



BigPicnic policy brief 4: Education and food security

BIGPICNIC TOPIC



EDUCATION AND
FOOD SECURITY

FOOD 2030 PRIORITIES



NUTRITION

SDGs



United Nations Sustainable
Development Goals

Recommendations

Overall: Food and food security, should be topics embedded throughout the formal and informal learning systems.

- Provide consistent, accurate and accessible information and teaching / instruction from the earliest age possible about food, food products and processes.
- Include both cookery and growing food plants (using school gardens) in the national curriculum.
- Support projects that provide knowledge exchange for stakeholder groups, education staff and relevant audiences on food and food security topics that include the environmental and biological as well as the social and cultural dimensions.
- Draw on a variety of local expertise to implement situational cues that encourage healthy and culturally relevant food habits in places where food is available. These could include cues provided on packages, the availability of different types of food, and food pricing.
- Link healthy eating campaigns to sustainable production and consumption campaigns.

Background

It is increasingly important to both understand the concept of and adopt behaviours to improve food security locally, regionally, nationally and globally. People from different communities have a different relationship to food and food security/insecurity depending on their socio-economic and cultural background. Yet this topic with its environmental, biological,

social (including social justice) and cultural dimensions are rarely dealt with in any meaningful way within our education systems. Thus embedding and updating the concept and value of food security, at all levels and for all age groups requires a lifelong learning approach. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for organisations across formal and informal learning settings.

Both the formal and informal education sector are key to embedding the concepts and value of food security, not only for young children but up to and including those in tertiary education and throughout the wider community. Content knowledge is not enough, learning provision also has to embrace experiential learning to embed the concepts and values of food security. Botanic gardens have a key role as sites for advancing food-related conservation and food security within both their education and research work. They can capitalize on existing public engagement activities and connect to grassroots movements to jointly deliver more inclusive public engagement and education. In tandem with the formal education sector, informal learning settings such as botanic gardens, heritage organisations and museums have the opportunity to embed this topic with a broad range of audiences and communities.

Findings

Audiences identified the provision of food education as very important. In addition, the collected data also indicated that people value not only the raising of awareness about food related issues but also supporting behaviour change.

Points that were raised included understanding how to access information about food, the importance of food labels, the acquisition of food skills (i.e. how to grow, prepare, cook and handle food), knowing more about where food comes from and what constitutes a balanced diet. Awareness of the negative impact of obesity, eating disorders and the need for a healthy diet featured strongly in the empirical evidence collected. At the same time, people felt that information offered by the media and public authorities was not trustworthy, making it increasingly difficult to make informed choices. Co-created actions related to sustainability, culturally appropriate foods and their availability, and the promotion of these ideas were valued because they shape the necessary information provision for different communities.

Conclusion

Education is key to societal change and education with regards to food security requires an approach which is emotionally and culturally relevant. In addition, knowledge provision should have an actionable approach to ensure autonomy in making informed food choices. Embedding the concept and values of food security also requires a lifelong learning approach that is knowledge based, situated in authentic contexts and experiential, and takes into account social and cultural differences. Cues, which take the local social context into consideration, situated in the environment could be used as a mechanism to raise awareness, to re-define people's relationship with food and to encourage changes in behaviour related to food choices.

The formal education system needs to develop a broader and deeper curriculum focus on topics related to food security. Informal education institutions, such as botanic gardens and museums, have the potential to become a trustworthy platform for supporting sustainable food choices with a wide range of audiences.



Bergamo Botanic Garden photo archive

Quotes

“But nevertheless we start with the children now and we do not even reach all - and what do you do with those who are no longer in school, that's the larger share, the more money-bearing share and I find that extremely difficult to convey.”

Participant in Vienna, Austria

“...visiting the Botanical Garden and seeing the pear labelled as strange food, it was a bit weird...this is part of the things that remind me about my childhood and one of my favourite food memories.”

Participant in Meise, Belgium

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