INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE INTEGRATED SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM MODEL IN DIFFERENT SCHOOLS IN CALABARZON

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Background:
A school-based nutrition program model which integrated gardening featuring climate smart agricultural practices, nutrition education for students and parents, and supplementary feeding of underweight children was previously implemented for three years and was proven effective in improving the nutritional status of children and knowledge of parents and children.

Objective:
This study aimed to mobilize and engage school officials to institutionalize the Integrated School Nutrition Program and document scale-up mechanisms for its implementation in CALABARZON.

Materials and Methods:
The scaling-up relied largely on establishing a critical mass of schools termed as “lighthouse schools” (LS), which provided local research-based evidence while demonstrating scalability of the model. Fifty-eight (58) LS were selected in CALABARZON Region where a total of 80,222 children were enrolled in 2016-2017. Capacity building (training of trainers, workshops, orientations) was provided for school program implementers. Seeds and planting materials and information, education and communication (IEC) materials were also provided to the LS.

Results:
Garden produce was regularly utilized in the school-based feeding program (SBFP) incurring savings of ~Php 42.00 per student in 120 days.

Different nutrition education (NE) modalities helped improve knowledge of children and parents, which resulted to “no plate waste” among schoolchildren. The NE activities also built a sense of cooperation among parents to help in the feeding activities and in sustaining the vegetable gardens.

After 120 feeding days a significant decrease in the proportion of wasted students aged 5 to 19 y.o. from baseline (100%) to endpoint (64.71%) was observed. There was a further significant increase in the mean weight and height of students at the end of the additional 80 feeding days for male (p=<0.05) and female (p=<0.05).

Conclusion and Recommendations:
Schools can serve as centers for learning and sharing about nutrition, food security, agro biodiversity conservation and climate change. Effective scaling-up requires demonstration of effective combination of advocacy and education, communication strategies directed at relevant agencies and sectors. Issues on sustainability, maintenance of soil quality and manpower need to be addressed for national scale implementation.