



Joint News Release

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SECOND AFRICAN DAY OF SCHOOL FEEDING CELEBRATED IN BRAZZAVILLE, REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Congo Brazzaville: The second edition of the African Day of School Feeding was officially launched and celebrated on Wednesday 1 March 2017, under the patronage of the Congolese government, under the theme: “Home Grown School Feeding: Investment in Youth and Children for Harnessing the Demographic Dividend”.

The historic day was celebrated by the African Union Commission, together with the AU Member States and development partners. The colorful ceremony, which was complemented by a series of official events in the Congolese capital, Brazzaville, was attended by senior government officials and ministers from African governments including Niger, Guinea Bissau, Chad, Zimbabwe, Senegal, along with development partners, members of the diplomatic corps and other guests.

The African Day of School Feeding was instituted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government during the 26th African Union Summit in January 2016 (Assembly/AU/Dec. 589 (XXVI), in recognition of the immense value of home grown school feeding, in enhancing retention and improving the performance of children in school, and in boosting income generation and entrepreneurship in local communities.

“The Government of Congo is committed to investing in school feeding in the interests of our children and for the future of our country,” said Minister Claude Alphonse Silou, representing the Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo.

Mr. Anatole Collinet Makosso, The Congolese Minister of Primary, Secondary Education and Literacy in his speech said “Today’s meeting which comes in the aftermath or as an extension of the celebration of the great Youth Day in Congo, is far from being a mere coincidence. It is rather the tangible evidence of the relevance of the political choices of the Government of Congo, which is determined to further invest in the youth to harness the demographic dividend”. He added that, “The national education strategy and the national school feeding policy of Congo are undoubtedly the expression of a broad-based public policy to totally restructure the education system, by laying special emphasis on the promotion of cognitive, intellectual, physical, mental and moral development of



children through safe and balanced school feeding based on local products and recognized as a sector platform with many advantages and benefits”.

“The experience of Congo in the area of school feeding which started very early in boarding schools and some high schools in the rural areas took a drastic turn in 2000. Though school feeding continued to be practiced in boarding schools, it was gradually oriented towards primary schools, in the form of school canteens, in order to bring back students to school after the armed conflicts that we experienced. Later on, it was expanded to help children from poor and vulnerable households living in rural areas to have access to education and receive balanced food for their mental, intellectual and physical development. It also aims at promoting universal primary education and contributes to the reduction of disparities, failures and early dropouts”. He further mentioned.

Dr. Martial de Paul Ikounga, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST) of the African Union Commission, in his speech started by highlighting the relevance of the African Day of School Feeding. According to him, this day aims to advocate with African policy makers so that they recognize and deem it relevant to allocate resources for school nutrition, as this has a lot of short, mid and long term benefits for the continent’s economy.

However, since this advocacy is mostly geared towards African leaders, the HRST Commissioner carefully mentioned that everybody should be concerned by the issue of school feeding. He thus said that; “each of us has a role to play in school feeding. Let us support our Governments and the African Union Commission in achieving the goals that led to the creation of this programme and of course our common vision of “the Africa we want”.

Stressing the contribution of school feeding in his academic background and in shaping the person that he is today, just like many other African leaders, he recalled the saying which goes “let us not close the door through which we became what we are today”.

In the same vein, he presented school feeding as a very profitable niche for investment in childhood and the youth so that today’s beneficiaries as many of them (men and women) become citizens able to contribute to the creation of innovative jobs that are useful for the economic growth of African countries.

Dr. IKOUNGA also presented the actions that the African Union Commission plans to implement in the future. Among them is the general advocacy with African leaders to show



them that it is more conducive to invest in profitable sectors like education during difficult economic situations, as it should always be recalled that “A hungry stomach has no ears”. The Commissioner concluded by quoting a statement made by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission during the 26th AU Summit in January 2016, “I dare to hope that the recommendations of the Assembly in favour of the promotion of school feeding programmes in the framework of CESA 16-25 will not remain a mere document sitting in the drawers of the ministries but will mark the beginning of a process which will offer many opportunities to reinforce the convergence of resources, skills and resources.”

Highlighting the catalytic effect of school feeding on poverty and hunger reduction, The Director of the Brazil based WFP Center of Excellence Against Hunger Daniel Balaban, stated that, “Home grown school feeding programmes bring together nutrition, learning and connect schools with parents, smallholder farmers and local markets, creating a powerful force. By encouraging these transformational programmes across the continent, the African Union is bringing us one step closer to our shared goal of a world with Zero Hunger.”

In his remarks, WFP Country Director in Republic of Congo, David Bulman, underscored the importance of school feeding programmes, particularly for vulnerable children, and cited recent research on the cost-benefit of school feeding programmes. “Every dollar invested in school meals in Congo generates a return on investment of more than nine dollars” he said.

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