



School Feeding Programmes in Masai Communities: The key to education not just nutrition

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Aim:

To assess the impact of school feeding programmes in a Masai community in Central Kenya



Background:

Masai lead a nomadic lifestyle with income generated from livestock and farming. Primary school is free but children are often prohibited from attending due to duties of herding goats and schooling perceived as unnecessary by parents.



A child born to an illiterate mother is 50% more likely to die before their 5th birthday than a child born to a literate mother.¹

One year in primary school increases future earnings by 10% .²

Poverty, drought and large numbers of children can contribute to malnutrition and low weight .



Method:

230 children aged 4-8 were enrolled.

Height, weight and mid upper arm circumference were measured at the start and finish of school terms over a two year period.

Number of children attending school was also documented.

Results:

2% of children were clinically malnourished at the start of the project.

There was no difference in % of malnourished children over the project period.

Heights and weights increased proportionally during term time. Weights were reduced or static at the start of term after each school holiday.

The number of children attending school increased by 27% during the feeding programme .

Impact:

School feeding programmes have little impact on malnutrition in areas where prevalence of malnutrition is low. A positive impact is seen on number of children attending primary school.



Thoughts:

Evidence suggests feeding programmes have a role in encouraging parents to send their children to school thus assisting in economic growth and prevention of inter-generational transmission of poverty.³

Is the right approach? Is dependency being encouraged?

Should trowels and irrigation be financed instead?

Would a womens microfinance project serve the community better?



References

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