

COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT MODEL FOR STRENGTHENING THE FEEDING OUTREACH PROGRAM OF URBIZTONDO INTEGRATED SCHOOL

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Abstract

School feeding programs are widely recognized as effective interventions for addressing malnutrition and supporting learner participation; however, their long-term success depends on consistent implementation, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable community support. This action research study developed a community-based support model to strengthen the Feeding Outreach Program of Urbiztondo Integrated School. Specifically, the study assessed the program's implementation status, identified challenges encountered, and determined stakeholder needs as inputs for designing an institutionalized support framework. A descriptive–evaluative approach was employed, using a structured survey questionnaire, stakeholder consultations, and document review to gather quantitative and qualitative data from key school and community stakeholders. Quantitative findings indicated that the feeding program was generally functional in planning, implementation, and monitoring, reflecting established internal school procedures. However, stakeholder participation and sustainability were rated lower, suggesting that program continuity was vulnerable to limitations in external support. The significant challenges identified included limited funds, delayed or insufficient food supplies, inadequate facilities, and inconsistent volunteer participation, which collectively disrupted feeding schedules and increased workload among implementers. Stakeholders emphasized the need for a stable food supply, organized community involvement, improved facilities, and stronger coordination mechanisms. Based on these findings, a community-based support model was developed to formalize stakeholder roles, enhance resource mobilization, strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems, and promote shared responsibility for program sustainability. The study concludes that strengthening feeding outreach programs requires not only effective school implementation but also structured community partnerships to ensure continuity and sustained learner support.

Keywords: School Feeding Program; Community-Based Support Model; Stakeholder Participation; Program Sustainability; Action Research; Nutrition Intervention

1. Introduction

Malnutrition among school-age children remains a persistent public health and education challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where food insecurity, poverty, and unequal access to nutritious diets intersect with learning outcomes. Nutritional deprivation during childhood has been linked to impaired cognitive development, reduced attention span, poorer academic performance, and diminished long-term educational attainment (Georgieff, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). These developmental impacts are not limited to early childhood; evidence indicates that nutritional deficits that persist into the primary school years can adversely affect IQ, classroom behavior, and school achievement, thereby undermining investments in education systems and human capital development (Smith et al., 2022). In this context, school-based health and nutrition programs, particularly school feeding interventions, are increasingly recognized as a strategic mechanism not only for improving child nutrition but also for strengthening equitable access to learning.

Globally, school feeding programs have become one of the most widely implemented social protection measures supporting children's well-being. The World Food Programme (WFP) notes that school meals now reach hundreds of millions of learners worldwide, reflecting major government commitments to tackle malnutrition, improve attendance, and promote educational participation (World Food Programme, 2024). Recent global reporting indicates that 466 million children are receiving school meals through government-led programs, representing a significant increase since 2020; however, large disparities remain, particularly in low-income settings where program coverage is often limited, and sustainability constraints are more pronounced (World Food Programme, 2024). These programs are regarded as "high-return" interventions, producing benefits across health, education, and local economic development—especially when they incorporate locally sourced food supply chains and community participation (World Food Programme, 2024). Parallel global education-health literature underscores that school health and nutrition programs are among the most feasible and cost-effective ways to support learners' development, resilience, and school participation, particularly for vulnerable populations (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023).

At the same time, malnutrition increasingly presents as a double burden, with undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight, and obesity coexisting within and across communities. This phenomenon reflects complex food environments and inequitable access to healthy diets. In global monitoring, the UNICEF–WHO–World Bank Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates emphasize that child malnutrition patterns remain uneven and persistent across countries, underscoring the need for integrated, context-sensitive nutrition strategies (World Health Organization, 2025). UNICEF's recent global nutrition report highlights that food environments are increasingly failing children, contributing to inadequate nutrient intake and rising diet-related health risks (UNICEF, 2025). Such trends underscore the importance of nutrition policies that safeguard children's dietary quality, including school-based interventions that ensure reliable access to safe, balanced meals during the school day.

In the Philippines, malnutrition continues to affect a substantial portion of learners, particularly those in public elementary schools where poverty and household food insecurity remain prevalent. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) as a national intervention to address undernutrition among learners and improve educational participation. The SBFP is framed not merely as a feeding initiative but as a program intended to improve classroom attendance and school performance while enhancing the nutritional status of target beneficiaries (Department of Education [DepEd], 2018). DepEd's supplemental guidelines emphasize that the SBFP aims to increase classroom attendance, encourage consistent school participation, and support measurable improvements in learner health indicators (DepEd, 2018). In principle, this establishes SBFP as a multi-sectoral education-health initiative aligned with global evidence suggesting that nutrition inputs can influence learning outcomes and engagement.

However, despite the sound rationale and national-level policy infrastructure supporting SBFP, implementation challenges persist at the local level. These challenges often include resource limitations, logistical issues related to food procurement and preparation, variability in stakeholder participation, and constraints in sustaining operations over time. School feeding programs, particularly those operating at the community level, require coordinated participation from school personnel, parents, local government units, and community partners to maintain program continuity. Where such support systems are weak or fragmented, feeding programs may be unable to achieve intended outcomes or may become dependent on inconsistent funding streams. Global literature emphasizes that expanding the reach of school meals is insufficient unless programs are also strengthened through governance, accountability, community ownership, and consistent financing (World Food Programme, 2024). Thus, the sustainability of

school feeding programs is increasingly understood as a structural issue that depends on local partnerships and multi-stakeholder systems rather than solely on food provision.

UNICEF further underscores that school-based nutrition programs are most impactful when integrated into broader school health strategies and supported through consistent implementation, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement (UNICEF, 2023). In many developing contexts, feeding interventions are often vulnerable to operational gaps because they rely heavily on school-level execution without sufficient institutional support structures. Moreover, recent research suggests that while feeding programs can improve nutrition-related outcomes, evidence of consistent impact on broader health and well-being varies across contexts, highlighting the need for localized program strengthening and outcome evaluation (Hallett et al., 2025). This underscores the need for local studies to understand implementation constraints, viable stakeholder support systems, and models that can strengthen feeding outreach programs in specific school settings.

In school communities with high nutrition vulnerability, strengthening feeding programs requires moving beyond compliance-based implementation toward deliberate, context-specific support mechanisms. One promising approach is the development of community-based support models that formalize stakeholder roles, define partnerships, and institutionalize resource contributions. Such models may include structured involvement of parent groups, local officials, barangay health workers, private partners, and civil society, supported by clear monitoring and feedback systems. This aligns with the broader global direction of positioning school meals as an investment in child development and local food systems rather than as a short-term welfare intervention (World Food Programme, 2024). It also reflects the policy and governance principle that schools operate as community hubs, capable of mobilizing collective resources for learner welfare.

The urgency of developing sustainable support mechanisms is reinforced by evidence linking malnutrition to long-term neurodevelopmental consequences. Contemporary research indicates that nutritional deprivation is associated with measurable neurodevelopmental effects, potentially shaping cognitive and behavioral outcomes that influence educational trajectories (Georgieff, 2022). Although causality is complex and mediated by socioeconomic factors, the persistence of these associations emphasizes that school feeding programs should be viewed as protective and developmental interventions, particularly for children in disadvantaged settings (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening feeding outreach programs is not only a matter of program management but a response to a persistent educational equity issue.

In this regard, action-oriented research is valuable because it supports the development and refinement of local solutions grounded in stakeholder experiences and contextual realities. Community-based models can be systematically assessed for feasibility, acceptability, and relevance to implementation challenges. In line with this perspective, this study focuses on developing a community-based support model to strengthen the Feeding Outreach Program of Urbiztondo Integrated School. By examining program status, stakeholder needs, and implementation constraints, the study contributes to a more actionable understanding of how school feeding programs can be reinforced through localized governance and participation mechanisms.

Accordingly, the study is anchored on the premise that feeding outreach programs are more likely to succeed when communities share ownership and responsibility for implementation. This reflects both national priorities of improving learner health and international evidence that effective school meals require systems-level support and sustained stakeholder engagement (DepEd, 2018; UNICEF, 2023; World Food Programme, 2024). The proposed output—a community-based support model—seeks to provide a structured framework for strengthening collaboration, mobilizing resources, and improving the sustainability and responsiveness of school feeding initiatives.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed an action research design with a descriptive–evaluative orientation to develop and propose a community-based support model intended to strengthen the Feeding Outreach Program of Urbiztondo Integrated School. The action research approach was selected because it is appropriate for school-based contexts where the objective is not only to describe existing conditions but also to generate a practical improvement framework grounded in stakeholder realities. Action research is characterized by a systematic, reflective inquiry process that involves identifying a problem, collaboratively gathering data, analyzing constraints and needs, and formulating an actionable response or intervention. In the present study, this design supported the development of a localized support model by anchoring recommendations in quantitative and qualitative evidence from program implementers and key stakeholders.

The research design followed a problem–analysis–solution framework, consistent with the methodological logic of action research. First, the study documented the existing status and implementation conditions of the Feeding Outreach Program, including operational practices and perceived effectiveness. Second, it assessed the challenges encountered in program implementation, particularly those relating to sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and resource constraints. Third, it identified stakeholder needs and potential mechanisms for strengthening collaboration and support systems. The findings from these phases were synthesized to inform the development of a proposed community-based support model.

The design's descriptive component enabled the study to systematically capture stakeholders' perceptions of the program's status and effectiveness. In contrast, the evaluative component enabled analysis of implementation gaps, areas for improvement, and contextual factors affecting program outcomes. Quantitative data were generated through structured survey instruments, while qualitative insights were gathered through stakeholder consultation processes and document-based review of program-related records. This mixed-evidence approach enhanced the explanatory power of the findings and ensured that the proposed model reflected both measurable patterns and contextual realities of implementation.

Overall, the adopted research design was aligned with the study's purpose of strengthening the Feeding Outreach Program through the development of a community-based support framework. By integrating stakeholder perspectives, documenting implementation challenges, and translating findings into a structured support model, the action research design produced evidence-informed, context-responsive outputs suitable for program improvement at the school and community levels.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were key stakeholders directly involved in or supporting the implementation and sustainability of the Feeding Outreach Program at Urbiztondo Integrated School. Participant selection was guided by the study's action research orientation, which requires the inclusion of individuals who possess relevant experiential knowledge of the program's operations, challenges, and support needs. Accordingly, the study engaged participants representing both the internal school implementation team and the external community support system.

The study included school personnel, specifically those assigned to manage and implement the feeding program at the school level, as well as individuals with administrative and operational responsibilities related to learner welfare initiatives. These school-based participants were selected because they were expected to provide detailed insights into program planning, daily implementation processes, learner participation, resource utilization, and operational constraints encountered during program execution.

In addition, the study involved parents and community representatives, including individuals who contribute to or are expected to contribute to feeding program support through volunteer work, resource mobilization, or participation in school-community collaboration activities. These participants were included because feeding outreach initiatives depend heavily on community cooperation, particularly in meal preparation, beneficiary monitoring, and the provision of supplemental resources. Their perspectives were essential to identifying feasibility issues, barriers to sustained participation, and the types of support mechanisms most acceptable in the local context.

Moreover, the study incorporated input from other stakeholders who influence program sustainability, including representatives from local government units, barangay officials, and community partners, where applicable. These stakeholders were considered relevant because local institutions often play an important role in maintaining the continuity of school-based programs through policy endorsement, logistical support, and the mobilization of community resources.

Participants were identified using a purposive sampling approach, ensuring that respondents had direct involvement or substantive knowledge relevant to the feeding outreach program. When the total number of eligible stakeholders was manageable, total enumeration was used to capture the perspectives of all individuals in specific participant groups. This sampling strategy supported comprehensive stakeholder representation and strengthened the validity of the study's findings, particularly in informing the development of a community-based support model grounded in stakeholder needs and program realities.

All participants were informed of the study's objectives, and their participation was voluntary. Ethical procedures, including confidentiality and informed consent, were observed throughout the data collection process to protect participants and ensure the responsible use of their responses.

2.3 Instrumentation

This study used three complementary instruments to generate quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess the Feeding Outreach Program and inform the development of a community-based support model. The primary instrument was a structured survey questionnaire designed to capture stakeholder perceptions regarding the program's implementation status, effectiveness, sustainability, encountered challenges, and identified support needs. The questionnaire employed a Likert-type rating scale and was organized into sections aligned with the study's objectives, allowing the data to be summarized using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, weighted means, and rankings.

To enrich and validate the survey results, the study used a semi-structured interview and a stakeholder consultation guide. This qualitative instrument enabled the researcher to obtain deeper explanations of implementation realities, barriers to sustained participation, and feasible strategies for strengthening stakeholder collaboration. The interview and consultation process supported the study's action research orientation by facilitating reflective input from participants and generating thematic insights that guided the formulation of the proposed support model.

In addition, a document and program record review checklist was used to systematically examine relevant school-based records and program documentation, including implementation reports, beneficiary lists, and monitoring records. This record-based evidence served as a triangulation mechanism to corroborate stakeholder responses and identify operational patterns not fully captured through perception-based instruments. Content validation of the survey instrument was conducted through expert review, and triangulation across survey, interview, and document-based sources was applied to strengthen the credibility and rigor of the study's findings.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the structured survey questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize stakeholder assessments of the Feeding Outreach Program. Responses to the Likert-type scale items were tabulated and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and weighted means, allowing the study to determine the overall status of program implementation and the extent to which participants perceived challenges and support needs. Items were further ranked based on computed weighted means to identify the most salient implementation constraints and priority areas requiring support.

Qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews, stakeholder consultations, and document review were analyzed using thematic analysis. Participant responses were organized, coded, and grouped into emerging themes aligned with the study objectives, particularly those relating to sustainability barriers, stakeholder participation issues, and feasible support strategies. Findings from the qualitative analysis were used to contextualize and triangulate quantitative results, thereby strengthening interpretive validity and providing an evidence-based foundation for the proposed community-based support model.

3. Results

Baseline findings showed that the Feeding Outreach Program of Urbiztondo Integrated School was generally functioning well, particularly in planning and implementation. In planning, most respondents described the program as organized and prepared: 65% of responses fell under *Very High* and *High* combined, suggesting that schedules, goals, and preparation activities were clearly communicated to implementers and stakeholders. Implementation also received favorable ratings, with 55% rated as *Very High* or *High*, indicating that feeding activities were typically carried out as intended and aligned with routine school operations. Monitoring and evaluation practices were likewise present and functional, with 50% of responses in the top categories, indicating that tracking systems existed, though not consistently strong across all feeding cycles. Overall, these findings suggest that the program's operational backbone—planning, delivering meals, and keeping some form of monitoring—was already established and working, providing a solid foundation for program strengthening.

However, the same results showed that the program became less stable when the focus shifted from school-led operations to community-linked components. Stakeholder participation was rated lower and more uneven, with only 45% of responses in *Very High* and *High*, while 25% fell under *Low* and *Very Low*. This pattern reflects that while some parents and community members were consistently supportive, others were less involved or participated only occasionally—making participation unreliable across feeding cycles. The weakest area was sustainability, with only 40% rated *Very High* or *High*, and a notable 30% rated *Low* or *Very Low*. These figures highlight a key reality: even when a school can plan and implement well internally, feeding outreach becomes fragile when resources, volunteer support, and long-term continuity depend on unstable external participation. This baseline gap directly justified the need for a structured community-based support model to stabilize involvement and ensure resource continuity.

Respondents consistently identified a set of challenges that explained why stakeholder participation and sustainability were weaker. The most frequently observed difficulties included limited funds, inconsistent or delayed food supplies, and low volunteer turnout, which often resulted in disruptions in feeding schedules or increased burden on teachers and implementers. Challenges also included inadequate feeding materials or facilities, weak monitoring routines, and irregular feeding schedules, all of which affected the continuity and quality of program delivery. What stood out in the responses was that these challenges were not isolated problems—they were interconnected. For example, when food supplies were delayed or incomplete, feeding days became irregular; when volunteers were unavailable, teachers carried

an additional workload; and when workload increased, monitoring and documentation tended to weaken. This overall pattern shows that the sustainability of feeding outreach was limited not by the program's intent, but by operational constraints that required broader support systems beyond the school alone.

When stakeholders were asked what the program needed most, their responses were clear and practical: they wanted the feeding outreach to be more stable, better supported, and easier to sustain. The most frequently mentioned need across all stakeholder groups was a stable and adequate food supply (35 total mentions), indicating that consistent delivery of ingredients and complete feeding cycles were the foremost priority. Stakeholders emphasized that when supplies arrive late or are incomplete, learners do not receive continuous support, and the purpose of feeding is weakened. The next two strongest needs were increased community and parent volunteer support (31 mentions) and better feeding facilities and materials (25 mentions). This indicates that stakeholders recognized that even if food is available, feeding cannot run smoothly without enough workforce and functional facilities such as utensils, storage space, and clean feeding areas. In short, stakeholders were not asking for more complicated systems—they were asking for the basics to become dependable: food that arrives on time, volunteers who can be organized, and facilities that allow the program to run safely and efficiently.

After the Community-Based Support Model was developed and applied, the post-implementation evaluation indicated visible improvements in previously weak areas. Results showed that feeding cycles became more consistent, stakeholder involvement improved through clearer systems of participation, monitoring routines became more regular, and sustainability practices strengthened through organized support mechanisms. The model's structured systems—focused on stabilizing supplies, organizing volunteers, improving facilities, strengthening coordination through a support team, and institutionalizing monitoring and feedback—helped reduce the program's dependence on informal, fluctuating support. Importantly, the findings reinforced that the Feeding Outreach Program's long-term effectiveness depended not only on school effort but on a shared-responsibility partnership with community stakeholders and that institutionalizing the model was necessary to sustain gains across future feeding cycles.

4. Discussion

The results of this study show that the Feeding Outreach Program at Urbiztondo Integrated School is operationally established and capable of being implemented within the school setting, especially in planning and delivery. Respondents generally rated program planning and implementation as high, suggesting that the school has already developed routine systems for scheduling activities, preparing meals, and organizing the basic flow of feeding operations. This aligns with broader evidence that school feeding programs can be effectively implemented when schools have clear operational structures and administrative commitment (UNICEF, 2023). In practice, once the internal school system is functioning, the primary challenge tends to shift from "how to feed" to "how to sustain feeding over time," particularly when the program requires consistent resources and collaboration beyond the school workforce. This explains why the study recorded weaker outcomes in stakeholder participation and sustainability—two components that depend heavily on external support and long-term resource continuity rather than internal planning alone.

A key contribution of the findings is the clear pattern that sustainability was the most fragile aspect of implementation, and that sustainability issues were strongly linked to resource limitations and constraints on stakeholder involvement. Respondents identified limited funds, delayed or insufficient supplies, and inconsistent volunteer support as persistent barriers. These results mirror national-level observations that the Philippine School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) operates under dynamic funding conditions and often relies on partnerships to sustain

implementation capacity (U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service [USDA FAS], 2023). DepEd operational guidelines further emphasize that implementation requires coordination, transparency, and stakeholder participation—implying that sustainability is not only a resource issue but also a governance and partnership issue (Department of Education [DepEd], 2021). The current study's results support this policy framing: when stakeholder participation is inconsistent, the burden of implementation falls back to teachers and program implementers, increasing workload and weakening monitoring routines. In other words, the feeding outreach program becomes technically functional but structurally vulnerable because it lacks the stable community support and consistent resourcing needed to sustain it across cycles.

The stakeholder needs assessment provides practical guidance for strengthening the program: stakeholders primarily seek stability in the program's basic inputs—food supply, workforce support, and functional facilities. The most strongly expressed need was a stable, adequate supply of ingredients, followed by organized parent/community volunteer support and improvements to feeding facilities and materials. This is consistent with global findings that the effectiveness of school feeding is highly dependent on predictable supply chains and enabling infrastructure for food preparation, safety, and delivery (World Food Programme [WFP], 2024). UNICEF's global report on school health and nutrition similarly highlights that school feeding programs yield strong benefits when they are embedded in robust implementation systems and supported by sustained stakeholder engagement (UNICEF, 2023). These findings suggest that strengthening feeding outreach at the local level does not necessarily require entirely new interventions; rather, it requires stabilizing the program's operational backbone through structured support and shared responsibility mechanisms.

Notably, the study's post-implementation observations indicate that the Community-Based Support Model improved the weaker areas identified during baseline assessment, particularly stakeholder participation and program sustainability. While the school could already implement the feeding outreach program internally, the model appears to have improved continuity by defining stakeholder roles, clarifying participation mechanisms, and strengthening monitoring and coordination systems. This outcome reflects the widely recognized principle that school meals become more sustainable when they shift from being "school-owned" to "community-owned," supported through formalized partnerships and shared accountability structures (WFP, 2024). Such findings are especially relevant in contexts where resources are limited and program implementers cannot sustain additional workload indefinitely. The model's impact suggests that sustainability can be strengthened when participation is not treated as voluntary goodwill alone but is built into structured collaboration agreements, clear systems of contribution, and routine monitoring processes.

Finally, the findings reinforce the broader developmental importance of sustained feeding outreach. Research consistently shows that childhood malnutrition is associated with cognitive delays, reduced academic achievement, and behavioral difficulties that can affect educational trajectories (Smith et al., 2022). Although school feeding programs are not a universal solution to malnutrition, they are recognized globally as strategic investments that support child development, learning participation, and longer-term human capital outcomes (UNICEF, 2023; WFP, 2024). The present study adds local evidence supporting this broader claim: even when a school feeding program is functioning, its long-term effectiveness depends on how well it is supported, sustained, and reinforced by community systems. The proposed Community-Based Support Model offers a feasible, context-specific approach to addressing the sustainability gap by formalizing stakeholder participation, stabilizing resources, and strengthening program monitoring. In doing so, it contributes to the operational strengthening of SBFP-aligned initiatives and provides a replicable framework that other schools facing similar sustainability constraints may adapt.

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