We shouldn't let Bihar tragedy jeopardize India's school feeding programme
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The deaths of 22 children due to suspected pesticide poisoning of school meals in Bihar, is a terrible tragedy that should be fully investigated but we should not allow the events in India to jeopardize school feeding programmes which benefit the lives of hundreds of millions of children each year. This was the key message of Dr Lesley Drake from the Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London during an interview broadcast on the Sky News Channel.

India accounts for over a third of the World’s 146 million undernourished children, the mid-day meals scheme provides hot meals to over 120million school children each day. The programme is extremely valuable social safety-net in terms of eliminating hunger and improving the health and educational outcomes of school aged children from across the country.

This is especially true in Bihar, one of India’s poorest states, where state supported school health programmes such as deworming and school feeding provide a valuable social safety net to some of the country’s most disadvantaged children.

During her interview Dr Drake called on the India Government to undertake a full investigation into what happened, and to review the checks and measures that are in place to ensure that standards are maintained right across the school feeding supply chain.

The Indian Government have responded to the incident by ordering a full report on the programme. The Indian government aren't alone in looking to improve the standards of their school feeding programmes. A recent report showed that every country we have data for is providing school feeding programmes at some scale. With so many countries looking to scale up their school feeding programmes, government's and their partners are increasingly reviewing their school feeding systems (from school implementation level up to governmental level) and develop global quality standards that can be adapted to country contexts.
Countries from across the globe are working with development partners such as the WFP, the World Bank and PCD to build the evidence base around how best to design and implement effective and healthy school meals.

The hope is that by partnerships such as this working together to improve the global standards around school feeding and terrible events like this in Bihar will become things of the past.