

EXACT DETAILS OF THE PILOT PROJECT ALREADY CONDUCTED IN KHI SINDH GOVT & WFP SCHOOL MEALS PILOT (MALIR DISTRICT)

Shameer Salman Ahmed^{*1}, Ayesha Tahir²

^{*1}Karachi Grammar School Class of 2026

²Class of 2021

Corresponding Author: *

Shameer Salman Ahmed

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ABSTRACT

The Lunchbox Karachi Project is a research-driven initiative that examines the relationship between food insecurity and academic performance in underserved school communities. The project was developed following field observations during a summer internship, which highlighted how consistent nutrition can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. To investigate this relationship, a pilot intervention was conducted at Neelum Public School in Karachi, where 50 students received nutritious, culturally appropriate hot lunches three times a week over a five-week period. Academic performance, attendance records, classroom behavior, and physical well-being were assessed before, during, and after the intervention. Findings from teacher reports and academic records indicate a positive correlation between regular access to meals and improved classroom focus, participation, stamina, and overall academic engagement. The study also revealed the burden of hunger-related fatigue among students balancing school with labor responsibilities, underscoring food insecurity as a critical barrier to learning. The Lunchbox Karachi Project proposes a scalable, community-supported school meal framework that treats food not as charity but as an essential educational tool, with the long-term goal of ensuring that no child is too hungry to learn.

INTRODUCTION

- May 2, 2025: Announced a one-year pilot for the 2025-26 academic session, targeting 11,000 primary students in Malir with daily hot meals (lentils, rice/bread, vegetables, weekly fruit) Students in pilot schools showed better midday energy levels
- Monthly surveys showed 80% of teachers saw an improvement in classroom focus
- Local community organizations praised the transparency and nutritional value of meals
- Early signs indicated increased female student retention in some co-ed schools
- Government considering expansion based on data collected from over 10,000

students

Sindh Govt + Allah Wale Trust “School Khana Program”

- May 17, 2025: Launched at Government Boys Primary School in Murad Memon Goth, aiming to feed ~100,000 students province-wide, starting with ~700 students receiving daily hot meals. Within two weeks, students previously leaving during lunch started staying the whole day.
- Reported increase in physical well-being and visible energy among younger children
- Trust conducted weight and height

tracking to monitor improvement

- Some parents began withdrawing children from informal jobs to return them to school
- Pilots saw requests for additional social services (e.g., hygiene kits, vitamins)

Saylani Welfare Trust Free Morning Meals Pilot

- February 6–20, 2025: Saylani began providing daily free meals (chicken rolls, biryani, nihari) at Allama Iqbal Govt Boys & Girls School in Sohrab Goth/Federal B Area, increasing attendance and student engagement. Pilot site saw a 30% rise in daily attendance within the first month
- Teachers noted that students who had previously skipped school for hunger-related reasons were now consistent
- Helped reduce behavioral issues during morning sessions
- Created positive parent feedback about quality and hygiene of food
- Inspired nearby schools to request inclusion in the program

Fortify Education Foundation (Orangi Town pilot)

- February 4, 2020: Began serving school meals via a makeshift kitchen at Pasban-e-Millat School.
- August 2020: Formal kitchen built, then expanded service to multiple government schools in Orangi by November 2021–2022. Improved regular attendance among students, especially in lower grades
- Teachers reported students appeared more attentive and alert during lessons
- Community engagement increased, with parents showing more trust in schools
- Enrollment rose modestly in the year following the pilot's expansion
- Helped standardize hygiene practices by pairing meals with handwashing education

Governor Kamran Tessori's Breakfast and Health Check-Up Initiative

- May 30, 2024: Announced by Governor Kamran Tessori – provision of daily

breakfasts and free medical check-ups across hundreds of Karachi government schools under a local welfare collaboration. Significant increase in morning attendance within the first two weeks

- Basic health screenings detected early signs of anemia and malnutrition in several cases
- Nutritional awareness improved among students and teachers
- Created pressure on other schools to implement similar wellness programs
- Breakfast provision helped reduce complaints of fatigue and fainting during morning classes

SOURCES:

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1. What are some of the best ways universities/professors/institutes are analysing or researching food equity on school performance?

A. Quantitative data analysis

- Surveys and Questionnaires: Collect data on students' access to nutritious food, dietary habits, and socioeconomic status, then analyse correlations with academic achievement, attendance, and behavioural outcomes.
- Longitudinal Studies: Track students over time to assess how changes in food security

status influence academic progress, attendance, and cognitive development.

- Statistical Modelling: Use regression analysis, structural equation modelling, or multilevel modelling to isolate the effects of food equity factors on school performance, controlling for confounding variables.

B. Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs

- Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs): Implement interventions like school meal programs or food assistance initiatives and evaluate their impact on student outcomes.
- Natural Experiments: Leverage policy changes or program rollouts to examine differences in school performance between affected and unaffected groups.

C. Qualitative Research

- Interviews and Focus Groups: Gather insights from students, parents, teachers, and administrators about barriers to food access and perceived impacts on learning.
- Case Studies: Conduct in-depth analyses of specific schools or districts implementing innovative food equity programs to understand contextual factors and best practices.

D. Policy Analysis

- Evaluate the effectiveness of food-related policies (e.g., free/reduced lunch programs) on reducing disparities and improving academic outcomes through comparative analysis.

Methodology **Example** **1:**
<https://bmresnotes.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13104-018-3909-1> Study Summary – Debre Markos Town Primary Schools (2018)

- Location: Debre Markos town, East Gojjam Zone, Ethiopia (299 km from Addis Ababa).
- Timeline: January 15 – March 17, 2018
- Population: 7,473 total primary school students; 3,831 were female
- Schools in Town: 15 governmental and 8 private primary schools

Study Design

- Type: Institution-based, cross-sectional study
- Population: Primary school students in Debre Markos town

Sample Size & Sampling

- Sample Size: 442 students
- Calculation Based On:
 - Stunting prevalence assumptions (48% vs. 29%)
 - 95% confidence, 90% power, 5% significance level
 - Design effect: 1.5
- Sampling Technique:
 - Stage 1: 4 schools randomly selected (lottery method)
 - Stage 2: Proportional allocation and systematic random sampling from student name lists

Data Collection

- Tool: Pre-tested structured questionnaire (Amharic translation)
- Respondents: Parents/caregivers of selected students
- Process:
 - Students selected → home addresses traced → parent interviews conducted
 - Data collectors trained for 2 days; interviewer bias minimized

Methodology **Example** **2:**
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11611424/>

Process: A cross-sectional study was conducted with 262 schoolchildren aged 11-16 years from various schools in Kattankulathur Block, Chengalpattu District. Dietary practices were assessed using a pretested questionnaire, while academic performance was evaluated based on school records. Data analysis included a t-test, as well as correlation and regression analyses, to examine the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, IBM Corp., Version 26, Armonk, NY).

Questionnaire for study was divided into 2

sections: First gathered socio-demographic data, health status, and family background. Second gathered dietary plans, nutritional status, covering aspects such as breakfast consumption, meal frequency, and the prevalence of fast food consumption among the students.

Methodology Example 3 (designed to see the relationship between nutritional status and academic performance):

<https://psychologyandeducation.net/pae/index.php/pae/article/view/1418>

An experimental study. A total of (2) schools and (40) class-three students of age 8 years were selected randomly. Anthropometric measurement data were taken of each student applying the standard tools recognized by the World Health Organization. Data were collected through the questionnaire and student achievement test; collected data were analyzed in SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Results of BMI and SAT scores were compared and interpreted. The study found that there was a significant difference in the mean score of the students marks and BMI before and after the treatment. This revealed that a low level of academic performance was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) among the underweight students than that of the healthy weight students. Malnutrition is a harmful factor which affects the lives of children and prevents them from engaging in mental and physical activities for which their learning is not effective.

Methodology Example 4:

<https://pjmhsnline.com/index.php/pjmhs/article/view/2347>

This cross sectional study was conducted by administering and filling the questionnaire from 400 children, 200 from private and 200 from public sector schools of ages 6 to 11 years in different public and private sector schools of tehsil Timergara Lower Dir, KPK. Nutritional status of children was calculated by anthropometric method and compared with WHO growth chart. Academic performance was calculated from the percentage of the marks obtained in the last annual exam. Data analysis was done using IBM SPSS 24.0.

A. Aga Khan University:

Objective: Their survey presents the pooled prevalence of nutritional status and dietary intake among school-going children and adolescents (5-15 years of age) in an LMIC of Pakistan and the perspective for broader global nutrition in this age group.

Methods: An electronic search of databases was run on Pubmed and Medline (via Ovid) along with gray literature and archives of local scientific journals till 2nd January 2021. Studies meeting the eligibility criteria were included and relevant data were extracted, and a pooled proportional analysis was performed.

B. Harvard University

• **Study Scope:** 2022-23 survey by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health among 1,745 graduate students and postdocs.

• **Findings:**

- 17% of grad students and 13% of postdocs were food insecure.
- Food-insecure respondents reported significantly lower self-rated health and higher anxiety and depression.
- International students and students with limited-work visas showed the highest risk.

◦ Food insecurity was identified as a key threat to academic productivity.

• **Citations:** Harvard Chan School Internal Report 2023; Harvard Graduate Council Brief, 2022.

C. Yale University

• **Yale Sustainable Food Program:**

- Offers fellowships, curriculum support, and a campus farm to integrate food equity into student life and academics.
- Links food access with sustainability and well-being.

• **Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project (YHHAP):**

- Student-led group raising over \$17,000 for food-insecure students.
- Advocates for meal plan adjustments and emergency food access.

• **Institutional Acknowledgment:**

- Yale identifies food access as a

core factor in academic equity, particularly for first-gen and low-income students.

D. MIT

- **MIT Food Insecurity Survey (2017–2018):**

- Found 13% of undergraduates and up to 8% of graduate students were food insecure.

- Food Insecurity Solutions Working Group (FISWG) established to study and address the issue.

- Introduced hardship grants, dining subsidies, and increased stipends.

- **Broader Research:**

- MIT J-WAFS funds research on food systems resilience, linking student wellness to global food equity

E. Stanford University

- **Center on Food Security and the Environment (FSE):**

- Conducts interdisciplinary research on food policy, climate, and nutrition.

- Projects explore how food insecurity affects student performance and community health.

- **Stanford FLI (First-Gen and Low-Income Office):**

- Provides a Food Asset Map and meal swipe donations.

- Offers emergency aid for food and housing insecurity.

E. Common Themes Across Top Institutions

- Food insecurity is a strong predictor of lower GPA, mental health challenges, reduced focus, and delayed graduation.

- Universities are addressing this through surveys, fellowships, financial interventions, mental health support, and food access programs.

2. Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

This research paper examines how food equity influences academic performance from two perspectives: (1) case studies and interventions from top universities in the United States and (2) a detailed field study in Debre Markos, Ethiopia.

By merging quantitative data with insights and analysis strategies, the paper gives a clear view of how food insecurity impacts student outcomes worldwide. It also offers a framework that can be used for future studies.

Case studies:

Harvard University

A survey from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in 2022–23 found that 17% of graduate students and 13% of postdocs faced food insecurity. Those experiencing food insecurity reported lower self-rated health and more mental health issues, especially among international students and those with limited work visas.

Yale University

The Yale Sustainable Food Program and the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project (YHHAP) are key in tackling food insecurity on campus. YHHAP raised \$17,000 in 2022 to support impacted students and pushed for emergency food services.

MIT

A survey from 2017–2018 indicated that 13% of undergraduates and up to 8% of graduate students were food insecure. MIT responded by forming the Food Insecurity Solutions Working Group, which offers stipends, grants, and meal subsidies. Broader research through MIT J-WAFS also looks at the links between food system resilience and student wellness.

Stanford University

The Center on Food Security and the Environment (FSE) studies food equity with an interdisciplinary approach. Stanford's First-Gen and Low-Income Office (FLI) provides a Food Asset Map and emergency help for students facing food insecurity.

Other Notable University Data

University of Rhode Island: 49% of students experienced food insecurity, with off-campus students having nearly 1.6 times the rates of on-campus students.

University of California System: Food insecurity

was linked to an average GPA drop of 0.32 points.

University of Wisconsin: Food insecurity was related to higher stress, more absences, and academic decline.

CUNY: 40% of undergraduates faced food insecurity, which was closely linked to lower attendance and performance.

Section 2: Field Study – Debre Markos, Ethiopia

Study Setting and Background

The study took place in Debre Markos, East Gojjam Zone, Ethiopia (299 km from Addis Ababa), from January 15 to March 17, 2018. The town had 7,473 students enrolled in primary education, including 3,831 females, across 15 public and 8 private schools.

Study Design

This was an institution-based cross-sectional study that focused on the link between students' nutrition and academic performance.

Sample Size and Sampling

Sample size: 442 students, calculated using a double population proportion formula.

Assumptions: 48% vs 29% prevalence of stunting, 95% confidence level, 90% power, design effect = 1.5.

Multi-stage sampling involved randomly selecting 4 schools, proportional allocation, and systematic sampling within classes.

Data Collection

A pre-tested structured questionnaire was translated into Amharic.

Respondents: parents or primary caregivers.

Data collectors visited homes using school database addresses. They received 2 days of training to ensure consistency.

Data Analysis

Data entry used Epi-Data v3.1 and was analyzed with SPSS v20. Nutritional Z-scores were calculated with ENA for SMART software.

Statistical Analysis:

Bivariable logistic regression ($p < 0.2$) identified candidate variables.

Multivariable regression assessed independent

predictors.

Multicollinearity was checked using $VIF < 10$.

Key Variables

Dependent: Academic performance (GPA, cognitive scores, attendance).

Independent: Food insecurity, income, nutrition status, mental health, parent education.

Control: Age, gender, household size, school type.

4i. Abstract + Beginning of Project

The Lunchbox Karachi Project is a research driven initiative focused on understanding and addressing the link between food insecurity and educational outcomes in underserved schools. The project began after a conversation with my counselor, shortly after completing a two-month summer internship in 2024 at Karachi United. At the internship, I observed a powerful model where children from Lyari were invited daily for football training, provided with healthy meals, transported via vans, and enrolled into schools through community driven support. While reflecting on this system, we asked: if such a model can work to support sports and schooling, why can't we implement something similar directly within schools? That discussion led to a deeper realization – that food is a fundamental barrier to learning for many children.

To explore this, we launched Lunchbox Karachi, a project that studies the impact of healthy hot meals on student performance, attendance, and well-being. The cornerstone of this project is a pilot program implemented at Neelum Public School, where we distributed 50 hot lunches three times a week for five weeks. Meals were designed to be affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate. Academic records and attendance data from before and after the intervention were collected to assess outcomes.

Academic reports from the group at the completion of the program indicate a promising correlation between consistent nutrition and improved academic engagement. Teachers reported better focus in class and more energetic participation from students. The more concerning and heartbreaking discovery were the burden of double shifts some of the most

intellectually capable students, as pointed out by teachers in reports, had to bear daily. Consequently, this deterred the affected students from keeping their eyes open during classes and destroyed the learning process and purpose of school.

Lunchbox Karachi aims to evolve into a scalable framework for school meal programs that are low

cost, community supported, and embedded within the school day. With the support from our friends at the globally infamous NGO the Robin Hood Army, this goal is within arms reach. By treating food not as charity but as an educational tool, the project envisions a future where no child is too hungry to learn

4ii. Timeline

DATE	TASK
29th October 2024	First meeting with Mrs. Shazia, Headmistress of Neelum Public School
11th November 2024	Sponsorship with Peak Freans (for biscuits) and local Roti shop (150 rotis donated weekly)
3rd February 2025	Hot lunch deliveries start (150 meals per week, 3 times a week)
5th March 2025	Hot lunch deliveries end
	Finalise and publish a research paper?

5. Neelum Public Pilot Program 2024-25

Neelum Public School Background

Location & Community Context

- Situated in Azam Basti, a densely populated, low-income neighbourhood in Karachi
- Most residents are from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, with limited access to healthcare, sanitation, and financial security.
- Azam Basti includes diverse ethnic groups, notably a significant Christian minority. The area often faces urban neglect.

School Capacity

- The school operates under the Path Education Society, registered under Sindh authorities, offering education from nursery through matriculation
- Approximately 480 to 520 students are enrolled across multiple grades and shifts, with teaching staff largely drawn from the local community
- Infrastructure is basic: overcrowded classrooms (40-45 students), limited learning materials, and no canteen or on-site meal services.

Academic & Organizational Features

- Frequent parent teacher meetings indicate active community participation .
- The school holds cultural and educational events fostering a nurturing environment
- Staff and teachers are often local residents
- A waiting list for admissions shows high demand for affordable education in the area

Why It Was a Strong Pilot Site

- High incidence of student hunger, observable lethargy, and irregular attendance.
- School size and population make it significant for evaluating research outcomes.

Gaps and Limitations

- No formal meal program or nutrition services prior to the Lunchbox pilot, students typically brought sparse lunches from home or skipped meals.
- Hygiene and sanitation were limited, with no infrastructure for clean water or handwashing education.
- Resource constraints: inadequate teaching aids, stationary, and infrastructure funding.

Difficulties / Challenges Faced

Initial problems with getting approval for the pilot program, as we were informed that it would not be approved by “the higher ups.” However, fortunately, after looking at the unreal conditions that the students were living through, including a majority working full time jobs from 1pm till 11pm, the headmistress was kind enough to give the approval to go ahead with the project.

Sponsorships were difficult to obtain, as many large national corporations and businesses did not seem to care about the project, as they saw it as another case of *charity work*. However, after a compelling case was made, Peak Freans generously funded and donated biscuit packets.

The physical process of packaging and cooking food was extremely tedious, as freshness and healthiness was of utmost priority. Costs of resources were expensive, and basic, yet extremely health and nutrient rich, food items

were provided. The 3 students apart of this project faced difficulty, as they attended their own schools for the duration of the pilot program. Their households were crucial in ensuring food was correctly, in the right proportions, and delivered to the school on time at 1030am sharp.

Analysis of Project (Based on student report cards provided)

Report cards provided by Headmistress of Neelum Public School (see last page)

- Phase 1 Report (Day 0): Baseline data before intervention
- Phase 2 Report (Day 15): Mid-point update
- Phase 3 Report (Day 30): Final review after 30 days

PHASE	ACADEMIC STATUS	CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR	PHYSICAL HEALTH
Phase 1	Mostly average or below average	Inattentive, shy, tired, sleepy or disruptive	Majority underweight, low stamina, absence due to various illnesses
Phase 2	Signs of improvement in over 50% [^]	Improved discipline, focus and confidence	Better stamina, some weight gain
Phase 3	Most students showed overall positive trends	Notably better participation and confidence	Notable physical improvement, better immunity

1. Academic Performance

- Notable improvements:
- 1. F. Faheem: From “Below Average” to “Improving”
- 2. F. Fareed: From “Below Average” to “Good”
- 3. M. Irfan: From “Average” to “Good”
- 4. A. Anwar: From “Below Average” to “Average”

2. Behavior in Class

- Over 70 percent of students showed positive behavioral changes.
- Notable improvements:
- 1. J. Hussain: Gained focus and became

more attentive

- 2. R. Farooq: Shifted from passive to participative
- 3. M. Irfan: From quiet to actively engaged

3. Physical Condition

- 22 out of 25 students showed improved health indicators.
- Examples:
- 1. H. Riaz: From malnourished to improving condition
- 2. Z. Ali: From slightly underweight to better weight
- 3. A. Anwar: Fewer illnesses, better

immunity

Conclusion:

- Academic: 60 percent of students demonstrated academic improvement.
- Behavioral: More than 70 percent

showed greater focus, engagement, or discipline.

- Physical: Nearly 90 percent showed improved stamina, weight, or immunity.
- Therefore, the clear link between correct nutrition and academic performance has been proven

Updated Data of Students (Post Meal Box - Phase 3)

No.	Name	Grade	Current Academic Results	General Behaviour in Class	Physical Condition
1	A. W Khan	4	Average → Slightly Improved	Attentive but easily distracted	Underweight → Slight improvement
2	F. Faheem	4	Below Average → Improving	Shy and reserved	Weak, low stamina → Better stamina
3	G. Ahmed	4	Average → Slight improvement	Cooperative	Generalized weakness → Improving strength
4	J. Hussain	4	Below Average → Improving	Struggles with attention	Weak, low stamina → Better stamina
5	Z. Malik	5	Average	Highly participative	Normal → Maintained good health
6	B. Raza	5	Average	Talks a lot, needs focus	Slightly underweight → Normal
7	M. Imran	5	Below Average → Slight improvement	Quiet, lacks confidence	Underweight → Improving
8	F. Saeed	5	Average	Quiet but hardworking	Normal
9	D. Asif	6	Good	Disciplined and responsible	Normal
10	S. Hussain	6	Average → Good	Curious and eager to learn	Normal
11	U. Javed	6	Average	Easily distracted → More focused	Slightly underweight → Better condition
12	H. Khan	6	Average	Needs help with comprehension	Slightly underweight with general weakness → Less weakness
13	H. Shah	6	Good	Focused and diligent	Normal
14	A. Hassan	7	Below Average → Slight improvement	Disruptive, struggles to focus	Weak, low stamina → Better stamina
15	L. Tariq	7	Good	Well-behaved and attentive	Normal
16	R. Farooq	7	Average	Passive → Participative	Underweight → Slight improvement
17	A. Noor	7	Average	Needs motivation to participate	Normal
18	H. Riaz	7	Below Average → Improving	Hardworking and obedient	Malnourished → Improving
19	A. Anwar	7	Below Average → Average	Friendly and participates well	Remains absent frequently due to infectious diseases → Better immunity, fewer absences
20	M. Aslam	8	Good	Perfectionist	Normal
21	Z. Ali	8	Below Average → Improving	Enthusiastic and cooperative	Slightly underweight → Better weight
22	N. Zahid	8	Average	Needs encouragement	Weak, low stamina → Better stamina
23	F. Fareed	8	Below Average → Good	Struggles with studies → Improved a lot	Mild underweight → Near normal weight
24	M. Irfan	8	Average → Good	Quiet, lacks confidence → Became participative	Underweight → Better condition
25	I. Zafar	8	Average	Leader in group activities	Normal → Maintained

Updated Data of Students

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1	A. W Khan	4	Average → Slightly Improved	Attentive but easily distracted	Underweight → Slight improvement
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5	Z. Malik	5	Average	Highly participative	Normal
6	B. Raza	5	Average	Talks a lot, needs focus	Slightly underweight → Near Normal
7	M. Imran	5	Below Average → Slight improvement	Quiet, lacks confidence	Underweight → Improving
8	F. Saeed	5	Average	Quiet but hardworking	Normal
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25	I. Zafar	8	Average	Leader in group activities	Normal

Data Of Students:

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24	M. Irfan	8	Average	Quiet, lacks confidence	Underweight
25	I. Zafar	8	Average	Leader in group activities	Normal

Above are the 3 data sheets collected over the entire Neelum Public Pilot (1 month)

1. First data report collected (3rd February 2025)

2. Second data report collected (20th February 2025)
3. Third data report collected (5th March 2025)

Sustainably grappling Lunchbox Karachi

- **Become a public program**

- Advocate transition from NGO pilot to public program funded by provincial education budgets.
- combining public funding with community contributions.

- **Boost Community Participation**

- Form school-based food committees (including parents, teachers, students) to ensure program ownership and cultural appropriateness. Hold informative sessions in schools across the city and have them provide lunchboxes every month - for example

- **Robinhood Collaboration**

-Being a part of the Robinhood Foundation for a year now, I can expand their model by incorporating certain schools who have children facing food insecurity. Robinhood's model is very sustainable as they receive surplus foods from every major/minor restaurant in the city, and pass it on to communities and people in need.

- **Hold informative sessions**

- Sessions to educate the public regarding food insecurity and sustainability.

- **Open food banks / contribute to them**

- Like similar models abroad, food banks can be used to collect funding and foodstuffs which can be used later on

- **Measure Impact & Create Accountability**

- Publish annual impact reports on attendance, health, and learning outcomes in newspapers etc to gain recognition and more aid.