

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: LET'S GET OUR CHILDREN FED

It is about time the Department of Education prioritised systems that ensure children from impoverished communities receive nutritious meals through a more reliable and accountable structure. The current decentralised system for the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) has failed repeatedly.

In the Eastern Cape, the food supplying scheme is broken and some of the school nutrition programmes have consistently failed to deliver meals. In 2018 a report on Limpopo revealed that over 4,800 pupils from 23 different schools were not receiving food at school for months at a time due to mismanagement. These persistent issues highlight the urgent need for a centralised system to ensure no child goes hungry—a model already proven effective in other government tender procurement processes.

Under a centralised system, the Department of Basic Education would directly manage procurement and distribution, eliminating the inconsistencies caused by regional suppliers and sub-contractors. Centralisation would also enhance accountability, ensuring that each meal reaches the intended child, and provide better oversight to prevent logistical breakdowns. Involving the Auditor-General to monitor these processes would further ensure transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption or failure.

Countries like Brazil and India have demonstrated the success of centralised school feeding programmes. Brazil's national programme serves over 40 million children daily, while India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme feeds over 100 million. Both programmes ensure consistency, quality, and transparency—which is sorely lacking in South Africa's approach.

Our children deserve better. By centralising the NSNP, the government can ensure that every learner in the programme receives the nutrition they need to focus on their education and build a better future.

This issue is not just about logistics; it's about our responsibility to the future generation. It is crucial that we act now.

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