

The 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum: *An Undergraduate Perspective*

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Attending the 2024 Global Child Nutrition Forum in Osaka, Japan was an incredibly rewarding experience that I will cherish for years to come. I strengthened my communication skills, made impactful connections, and experienced being in a foreign country for the first time. Most importantly, I learned so much about school feeding programs (SFP) and their crucial role in global health. I am grateful to the Alice Wimpfheimer International Nutrition Fund for providing me with this experience, alongside Judy Beto and Barb Benson from AWIN (pictured right) for their mentorship.



“Artistic and technological endeavors do not flourish in a country where people have to fight for food.”

Douglas Syakalima, Minister of Education, Republic of Zambia

The forum, hosted by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF), featured several speaker and panel discussions on a vast array of topics within SFPs. We learned about Shokuiku, Japan’s food education, and the role of private sector involvement in SFPs. Betty Kibaara, Director of the Food Initiative at the The Rockefeller Foundation, shared how SFPs transform the “three M’s” of communities; meals, market, and mindset. Dignitaries from countries around the world shared their countries’ SFP approaches and priorities, such as Burkina Faso’s focus on building resilience in the face of crisis, Brazil’s use of indigenous agriculture to cultivate climate resilient crops, and São Tomé and Príncipe’s taxation to fund sustainable SFPs. We also heard from professionals regarding the biggest challenges and opportunities, within governmental and private sectors, to building effective and long-lasting programs. I am excited to transform this knowledge into action, using it to inform the steps my peers and I take in support of global health.

The diversity of the forum attendees really inspired me. During workshops, I was privileged to collaborate with SFP directors, policy researchers, dignitaries, non-profit founders, teachers, RDNs, and many more. As an undergraduate, I first believed that I did not bring any contribution of value to these conversations, but I was quickly urged by my colleagues to participate and share my experience. Together, we participated in exercises such as integrating “climate-smart strategies” into food system reform and using empathy-mapping to design student-led programs (pictured left). On the first day, Heidi Kessler, Deputy Director of GCNF, stressed that “we are all VIPs,” highlighting the important role each of us have in improving global child nutrition and the unique,





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inherent value of each of our perspectives. I truly felt that my presence was not only welcomed, but embraced, as I was consistently encouraged to contribute in many ways throughout the forum.

I particularly enjoyed hearing from new organizations each with their unique contributions to global child nutrition. For example, the Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger developed a “2030 sprint,” in which 12+ countries aligned to present early priorities in child nutrition. The Fortified Whole Grain Alliance is paving the way in biofortified rice production, presenting a culturally-tailored and nutritionally powerful innovation. My most

**“Nutrition is
not acquired, it
is learned.”**

Kei Kuriwaki, Representative Director,
International Child Nutrition Japan



cherished highlight of the forum was the school site visit on the last day. I visited Hirakata Shiritsu Isoshima Elementary School, about 40 minutes outside of Osaka. The students proudly displayed their English-speaking skills while teaching us about typical school meals (pictured left) they receive. To our surprise, we learned how part of Shokuiku is civil duty and the importance of labor, so each student played a role in food preparation, serving meals to their classmates, and cleaning up after.

The students were also taught about each component of the meal from agricultural, cultural, and nutritional perspectives. Additionally, the ecstatic smiles and joyous laughter of the children left a lasting imprint on my heart.

I am incredibly grateful for Alice Wimpfheimer International Nutrition for providing me with this incredible opportunity. I sincerely thank Judy Beto and Barb Benson for their unwavering support and



guidance throughout the forum. I am so lucky to have been in the presence of two incredibly powerful women who have made waves of impact throughout their careers. I cherish the advice (and amazing stories) they shared with me. I would also like to thank the Global Child Nutrition Forum and every professional who made the forum possible. I am leaving this experience and entering my next semester saturated with inspiration, newfound connections, and inspiration to contribute to global child nutrition in my own unique way. Looking forward, I excitedly bring this knowledge and ideas back to Cornell’s Division of Nutritional Sciences and into my future career in nutrition.