweden, the people involved have a demand for food councils in the schools. There is a food council of parents' administration that makes everyone come together and discuss food issues, or makes decisions on food-related matters leading to an increase in ownership and participation.

For more resources and information on the webinar please follow the links below.

[Germany's School Food Program Webinar](#)

[Ulrike Arens-Azevedo's Presentation Slides](#)

[Ernestine Tecklenburg's Presentation Slides](#)

[Tim Björstrand's Presentation Slides](#)