



## WEBINAR SERIES ON THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN: INSIGHTS FROM CURRENT RESEARCH ON CHILD NUTRITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Food Evolution Research Laboratory (FERL) at the University of Johannesburg, in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Tiger Brands Foundation (TBF), and the Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA), has initiated a four-part webinar series aimed at strengthening the health and well-being of South African children. The series places a spotlight on research and practice in the school food environment — an area of critical importance given the persistent burden of malnutrition and food insecurity among children in the country.

The first webinar in the series, titled “Research on the Nutrition Status of Children in South Africa”, took place on 22 May 2025 and featured a series of data-driven presentations reflecting nutritional challenges and opportunities across different provinces. The session was well attended by government officials, nutrition professionals, academic researchers, and stakeholders from non-governmental organisations and the food industry.

### Background: The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)

South Africa’s National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), established in 1994, provides meals to over 9 million learners daily, primarily targeting quintile 1 to 3 schools. Its goal is not only to alleviate short-term hunger but also to improve learner attendance, classroom concentration, and educational outcomes. The NSNP plays a pivotal role in supporting children from food-insecure households. The research will assist the Department to have evidence-based reports on impact as well as identify gaps within the sector.

This webinar series is timely and important as it creates a platform for translating current research into actionable strategies to inform the strengthening of the NSNP and other school-based nutrition interventions.



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**20 YEARS**  
2005-2025

**Our Future. Reimagined.**

### INVITATION TO A WEBINAR SERIES ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

*First webinar titled: Research on the Nutrition Status  
of Children in South Africa*

DATE • 22 May 2025 | TIME • 10:30 to 13:00

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**FERL/NSSA/DBE and TBF:**

**Webinar series on the nutrition status of learners**

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR **Ms Carina Müller**, Chief Education Specialist, National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), Department of Basic Education

OPENING REMARKS **Dr Granville Whittle**, Deputy Director-General, Department of Basic Education  
**Ms Mary-Jane Morifi**, TBF Trustee and Chief Corporate Affairs & Sustainability Officer, Tiger Brands Ltd.



**Speaker 1**  
**Prof Salome Kruger**

**Presentation Topic:** The nutritional status of primary school age children in the North West Province.  
**Designation:** Professor of the Centre of Excellence for Nutrition in North West University at Potchefstroom campus.



**Speaker 2**  
**Ms Angelique Carson-Porter**

**Presentation Topic:** Household Dietary Diversity and Nutritional status of the Pre-School Children in Peri-urban and Rural in Free State, South Africa.  
**Designation:** Lecturer at Free State University.



**Speaker 3**  
**Dr Eridiong Onyenweaku**

**Presentation Topic:** The Effect of in-school breakfast programme on the nutritional status of learners in Mpumalanga: A Baseline Study.  
**Designation:** Senior postdoctoral research fellow: FERL.



**Speaker 4**  
**Ms Helen Donkin**

**Presentation Topic:** Growth Monitoring in Early Childhood Development Centres: Using Simple Tools to Track and Respond to Malnutrition in the Eastern Cape.  
**Designation:** Nutrition Programme Lead: Zero2Five.





## NSSA NEWSBITS – JUNE

### Programme Overview

The session was chaired by Ms Carina Müller, Chief Education Specialist at the DBE's NSNP. In her role as Programme Director, she underscored the importance of integrating research insights into programme implementation and policy development.

The event commenced with opening remarks from Dr Granville Whittle, Deputy Director-General at the DBE, who highlighted the importance of intersectoral collaboration to address malnutrition and food insecurity. He noted that data-driven decision-making is critical to creating sustainable school food environments.

Ms Mary-Jane Morifi, Trustee at Tiger Brands Foundation, further emphasised the private sector's role in supporting national nutrition goals and expressed commitment to continued partnership with academic and government institutions.

### Speaker Highlights

#### • Prof. Salome Kruger

*Professor, Centre of Excellence for Nutrition, North-West University*

Prof. Kruger presented findings from her study on the **nutritional status of primary school-aged children in the North West Province**. Her research revealed high prevalence of stunting and micronutrient deficiencies. Concerns on hypertension, obesity linked to poor diets and low physical activity were reported.

#### • Ms Angelique Carson-Porter

*Lecturer, University of the Free State*

Carson-Porter's presentation examined **household dietary diversity and the nutritional status of preschool children in peri-urban and rural areas of the Free State**. Her findings showed a strong association between low dietary diversity scores and undernutrition, highlighting the importance of household-level nutrition interventions in early childhood.

#### • Dr Eridiong Onyenweaku

*Senior Postdoctoral Research Fellow, FERL*

Dr Onyenweaku shared baseline data from

her evaluation of an **in-school breakfast**

**programme in Mpumalanga**, revealing significant associations between meal timing and learner nutritional status. She called for diversity in breakfast menus with addition of protein on menus. Learner's feedback indicated that breakfast aids improved energy, feeling stronger and healthier.

#### • Ms Helen Donkin

*Nutrition Programme Lead, Zero2Five Trust*

Donkin presented an innovative model for **growth monitoring in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres** in the Eastern Cape, using simple, community-based tools. Her project demonstrated the effectiveness of community training in identifying early signs of malnutrition and referring children to services, underscoring the role of ECDs in early intervention.

### Looking Ahead

This initial session laid a robust foundation for the webinar series by showcasing diverse research across provinces and populations. Each study contributed valuable insights into the persistent challenges of childhood malnutrition, dietary inadequacies, and the role of institutional support in mitigating these issues.

Future webinars will delve deeper into:

- **Nutrition Education** in schools as a tool for behavioural change.
- **Food Safety and Quality**, particularly in the procurement and preparation of school meals.
- **Partnerships** across government, academia, and civil society to enhance the school food environment sustainably.

By fostering evidence-based dialogue, this webinar series is an important step in reinforcing the link between research, policy, and practice, an essential triad for improving the nutritional well-being of South African children.

*By Dr Hema Kesa*

*NSSA Council Member*

*Director: Food Evolution Research Laboratory*

### Conflict of Interest Declaration

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is currently in partnership with the Tiger Brands Foundation (TBF) on the in-school breakfast programme. The Food Evolution Research Laboratory (FERL) at the University of Johannesburg has conducted research on the Tiger Brands Foundation (TBF) in-school breakfast programme. The results of this research have been presented as part of this webinar series. All findings and interpretations presented are based on independent research and are intended to contribute to evidence-based improvements

in child nutrition programmes in South Africa. TBF were not involved in the programme or content of the webinar.

The DBE values partnerships as education is a societal issue that supports learner development and wellbeing. The Department does not promote brands and align with health regulations. The National School Nutrition Programme as well as Early Childhood Development are key care and support programmes that benefit from research findings from reputable institutions.