Ethiopia is to implement national school feeding programme at all schools as part of the newly developed National School Health Nutrition Strategy. The Ethiopian Herald's Desta Gebrehiwot attended the opening ceremony of a two-day consultative workshop on 'Systematic Approach for Better Education'.

The new national school feeding programme which is integrated with the national education system will be applicable to all schools either private or public in towns or rural areas. The new design builds on the previous school feeding programme has been targeting schools where students are vulnerable to malnutrition and food shortage.

"School feeding will maximize the cognitive potential of students. PCD is committed to work with the Ministry of Education to develop practical national strategy in this regard."

Dr Laura Appleby, Partnership for Child Development

The feeding scheme will primarily be applied in primary schools as a pilot project and will consequently be cascaded to other levels. The SABER consultative workshop will help identify capacity gaps and design strategies for school feeding programme.

The programme is apart of the ongoing global efforts to achieve education for all and school
Ethiopia's national school feeding to provide meals for all schools
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The government has developed the programme to ensure transition from donor funded programme to national ownership and expand the current coverage to more schools, said Eshetu Assefaw, Action Planning Resource Mobilization Director with the Ministry of Education.

According to the strategy, the feeding programme will be implemented by national capacity from financing up to supplying food. In addition to school feeding, the strategy also targets on the provision of healthy conducive and friendly school environment. "The feeding scheme will help create healthier and efficient generation and ensure quality and better education system," added Eshetu.

The programme is developed in line with the country's Second Growth and Transformation Plan that is geared towards ensuring food security and ending abject poverty, he added.

School Feeding programmes have been implemented in many countries and can be critically important means by which governments are able to combat food shortages and malnutrition. It is also a systematic approach to minimize school dropout, said Bachir Sarr, Partnership for Children Development (PCD) Senior Policy Analyst.

It is good that the government looks to own the school feeding programme and social safety net and helps vulnerable community. Effective school feeding programme requires strong coordination among education, health and agriculture sectors. At starting point and needs more scale up, helping Ethiopia find the necessary support and provide various assistance.

"PCD has been undertaking a number of various activities in Ethiopia particularly in 30 schools located at SNNPR State. We have been providing daily school feeding services, sanitation facilities and health educational facilities and others. And we have seen an increase in student enrolment and decrease in infections diseases.

School feeding scheme supports children going to schools to be nurtured and have good physiological and psychological make up," noted Laura Appleby (PhD) Partnership for Child Development Neglected Tropical Disease Programme Manager.

Laura said the government of Ethiopia and other partners are now committed to schools in drought areas in terms humanitarian aid. Poor nutrition leads to poor cognition ability. Hence, school feeding will maximize the cognitive potentials of students.
"It does take huge resource and proper policy to implement national school feeding scheme. PCD is committed to work with the Ministry of Education to develop practical national strategy in this regard," added Laura.

The National School Health Nutrition Strategy would be officially launched today.

Written by Desta Gebrehiwot, this article appeared in the Ethiopian Herald 8th March.