

China's Nutrition Improvement Plan---Global Perspective

——Discussion with China Development Research Foundation and Feedback Report of the Field Investigation in Qinghai and Guangxi Province

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An inspection delegation consisting of three experts from the United Nations World Food Program and other international organizations, Donald Bundy, Carmen Burbano and Lesley Drake, launched a field trip(June 4-15,2012) to Ledu County in Qinghai Province and Du'an County in Guangxi Province to observe the implementation of the Nutrition Improvement Plan for Rural Compulsory Education Students. They went to five rural primary schools and educational departments in these two provinces. In this field trip, the inspection delegation observed the operation of school feeding programs in China, and they also held several informal discussions with local school leaders, teachers, students and government officials. When the delegation went back to Beijing, they discussed their observations with China Development Research Foundation (CDRF) staff.

Main Conclusions

China Nutrition Improvement Plan provides daily school meals for 26million children, whose coverage is the third largest in the world, second only to the school feeding plans in India and Brazil which covers 130million and 47million children respectively. China's nutrition improvement plan covers children in 699 impoverished counties. The majority of beneficiaries are leftover children.

(一) Advantages

The nutrition improvement plan helped a large number of vulnerable children in a short time, which proves Chinese government's high efficiency. The inspection delegation found that the policies of the relevant government departments were clearly targeted. They perfected the policy under the current circumstances and expanded the coverage of the plan.

Compared with the successful experiences internationally, the inspection delegation discovered that the nutrition improvement plan has some obvious advantages. The local government is organized in carrying out the policy with clear division of labor. The food purchase process is well supervised, with the department of health supervising the nutrition ingredient of the school meal and the food safety and the financial department managing the funds.

Another important advantage is that China's school feeding programme is not against the quality of school education. Some international examples show that some teachers need to cook the meals for students and manage the whole process, so the

teachers are heavily burdened and the educational quality is decreased. In China's case, teachers do not have to do these chores (in the five targeted schools). The initial goal of the nutrition improvement plan is to raise the educational level. Therefore, it is important that the teachers are not over pressured. The government investment in hiring cooks and other personnel is quite useful in the plan.

The other advantage for the nutrition improvement plan is that the Ministry of Education and the local government have launched explicit policy and standard, making for the implementation of the plan and the quality of the plan. The inspection group found that children are satisfied with the school plans.

(二) Challenges

The comprehensive nutrition plan and the subsistence allowance for boarding students per day are two policies that help to provide three nutritious meals to the boarding school students per day. The total expense is about 1 dollar per student per day, while the expense of the school lunch or snacks is about 0.5 dollar per student per day.

Graph 1 demonstrates the estimated result of school feeding programme in all the countries. China's expense in providing snacks is close to countries with similar per capita GDP. Expense on boarding primary school feeding programme is higher in China than in other countries with similar GDP levels. Graph 2 is an extension of Graph 1, which introduces the basic educational expenses as a reference standard. In low-income countries, the expense on the nutrition improvement plan is close to, equal to or higher than the basic educational expenses. The same happened in middle-and-low income countries. Statistics show that in middle-and-high income countries, the rate is between 5% and 15%. The expense for nutrition improvement plan is close to international standard, which is similar to the expense in high per capita GDP countries (countries with per capita GDP higher than 10 thousand dollars). The snack expense complies with the international standard.

Building up boarding school system can guarantee poor children's equal educational opportunities. Boarding schools are built in areas with low population density, otherwise children have to walk a long way to school (for example, on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau or in Guangxi mountainous areas). Boarding school system can help to locate the poorest and most vulnerable children and provide them with effective support. On that base, the investment in children is equal to social protection methods.

Brazil and Mexico use the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCF), which is targeted to help the most vulnerable impoverish people. CCT and school feeding programme are operating simultaneously in Brazil and Mexico, which can keep children from impoverished families, especially girls in school. The boarding school system is the only way to protect children in similar areas, and the school meals can directly benefit the children.

Prospect

Nutrition Improvement Plan works as a part of the educational policy with an aim to support and safeguard the children development. The results are heartening.

The issues above is worthy of discussion and can further improve the quality and effect of the nutrition improvement plan.

Other countries can learn from China's experience. At the same time, China exchange views with other countries and learn from others' merits. After the field trip, World Bank, the UN World Food Programme and Partnership for Children Development hope to achieve two goals with China Development Research Foundation: firstly, to cooperate with CDRF through helping poor students and children in order to reduce poverty in a strategic way; secondly, to form an international expert team to participate in the assessment and experience exchange process.