Process for Applying the FAO’s School Food and Nutrition Education Capacity Assessment Tool in the Context of COVID-19: Results from El Salvador.

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Background
Due to the nature of effective school food and nutrition education (SFNE) and the recent emphasis on it, capacities in this area are found to be lacking or need strengthening, particularly in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), hence the need for planning for systemic capacity development. FAO has developed a tool to assess capacities, strengths, and gaps for developing and implementing successful SFNE programs at national and/or subnational level.

School-based food and nutrition education Capacity needs assessment tool

Enabling Environment

Organizational Level

Individual Level

Measurable Outcome/Analysis

The tool comprises a series of guiding questions to assess individual SFNE capacities, as well as organizational capacity and the policy environment. Key variables of interest comprised policy and legal frameworks, sources of funding, signs of political commitment, organizational processes, programme-related capacities, school system, individual learning opportunities and training schemes, among others. Descriptive content analysis was carried out to synthesize the results from each dimension. Group discussion based on predefined criteria was used to prioritize capacity gaps and proposed solutions.

Results
Main capacity gaps evidenced by the application of the tool included: weak institutional coherence and coordination, exclusion of SFNE in the formal school curriculum, limited clarity regarding the financial resources exclusively allocated to SFNE, lack of opportunities to engage key school-level stakeholders in learning activities, and insufficient educational materials for all schools. Key strengths focused on the inclusion of SFNE into key policies, the widespread integration of SFNE activities within the national school feeding programme and the availability of SFNE training schemes for front-line educators. Prioritized proposed solutions centred around advocacy for the allocation of SFNE-specific government budget, leverage on existing multisector platforms to enhance institutional coherence, involve academia and professional associations to support SFNE processes, strengthen training of curriculum developers, increase the coverage of school gardens (which are currently used as a platform for SFNE), and further promote the endorsement of a proposed school food and nutrition law.

Conclusion:
The application of the tool evidenced key capacity gaps that needed to be addressed at national level and provided a clear and nationally-endorsed roadmap to enhance the impact of SFNE in El Salvador.

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