



School Meal Programme

WFP Myanmar

Education in Myanmar

In Myanmar, only 73.8 percent of children complete primary education. Particularly in remote areas, high dropout rates remain a serious concern. School meals aim to increase enrolment, improve the access of children to nutritious food, improve learning capacity and encourage school attendance. This allows more families to keep their children in school, whereby securing a better future for children, their families, and Myanmar. However, the different modalities of the school feeding serve different purposes. The distribution of high energy biscuits (HEBs) addresses short-term hunger while school meals and cash-based transfers work as social protection and give the children the energy to focus and learn.

Origins and rationale of the school meal programme

In 2018-2019, WFP pilot School Meal programme in Myanmar will provide assistance to Early Childhood Care Development Centres and primary schools in Kachin, Magway, Mon, Wa and Rakhine States and Regions.

In 2015, WFP shifted into a more child-centred approach using on-site feeding with HEBs. In 2016, WFP and the World Bank launched the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) that rated school feeding as emerging. The final report recommends the establishment of a multi-sectoral steering committee, the development of a policy framework, monitoring and evaluation systems, and funding for National Budget. The same year, the evaluation of the Protracted Relief and Rehabilitation Operation (PRRO) advised the WFP to integrate nutrition education into all programs, increasing the use of cash-based and mixed modalities and shift to school meal in order to reach an eventual government ownership. In line with these conclusions, the Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition in Myanmar conducted by the government in 2016 recommends to expand school feeding, local sourcing of food and to include nutrition and school gardening activities in the curriculum.

In 2017, WFP started implementing pilot school meals programmes in three States/Regions of Myanmar. While WFP continues to distribute nutritious snacks and to increase its coverage to new areas, it is gradually shifting from snacks to school meals, cooked at school. This reflects a more sensitive approach to nutrition and aims at engaging community participation and parents' involvement at school. The pilot school meal programme aligns with the National Education Strategic Plan, the National Social Protection Strategic Plan and the activity 3 of the WFP Country Strategic Plan to implement a comprehensive school feeding programme in targeted schools in support of the national programme. At the same time, WFP is also operating a shift to locally purchased school meals, aligned with the Government's long-term vision and the scale up of the pilot school meals programme. Ideally, food should be purchased from women suppliers, and schools and the community should provide trainings in health and hygiene during the preparation of school meals.

The programme combines food provision (rice and pulses) coupled with education on health and hygiene practices, teaching children as well as teachers, parents and cooks about the importance of hand washing, sanitation and nutrition sensitive education.

2018-2019 SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMME IN NUMBERS



22,281

Schoolchildren



78

School gardens supported



231

Schools



5

States and Regions





Logistics, modalities and food preparation

The school meal pilot programme provides 150g rice and 50g pulses per student every school day in the targeted schools. Those ingredients are cooked and consumed in the schools. However, parents and community members are encouraged to contribute with additional ingredients such as vegetables, meat or oil. They organise cooking groups to prepare the children's lunches.

In some regions, WFP complements the programme with school gardening activities supported by local and international NGO. Gardens provide vegetables for the school meals during winter. Starting in 2018-2019 academic year, WFP will change the school meal in kind modality to provide cash-based transfers to schools (350 kyats per students covering 3 meals per week). This new modality will replace the distribution of rice and pulses.

Evidence of programme impact and good practices

In 2018, WFP Myanmar conducted an internal analytical study of the pilot school meal programme. Based on school visits in Magway and Kachin and a comprehensive literature review, the pilot programme has shown the following benefits:

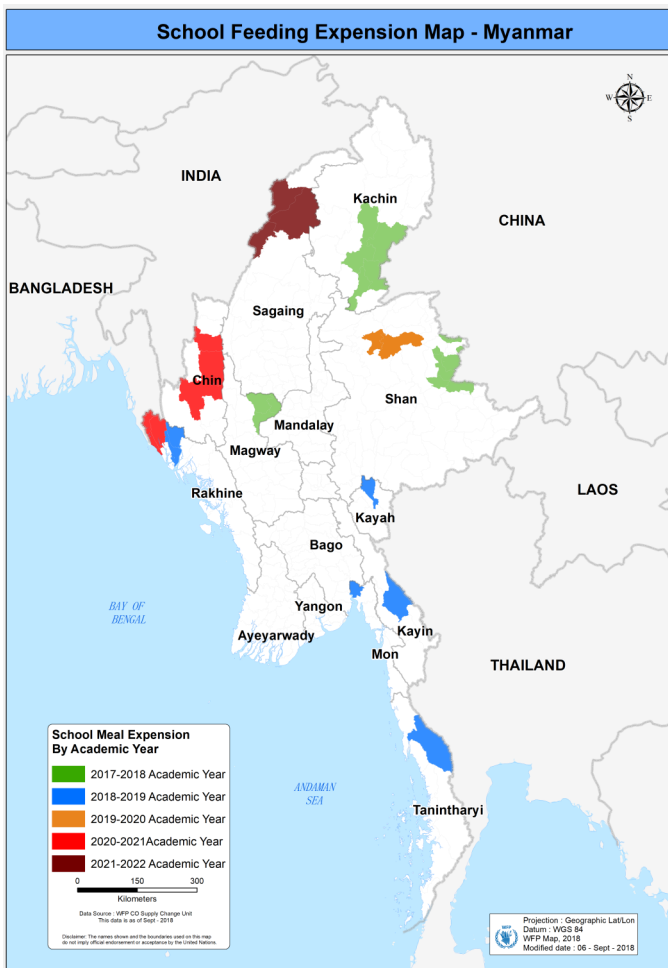
Increasing enrolment, attendance and reducing drop-out

School feeding is included in national education plans to increase enrolment and attendance. An analysis of 45 studies of school meals programmes around the world shows that children receiving a school meal during the entire school year attend school 4-7 days more than children who do not receive school meals (Kristjansson et al 2016). In Myanmar, enrolment rates are high with a gross enrolment ratio above 100% for primary schools. However, schools implementing the school meals have recorded a lower proportion of drop-out and very high attendance rates.

Addressing short-term hunger, improving micronutrient status, cognitive abilities and encouraging participation

School meals can improve cognitive abilities and contribute to learning outcomes, ensuring that children are not too hungry to learn.

*At **Pa La Na primary school** in Myitkyina township (139 children in 2018) received high energy biscuits in 2016-2017 and piloted the school meal programme in 2017-2018. Teachers reported that children used to be very tired in the afternoon when they only received fortified biscuits and are able to concentrate more since the beginning of the school meal programme. Parents from other schools have also noticed this change and realized that children from Pa La Na had better grades than children from neighbouring schools.*





Improving social protection for vulnerable households

School feeding is commonly integrated in social protection systems to support vulnerable households by transferring income to families. In Myanmar, communities have noticed the benefits of the school meal programme to support the most vulnerable households. Since the change of modality, many parents have reduced their expenses and increased their purchasing power.

*Since 2005, the WFP has been implementing the school feeding programme in **Htan To** primary school, in the South West of Yesagyo township. In 2017-2018, WFP has changed the school feeding modalities to provide daily school meals to children instead of fortified biscuits. In total, 40 children have lunch at school every day. Daw Khin Nu, mother of three kids enrolled at Htan To, has significantly reduced her food daily expenses since the implementation of the school meal (see picture). Every day, she saves 0,375kg rice and three eggs. With the money saved, she can support her elder son who goes to middle school in Pakham Gyi village and does not benefit from school meals.*

Changing health-related behavior

The implementation of the school meal programme requires parents to cook in schools. If cooking at school can be seen as an increase of parents' burden and can have high risks of failure in quality control and hygiene, it also appears as an opportunity to teach them health practices. The

school meal programme is coupled with education on health and hygiene practices, teaching children as well as teachers, parents and cooks about the importance of hand washing, sanitation and nutrition education.

Understanding the value and importance of nutrition for the children's development

Myanmar's Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (WFP, 2018) includes the development of nutrition training in social protection interventions, especially in school feeding to fill the gap of government social safety nets. Aligned with the National Strategic Review, WFP and government health staff give nutrition and health awareness sessions in schools. In pilot schools, parents, teachers and communities have gained knowledge in nutrition and are able to name the different food groups and cite their nutritious values.



Increasing community participation

Communities play a pivotal role through parents' groups. Parents are active in collaborating and coming up with creative solutions to manage the meal preparation activities and

"The school meal programme makes our children healthier and happier. Before, we already came to school but we come more often since the beginning of the programme. Teachers can share their messages easily and educate us as well as children."

Parent from Shwe Pay primary school, Yesagyo township.

contribute with resources. In pilot schools, relationships between parents and teachers have improved and stakeholder engagement has increased.

*At **Ai Ma** primary school in Myaing township (118 students in 2018) the entire community participates to the school feeding programme. Shwe Lin is 70 years old and volunteers at school. Since he retired from the government, he has been responsible of cooking rice every day at school. Every morning, U Shwe Lin arrives at 6am and stays until 12am. U He doesn't have grand children in the school, but loves helping the community.*



Improving infrastructures and empowering communities

As a complementary programme to the school meal pilot, school gardens represent an opportunity to source food locally. Schools use school grounds to grow their own vegetables to provide for the meals. In remoted areas, the self-procurement of fresh vegetables through school gardens is particularly valuable, given the difficult access to local markets. Communities are empowered: they are less vulnerable towards climate change, less dependent on external markets and have created new economic opportunities.

Some pilot schools do not have proper kitchen which undermines the implementation of the school meal programme. To address the lack of infrastructures and the unequal access to the market, WFP has launched cash-for-work activities

to build school kitchens. In 2018-2019, WFP will start a school kitchen development project in 43 schools implementing the school meal programme. Volunteer community members from the most vulnerable households will construct school kitchens and get cash from WFP according to the work they produced. The community will also contribute with construction materials such as wood, bamboo or local products collected in the forest.

Building capacity at national level

One of the main findings regarding best practices in school feeding is that the quality and sustainability of school feeding depends on the understanding and commitment to the programme of the decision making levels of the government, as well as its embedment in national policy frameworks. In Myanmar, the National School Feeding Program is incorporated to the five years National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021 that supports free, compulsory and inclusive education. The National School Feeding Programme is also linked to the National School Health Strategic Plan (2017-2022) to improve health status of the entire school children. In July 2018, WFP and MoE organised a two-days National School Feeding workshop that brought together the major actors of school feeding. The Union Minister of Education, Dr. Myo Thein Gyi, delivered the opening speech on behalf of the MoHS Minister. The event marked the first official collaboration between WFP, MoE and MoHS in the implementation of the school feeding programme. The event was also an opportunity to discuss the benefits and challenges of the school meal programme and to foresee its handover to the



SWOT analysis of the school meal programme

WFP Myanmar

STRENGTHS

- Beneficiary satisfaction
- Diversification of the children's diet, more nutritious meals
- Reduction of children's diseases
- Efficient safety net for vulnerable households
- Increase of nutrition and health awareness
- High community participation
- Strengthened capacity building with government and local partners

WEAKNESSES

- Important financial burden for parents
- Lack of infrastructures
- Quality of food provided
- Weak multi-sectoral cooperation
- Geographical challenges for the procurement of food, especially in non-government controlled areas
- Weak monitoring and evaluation

OPPORTUNITIES

- CBT will increase the community's ownership of the programme and support the local economy
- School gardens can enhance women's empowerment and disseminate organic practices
- Collaboration among multi-sectoral ministries
- Endorsement of the school meal programme by MoHS
- Expansion of the school meal to other geographical areas
- Involvement of local markets in the school meals
- Collaboration with asset creation to build school kitchens and maintain school gardens

THREATS

- Insufficient funding
- No school feeding policy at national level
- Weak support from MoE
- Lack of collaboration between different ministries
- Poor sanitation and hygiene practices at schools
- Restricted access to schools because of conflicts and natural disasters

Recommendations

Based on the SWOT analysis and the school visits, the following recommendations are made for consideration by the WFP, MoHS and MoE:

- Increase communication materials to strengthen community participation
- Implement and monitor cash-based transfers
- Handover the school feeding programme to the government
- Implement a coherent and systematic monitoring and evaluation plan
- Improve multisectoral coordination
- Strengthen school gardening activities
- Reduce parents' burden
- Expand the programme to other areas and secure funding

References

Kristjansson et al. (2016), *Costs, and cost-outcome of school feeding programmes and feeding programmes for young children. Evidence and recommendations*, International Journal of Educational Development 48:79-83

WFP (2018), [Myanmar Country Strategic Plan \(2018-2022\)](#), World Food Programme, Accessed on August, 28th, 2018.

To know more: Pilot School Meal Programme in Myanmar. An Analytical Study.