

## CHAPTER 13

# Postscript

There was little inkling that a global pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus loomed when GCNF embarked on the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © in mid-January 2019. The data collection had wrapped up and 70 summary country-specific reports had already been shared at the December 2019 Global Child Nutrition Forum in Siem Reap, Cambodia before news of the virus took over the airwaves and brought business as usual to a screeching halt.

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed the data cleaning, analysis, and final production of this report, but that was the least of GCNF's worries.

Much more importantly, the pandemic wreaked havoc on school systems and disrupted school meal programs around the world, depriving vulnerable children of a daily meal at school, causing new levels of child hunger, and globally throttling education for nearly all children.



**COVID-19 disrupted school meal programs around the world, depriving vulnerable children of a daily meal at school.**

Program implementers worked desperately to adjust their programs to safely serve the most vulnerable despite the closure of schools, borders, travel and transport options, and most businesses. Funding for school meals was also taxed, as governments and donors alike focused their resources on health care, safety measures, and finding a cure. GCNF captured some of the early stories of how school meal programs recalibrated and shared what we were learning about what was working and not working on our website and via webinars.

As this is written, programs continue to struggle to reach vulnerable children. The pandemic persists in threatening children, teachers, and food providers, requiring them—even where schools have reopened—to practice social distancing, wear protective equipment, and otherwise operate quite differently than pre-pandemic.

We fear for this generation, beset by arguably unparalleled challenges, and pledge to do our best to both document and help to mitigate the negative effects of the hunger, damage to their schooling, and the psychological toll of the pandemic.

In mid-2021, we will embark on the second round of the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©. We are scheduling the survey to capture the impact of the pandemic for at least one full school year. For countries whose school years are the calendar year, this will likely be school year 2020; for the remaining countries, it will be school year 2020/2021. The 2019 survey (covering school year 2017/2018 or 2018 in most cases) will serve as the baseline against which we can begin to measure the toll of the pandemic on the school food ecosystem. We also hope to document the resilience and creativity of school meal programs in the face of such dramatic challenges.

To quote Gene White, beloved GCNF co-founder and long-time school nutrition leader,



**Peace begins when the hungry are fed; the future begins when the hungry are educated.**



The pandemic has made it harder but has not changed our resolve to ensure that school-age children around the world are nourished, can learn, and can thrive.

On behalf of the whole GCNF team,

**Arlene Mitchell**

Executive Director

Global Child Nutrition Foundation