

Nutritional program benefits over 36 million rural students

More than 36 million Chinese rural students have benefited from a national nutritional improvement program launched in 2011, a foundation said Thursday.

The central government has allocated 159.1 billion yuan (23.4 billion U.S. dollars) for improving the nutrition of rural students since the end of 2011, according to a report released by China Development Research Foundation on International Children's Day.

The report showed that the physical health of students in poor regions has improved remarkably in recent years.

The central government will expand the program, which is part of the country's poverty relief campaign, and continue its reward and subsidy policies, said Liu Xin'an, an official with the Ministry of Finance.

In November 2011, the nutritional improvement plan for elementary and middle school students in rural areas was launched. It offered schools a subsidy of four yuan per student per day to build canteens or outsource breakfast and lunch from catering companies.

The program also provided free nutritional packages for infants aged six to 24 months and provided information on healthy nutrition for their caregivers.

A total of 1,590 counties in 29 provinces, autonomous regions or municipalities have taken part in the program, covering 134,000 schools, the report said.

A separate nutritional program was implemented in Beijing and Tianjin, and Shandong Province.

At the end of 2016, China had more than 43 million rural residents living below the poverty line. Malnutrition is a concern amongst those in the remote countryside.

The central government has vowed to lift the rural population out of poverty by 2020 to build a moderately prosperous society.

Since the country began the reform and opening-up drive more than 30 years ago, over 700 million Chinese have been helped out of poverty, accounting for over 70 percent of the global poverty reduction during that period.