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Successes and Challenges of Implementing USDA McGovern-Dole Funded Food for Education Programmes in the Asia/Pacific Region

A Review of Key Findings from WFP Programme Evaluations in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal during 2013-2018



World Food Programme

August 2019

Introduction

This exercise was commissioned by WFP's Regional Bureau Bangkok (RBB) in response to two requests: i) one from WFP's Regional Evaluation Committee (REvCO) for RBB to provide learning opportunities for Country Offices implementing McGovern-Dole monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements, and ii) one of the recommendations of the McGovern-Dole Endline Evaluation of WFP's Food for Education (FFE) programme in Cambodia (2013-2016). The recommendation was to undertake a meta-analysis of the successes and weaknesses of the USDA McGovern-Dole Programme approach to school feeding across the Asia/Pacific region.¹ After discussions among Programme and M&E staff at RBB and with the four Country Offices who were implementing McGovern-Dole funded FFE programmes in the region at the time of this exercise (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Nepal), it was concluded that a summary of the key learnings from previously conducted McGovern-Dole evaluations would be most beneficial for school feeding activities in the Asia/Pacific region.

Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this exercise is to learn from the evaluations conducted in McGovern-Dole programme countries in the Asia/Pacific region. By reviewing evaluation findings using a common analytical framework, RBB is aiming to provide Country Offices with insights on the strengths and weaknesses of the McGovern-Dole approach to school feeding and highlight regional learning.

The aim of this exercise is to answer the following questions:

1. Have McGovern-Dole funded school feeding programmes achieved their objectives to improve literacy, and increase the use of health and dietary practices during the time period 2013-2018?
2. Have McGovern-Dole funded school feeding programmes in the Asia/Pacific region enabled governments to successfully transition to nationally-owned school feeding programmes during the time period 2013-2018?
3. What are the factors that positively or negatively influenced the ability of the programmes to reach their objectives?

The findings of this exercise have the primary purpose of providing a basis for discussions among the M&E and programme teams of the relevant Country Offices and RBB on how their programmes can be strengthened. There is also potential for the findings to contribute to the WFP Regional School Feeding Strategy.

Users

The primary users of this exercise are:

- WFP Country Offices and WFP's implementing partners in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal, to use the key learnings to improve their McGovern-Dole FFE programmes as well as the way they are monitored and evaluated.
- WFP RBB to use the key learnings for wider organizational learning, to improve WFP's school feeding activities, and the way they are monitored and evaluated across the region.

Other secondary users of this exercise may include:

- Other WFP offices that implement USDA McGovern-Dole FFE programmes, and other WFP Regional Bureaux that support USDA McGovern-Dole programmes for regional and global learning, programme improvement and strategic adjustments.
- The governments in the four countries, the Asia/Pacific region and worldwide who are planning to transition WFP's school feeding programmes to national ownership, to learn from the successes of the McGovern-Dole approach.
- Other donors and implementing partners of school feeding programmes such as USAID, DFAT, UNICEF, UNFPA or the World Bank.
- The WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil in its role for provision of technical guidance and sharing of knowledge.

Scope

The subjects of this exercise are the four McGovern-Dole school feeding programmes in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal. These were all the WFP programmes in the Asia/Pacific region that were receiving FFE grants during the time period 2013 to

¹ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia 2013-2016 Evaluation Report, p. 51.

2018. The findings and lessons from this implementation period, as analysed in the following evaluations, will be the main subject of this exercise:

- Final Evaluation of the McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh (March 2015 to December 2017)²
- Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia (2013-2016)³
- USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR (FY14-16)⁴
- USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017)⁵

These endline evaluations were chosen as the main source of information to answer the first question of this exercise, as the analysis of the achievement of objectives and programme targets required endline values of the monitored indicators. Some additional indicator tracking data was also provided by Country Offices.

For the analysis of the second question on the transition to national ownership, additional, more recent information was utilized, including baseline and mid-term evaluations of the most recent phase of programming and SABER reports, where available:

- Bangladesh Baseline McGovern-Dole School Feeding Programme Evaluation (2018-2022)⁶
- Baseline evaluation of WFP Cambodia's USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education programme (2017-2019)⁷
- Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia (SY 2016/17 and 2017/18)⁸
- Baseline study for the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Programme in Nepal (2018-2022)⁹
- Gill, N (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report
- World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: Dhaka – 23-24 August 2016

² Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

³ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia (2013-2016). Evaluation Report, November 2017.

⁴ NRMC (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR (FY14-16). Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

⁵ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017). Draft Endline Evaluation Report. April 2019.

⁶ NRMC (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole FY17 Baseline Study in Bangladesh. Final Report of Baseline Evaluation.

⁷ The KonTerra Group (2017) Baseline report for WFP Cambodia and the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education program 2017-2019. December 2017.

⁸ The KonTerra Group (2018) Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant FFE-442-2016/015-00 for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia covering school years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

⁹ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2018-2021). Draft Final Baseline Study Report. October 2018.

Methodology

The methodology for this summary of findings was desk-based and included comparing the outcomes of the four end-line evaluations that are subject of this exercise. An analytical framework was developed to transparently analyse evidence from the source evaluation reports. It was used to analyse both the quantitative and the qualitative findings and recommendations from the individual evaluation reports along the analytical dimensions of 'question', 'sub-question' and 'country'.

The analysis included the identification of similarities and differences in the findings between countries, with due consideration of the findings' strategic importance. Weighting by frequency and significance of findings was initially planned but could not be carried out due to significant differences in the quality and presentation of data in the four endline evaluations.

Where key programmatic aspects were not clear or not covered in the evaluation reports, the respective Country Office programme teams were approached for clarification.

Findings of this exercise were reviewed by all four Country Offices whose programmes are subject of this exercise, the Regional School Feeding Officer, School Feeding Division at headquarters (OSF), Office of Evaluation (OEV) and US Relations Office of WFP.

Limitations

Several challenges were found when comparing the evaluation reports, which has affected the analysis of findings. The main challenges were:

- Due to time constraints the scope of the exercise could not be extended to include additional studies that were supported by WFP. For example, the Cost-Benefit Analyses of school meals programmes conducted in Lao PDR and Nepal, and the Home-Grown School Feeding Feasibility Study conducted in Cambodia.
- The summary has mainly focused on the successes and weaknesses of the in-school meal activity, with limited inclusion of the take-home ration activity as it is only implemented in Cambodia.

- It was difficult to compare findings across evaluation reports as countries used different indicators to measure the success of their programmes. Similarly, the programme targets were also different, and therefore not directly comparable. To overcome this, the review has tried to include all indicators used to measure the programme outcomes, and to quantify the results when available.
- The evaluation reports were written by different teams, focusing on different aspects of the programmes, depending on the Terms of Reference provided by the Country Offices. This meant that some aspects of the programme were not described as fully in some evaluation reports as in others. This also meant that the evaluation findings were not always directly comparable.
- Lastly, evaluation reports made only limited mention of programme targets. Although all the McGovern-Dole funded programmes have agreed targets as part of their agreement negotiation, not all evaluation reports made reference to them. As a result, the review team contacted the programme teams directly and used additional information to assess whether programme targets were reached.



A child after eating his school meal in Oudomxay Province, Laos.
© WFP/Rein Skullerud



A student waters her school garden in Laos.
© WFP/Jake Henkle

McGovern-Dole Results Frameworks

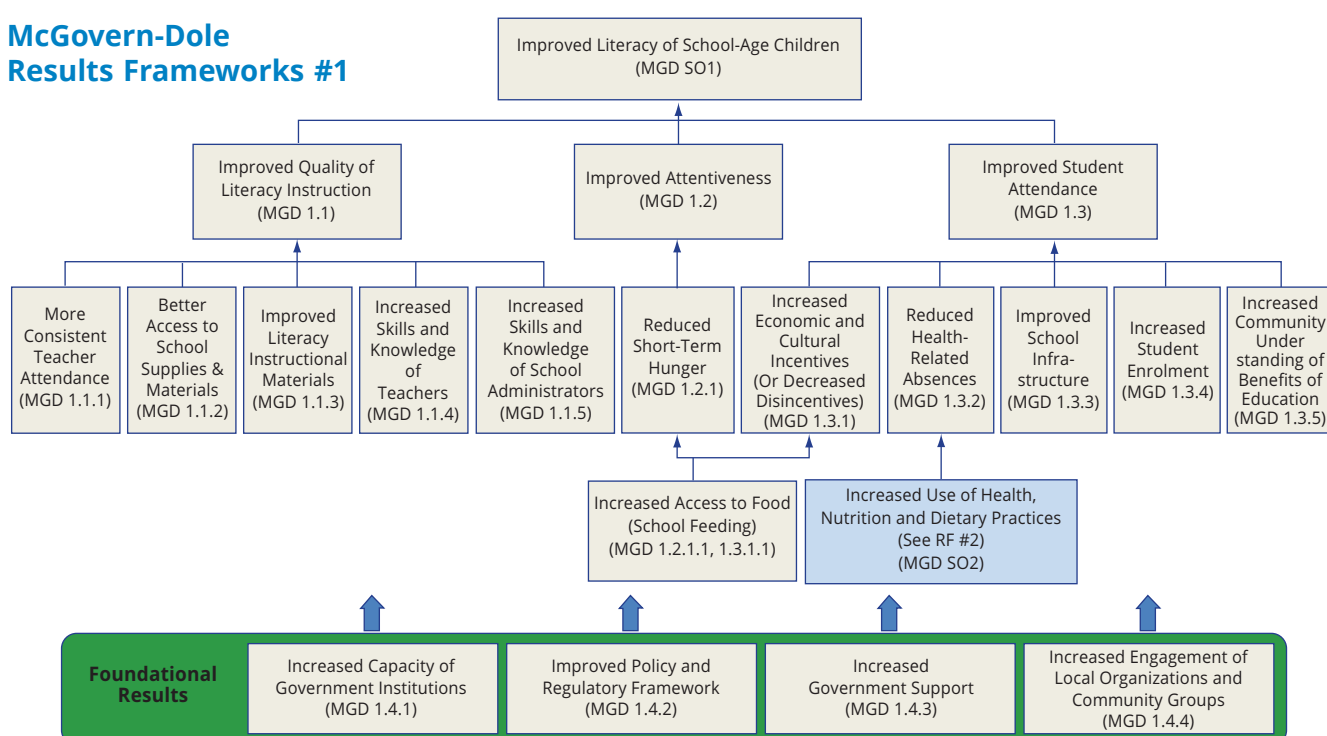
The McGovern-Dole FFE Programme helps support education, child development and food security and nutrition in low-income, food-deficit countries around the globe. The programme provides agricultural commodities from the United States of America and financial and technical assistance to support school feeding and maternal and child nutrition projects.¹⁰

McGovern-Dole FFE programmes have two strategic objectives: i) to improve literacy of school-age children with a focus on early grade reading and ii) to increase the use of health and dietary practices.¹¹ To reach these two objectives, specific activities are implemented and monitored against two results frameworks, each of which illustrates a theory about how the two objectives can be achieved. The second objective – increased use of health and dietary practices – helps achieve the first objective – improved literacy in students. The two results frameworks are therefore interrelated.

In addition to these strategic objectives, the Results Frameworks include a set of foundational results that help foster the capacity and commitment of the host government, local community groups, and other actors to support the achievement of other results in the framework and eventually graduate from USDA assistance. These foundational results feed into the higher-level results.

Results Framework 1: This framework depicts the theory that improved literacy will be achieved, if three results streams are achieved. The three results streams are i) improved quality of literacy instruction, ii) improved student attendance and iii) improved student attentiveness. These three results streams are achieved through sub-streams, which the programme addresses through various activities, including a school meals programme.

McGovern-Dole Results Frameworks #1



A Note on Foundational Results: These results can feed into one or more higher-level results. Causal relationships sometimes exist between foundational results.

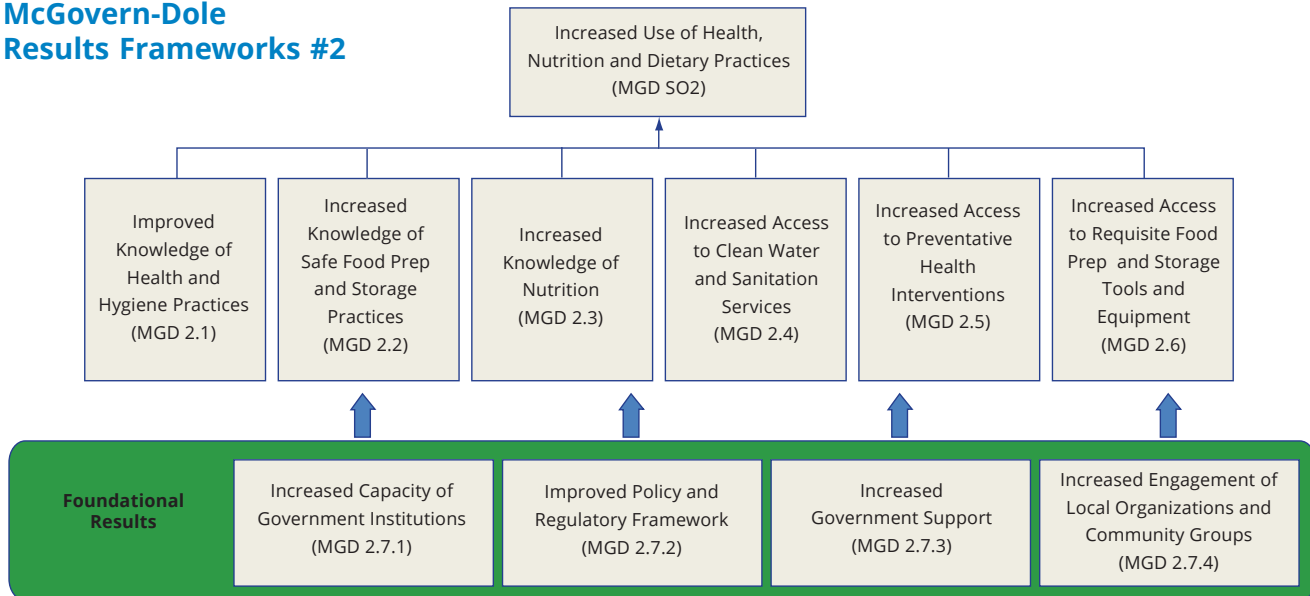
¹⁰ <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/mcgovern-dole-food-education-program>

¹¹ In 2019 USDA changed this strategic objective to “increase the use of health, **nutrition** and dietary practices” however for the purposes of this review, the old wording has been used as per the reviewed evaluation reports.

Results Framework 2: The objective of this framework is to increase the use of health and dietary practices, primarily by school age children, but also by parents, families and school staff. This objective is intended to support reduced health-related absences of students and provide a healthy school environment (access to

clean water, provision of toilets and handwashing facilities, etc.) which is conducive to learning. The achievement of this objective depends on achieving six health and nutrition related outcomes and helps to support the achievement of the first objective in the Literacy Results Framework.

McGovern-Dole Results Frameworks #2



A Note on Foundational Results: These results can feed into one or more higher-level results. Causal relationships sometimes exist between foundational results.



Students in Bangladesh enjoy micronutrient fortified biscuits. © WFP Photo Library

Overview of McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Programmes in the Asia/Pacific Region

Each of the four countries implementing FFE programmes in the Asia/Pacific region intend to achieve the same two McGovern-Dole strategic objectives as described above. However, to do so, the specific programme activities implemented vary from country to country, adjusted to the specific local contexts.

In Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal, a hot in-school meal is provided to primary school children, either as a mid-day meal or breakfast, while in Bangladesh the programme predominantly distributes micronutrient fortified biscuits. In Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal, WFP also promotes Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF), a school feeding modality that uses locally procured commodities. In Cambodia the most vulnerable children also get take-home rations of either rice or cash to provide an additional incentive to attend school on a regular basis. All countries implement literacy activities and activities to improve health and dietary

practices to achieve the two USDA strategic objectives (Table 1).

The size of the school meals programmes also vary, as Figure 1 below illustrates. School meals programmes in Bangladesh and Nepal are significantly larger than in Cambodia and Lao PDR. While in Bangladesh and Nepal the respective governments are implementing the majority of the programme, in Cambodia and Lao PDR, WFP still reaches most of the students.

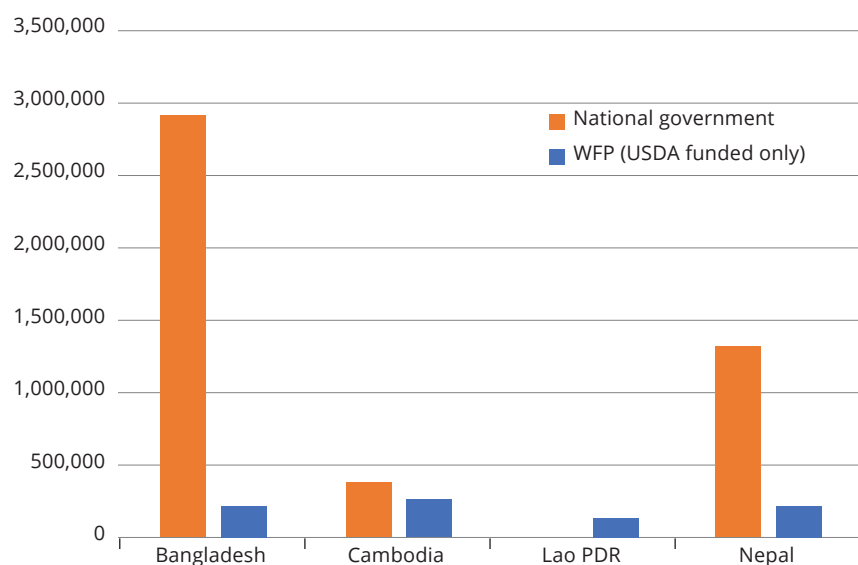
It should be noted that in addition to the government programmes and the USDA funded McGovern-Dole programmes implemented by WFP and partners, some countries also have WFP implemented school feeding programmes funded by other donors, and/or separate school feeding programmes implemented by other agencies. None of these other school feeding programmes are included in this review.

Table 1: Overview of USDA-Supported and Government-Supported School Feeding Programmes in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal (as of January 2019)

	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
WFP (USDA funded only)	1,806 schools	1,100 schools	1,434 schools	Not mentioned in evaluation report
	220,457 students	277,000 students	131,227 students	219,000 students
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micronutrient fortified biscuits - Mid-day meals (in 3 sub-districts) - Literacy activities (incl. construction of class rooms, school gardens) - Health & Dietary Practices activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breakfast/mid-day meals - Take Home Rations - Home Grown School Feeding - Literacy activities (incl. school infrastructure construction/rehabilitation) - Health & Dietary Practices activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid-morning snacks/ mid-day meals - Home Grown School Feeding - Literacy activities - Health & Dietary Practices activities (incl. construction of fish ponds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid-day meals - Literacy activities (construction of school kitchens) - Health & Dietary Practices activities
	13,274 schools	4,951 schools	Handover to start in June 2019	Not mentioned in evaluation report
	2.7 million students	110,156 students	0 students	1.1 million students
National Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micronutrient fortified biscuits - Literacy activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take Home Rations (cash scholarships) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid-morning/mid-day meals (through cash transfers to schools) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid-day meals (through cash transfers to schools)

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

Figure 1: Number of Children Receiving School Meals Through USDA Support or from the Government



Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

Lao PDR received McGovern-Dole funding for the first time in 2002 and the other three countries in 2003. Bangladesh has received continuous USDA support since 2008, Cambodia and Lao PDR since 2010, and Nepal since 2011.

All four countries have started to transition the WFP programmes to government ownership. The Country Offices are therefore working closely with relevant line ministries to gradually hand-over the WFP supported school feeding programmes, including the FFE programme, to the government. This is discussed further in the next chapter: *V. Key Findings*.

Key Findings

Question 1: Have McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Programmes Achieved their Objectives to Improve Literacy, and Increase the Use of Health and Dietary Practices During the Time Period 2013-2018?

Strategic Objective 1: Improve Literacy in School-Age Children (Early Grade Reading)

The first strategic objective of the FFE programme is improved literacy among school-age children, with a focus on early grade reading. To achieve this, the programmes focus on three result streams: improving the quality of literacy instruction, improving student attentiveness in class, and improving student attendance as per Results Framework 1.

Several activities are implemented to improve the quality of literacy instruction in school including ensuring teacher attendance, providing school supplies and materials, training teachers in literacy teaching methods, providing literacy-related educational materials, and increasing the literacy knowledge and skills of school administrators. In addition, activities are implemented to improve student attendance and attentiveness in class, including providing the in-school meals to reduce hunger and improve concentration. Many of the literacy specific activities are outside of

WFP's mandate and core competencies and are therefore mainly implemented by the ministries of education and supported by WFP cooperating partners with the required expertise.

The desk review found that in the last round of funding, all four programmes had achieved some improvement in literacy levels (Table 2). However, WFP's own programme literacy targets were generally set too high. Coupled with insufficient literacy support, in three out of the four countries, the literacy targets were not met. Cambodia was the only programme that achieved their literacy target. However, the evaluation team noted that WFP's literacy assessment was not as accurate as a test administered by the Cambodian Education Quality Assurance Department, which showed that desirable proficiency levels were not met. Also, Cambodia used an indicator at Grade 6 level, while the other countries used early grade reading indicators (Grade 2). The results are therefore not directly comparable across countries.

Table 2: Overall USDA McGovern-Dole FFE Early Grade Reading results by country (2013-2016)

Indicator	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
	Percentage of students, who by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text	Percentage of grade 6 students demonstrating reading comprehension equivalent for their grade	Percentage of grade 2 students who showed at least 75 percent comprehension of the Lao language	Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text
Baseline	26%	57%	2%	1%
Endline	28%	85%	7%	23%
Target	50%	80%	25%	30%
Improved literacy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Target achieved	No	Yes	No	No

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

Table 3: Achievement on Key Literacy Related Outcomes

Outcomes	Indicators	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
Improved quality of literacy instruction	More consistent/average teacher attendance	Similar high result ¹² : 92% (baseline) and 93% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 85% (baseline) to 95% (endline) Target achieved of ≥90% achieved	Similar high result: 94% (baseline) and 97% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 73% (baseline) to 79% (endline) Target not mentioned
	Improved access to literacy instructional materials	Indicator not mentioned	Improved: 100% of USDA supported schools received Target of 100% achieved	Improved from 0% (baseline) to 238% (endline) Target of 100% achieved	Indicator not mentioned
	Teachers/educators/teaching assistants demonstrate use of new and quality teaching techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance	Improved from 73% (baseline) to 94% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 36% (baseline) to 41% (midline); data not collected during endline Target of ≥80% not achieved	Similar high result ¹² : 100% (baseline) and 99% (endline) Target of 100% achieved	Improved from 20% (baseline) to 24% (endline) Target not mentioned
Improved student attentiveness	Percent of students in classrooms identified as inattentive by their teachers	Improved from 29% (baseline) to 22% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 13% (baseline) to 4% (endline) Target of ≤10% achieved	Similar result: 19% (baseline) and 21% (endline) Target not mentioned	Similar result ¹² : 22% (baseline) and 23% (endline) Target not mentioned
Improved student attendance	Students regularly attending USDA supported schools (80% of school year)	Similar high result: 79% (baseline) and 81% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 78% (baseline) to 89% (endline) Target of ≥80% achieved	Similar high result: 97% (baseline) and 98% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 60% (baseline) to 82% (endline) Target not mentioned
	Percent of parents in programme schools who can name at least three benefits of primary education	Indicator not mentioned	Improved from 18% (baseline) to 80% (endline) Target of 85% not achieved	Improved from 45% (baseline) to 96% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 78% (baseline) to 100% (endline) Target of 60% achieved

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

Table 3 shows the achievements of some of the key outcome indicators for Results Framework 1. While the majority of programme targets have not been achieved (or not been mentioned in the evaluation reports), most indicators that were reported on showed improvements since the start of the funding period.

Improving literacy is a complex task, with results dependent on several factors including regular attendance of both teachers and students, the experience and expertise of teachers, the presence of adequate instructional materials, and the attentiveness of students. The majority of these factors require

significant input from the Ministry of Education and/or other partners with the appropriate expertise. The provision of the school meal contributes to improved student attentiveness by reducing hunger, enabling students to concentrate on their studies.

In Bangladesh, literacy in school-aged children improved slightly (from 26 to 28 percent) between 2015 to 2017 with girl's performance generally better than boy's. The improvement in literacy was not sufficient to meet the programme target of 50 percent.¹³ Bangladesh already had high attendance for both teacher (>90 percent) and students (~80 percent) at the start of this phase of

¹² A change of 3 percent or less in the indicator value was classified as "similar result".

¹³ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

programming, but still achieved small improvements in both indicators during the 2014-2017 phase.¹⁴ The 2017 evaluation of the Bangladesh FFE programme noted that the improvement of education quality is not a mandate of WFP and recommended that the Country Office reconsider its direct role in supporting complementary activities that are not linked to its core competences.

In Cambodia, the literacy target of 80 percent of students at USDA supported schools who, by the end of Grade 6, demonstrate reading comprehension equivalent to their grade level was exceeded by 5 percent when tested by WFP¹⁵, with girls performing better (89%) than boys (84%). However, a different literacy test conducted by the Cambodian Education Quality Assurance Department showed that desirable proficiency levels were not met. The latter used a method that the evaluation team considered more accurate than the one used by WFP's partner. For the latest phase of programming, WFP has changed their literacy partner, and the literacy indicator has been changed to an early grade reading indicator (grade 2 level reading proficiency),¹⁶ in line with other countries and the USDA standard indicator. The evaluation team noted that almost all outcome and output targets of the three literacy streams were met in Cambodia and literacy outcomes were better at USDA supported schools compared to non-supported schools.¹⁷ Despite these successes, lack of expertise in literacy programming by WFP and its implementing partner (2013-2016) was the one factor identified to have negatively influenced the ability of the programme to reach its targets. Since 2017, WFP has been working with a new implementing partner on the literacy component, who is an expert in this field. Considerable improvements in the programme's literacy activities have been noted since then.¹⁸ The Cambodia evaluation did not find any improvement in student attentiveness over the course of the programme, with teachers reporting multiple reasons why students are not attentive in class, only one of which is hunger. The evaluation did however note a significant difference in the attentiveness of students in schools where in-school meals were provided compared to other intervention types. Girls were also found to be more attentive than boys.

In Lao PDR, children's reading and comprehension abilities increased by 5 percent, and comprehension was found to be better among boys than girls.¹⁹ However, aside from the overall literacy indicator of early grade reading, the evaluation report does not mention any other USDA literacy-related standard indicators, focusing instead on customized indicators. These include the proportion of students taking extra classes beyond school hours, the proportion of students having someone at home to help them with their studies, and the proportion of students reporting reading any type of extracurricular book. All these indicators increased significantly over the course of the programme. The evaluation report mentions that WFP did not initially receive the desired support from the literacy partner, requiring WFP to establish new partnerships. Eventually WFP was able to find new literacy partners, but this delay has contributed to WFP's inability to reach the programme targets.

In Nepal, there was a large improvement in literacy rate – the proportion of students able to read and understand grade-level text by the end of grade 2, increased from 1 percent at baseline to 23 percent at endline mainly due to the implementation of new literacy teaching techniques and improved student-teacher interactions. No significant differences were observed between male and female students at endline in terms of their overall early grade reading assessment competency score. However, even the large overall improvement since baseline was not enough to meet the programme target of 30 percent.²⁰ The Nepal evaluation has not discussed many of the USDA literacy-related standard indicators, focusing instead on comprehensive reporting of the results of each sub-task of the early grade reading assessment.²¹ The evaluation results were mixed, with statistically significant improvement in test scores in Matra Reading, but worse results in non-word reading, oral comprehension and listening comprehension. The evaluation also highlighted issues around the quality of teaching. Only a quarter of surveyed teachers (23 percent) had received training in the 12 months prior, and only 34 percent of those reported receiving training on new teaching and learning techniques.

¹⁴ Data provided by WFP Bangladesh Country Office: Final outcome survey results 2017.

¹⁵ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia. Evaluation Report, November 2017.

¹⁶ The KonTerra Group (2017) Baseline report for WFP Cambodia and the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education program 2017-2019. December 2017.

¹⁷ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia. Evaluation Report, November 2017.

¹⁸ The KonTerra Group (2018) Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant FFE-442-2016/015-00 for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia covering school years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

¹⁹ NRMIC (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

²⁰ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017). Draft Endline Evaluation Report. April 2018.

²¹ EGRA sub-tasks include listening comprehension, letter sound knowledge, non-word reading, oral reading and oral reading comprehension.

Strategic Objective 2: Increased Use of Health and Dietary Practices

The second objective of the FFE programme is increased use of health and dietary practices. Activities under this results framework target not only the school children but also the parents, and school personnel. According to the programme theory, this objective, if accomplished, helps to reduce health-related absences of school children, which falls under the third results stream (improved student attendance) of the first objective, and thus ultimately contributes to improved literacy. To achieve this second objective, parents and students are trained on good health and nutrition practices, and school personnel are trained on safe food preparation and storage practices. In addition, school kitchens are improved, school gardens are established, and adequate equipment provided. In some countries, latrines and water stations are built to increase access to clean water and sanitation services.

According to USDA's results framework, the achievement of Objective 2 is measured through the indicator of reduced health-related absenteeism of school children. Each of the evaluations have reported this indicator differently due to the lack of school records on absenteeism and lack of information on the cause of student absence. The Bangladesh and Cambodia evaluations measured the average number of days that students were absent for health-related reasons, while Lao PDR and Nepal evaluations reported the percentage

of absences that were health related. However, neither Lao PDR nor Nepal evaluations specified a baseline value, so improvement could not be assessed. The Cambodia evaluation reported an increased number of health-related absence from 16 to 18 days per year (Table 4) but this was likely to be due to the poor-quality absenteeism data available and the result was not statistically different.

Instead of looking at this overall indicator of success, most evaluation reports focused on the six result streams that lead to improved use of health and dietary practices.

- Improved knowledge of health and hygiene practices
- Increased knowledge of safe food preparation and storage practices
- Increased knowledge of nutrition
- Increased access to clean water and sanitation services
- Increased access to preventative health interventions
- Increased access to requisite food preparation and storage tools and equipment

Each of these result streams have several indicators that can be used to measure their success. Table 5 shows that although different programmes used different indicators, in general, the evaluation reports describe positive results across the six result streams.

Table 4: Overall Achievement on Reduction of Health-Related Absenteeism (2014-2017)

Results	Indicators	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
Improved attendance	Students regularly (80% of school year) attending USDA supported schools	Similar high result: 79% (baseline) and 81% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 78% (baseline) to 89% (endline) Target of ≥80% achieved	Similar high result: 97% (baseline) and 98% (endline) Target not mentioned	Improved from 60% (baseline) to 82% (endline) Target not mentioned
	Reduced health-related absenteeism	Indicator unclear: 1 at both baseline and endline (unclear whether day or %) Target not mentioned	Similar result: 16 days/year (baseline); 18 days/year (endline) Target of 5 days not achieved	Wrong indicator: 67% of all absences health-related (endline) No baseline value or target mentioned	Indicator not mentioned

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

Table 5: Achievement on Health and Dietary Practices Related Outcomes

Results	Indicators	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
Improved knowledge of health and hygiene practices	Parents/students are able to identify at least three important health/hygiene practices	Indicator not mentioned	Improved from 57% (baseline) to 87% (endline) Target of 85% achieved	Indicator not mentioned	Improved from 66% (baseline) to 87% (endline) Target not mentioned
	Parents/students can identify at least one local source of information on good health practices	Indicator not mentioned	Similar high result ²² : 94% (baseline) and 92% (endline) Target of 85% achieved	Indicator not mentioned	Similar high result ²² : 100% (baseline) and 100% (endline) Target not mentioned
Increased knowledge of safe food prep and storage practices	Percent of storekeepers trained on safe food preparation and storage practices.	Improved from 15% (baseline) to 78% (endline) Target not mentioned	Indicator not mentioned	No baseline value reported. Endline = 65% Target not mentioned	Indicator not mentioned
	Cooks/storekeepers who achieve a passing score on a test on safe food preparation and storage	Indicator not mentioned	Improved from 0% (baseline) to 99% (endline) Target of 85% achieved	Improved from 8% (baseline) to 88% (endline) Target not mentioned	Similar result ²² : 20% (baseline) and 22% (endline) Target of 80% not achieved
Increased knowledge of nutrition	Children who can name at least three good nutrition and dietary practices	Improved from 42% (baseline) to 91% (endline) Target of 80% achieved	Improved from 88% (baseline) to 92% (endline) Target of 85% achieved	Indicator not mentioned	Indicator not mentioned
Increased access to clean water and sanitation services	Schools with a source of safe drinking water at or near school	Similar high result ²² : 99% (baseline) and 100% (endline) Target of 100% achieved	Improved from 67% (baseline) to 100% (endline) Target of 100% achieved	No baseline value reported. Endline = 76% Target not mentioned	Deteriorated from 77% (baseline) to 72% (endline) Target of 100% not achieved
	Schools with latrines of sufficient quality	Indicator not mentioned	Improved from 78% (baseline) to 86% (endline) Target of 100% not achieved	No baseline value reported. Endline = 76% Target not mentioned	Same result: 88% (baseline) and 88% (endline) Target not mentioned
Increased access to preventative health interventions	This result was measured using different indicators in each of the four Country Offices and therefore could not be compared.				
Increased access to requisite food preparation and storage tools and equipment	Schools with improved food preparation and storage equipment	Not applicable (providing biscuits only)	Improved from 0 schools (baseline) to 580 schools (endline) Target of 600 schools almost achieved	Improved from 0 schools to 58 schools Target of 1,500 schools not achieved	Indicator not mentioned
	Schools storing food off the ground	Improved from 94% (baseline) to 98% (endline) Target not mentioned	Deteriorated from 85% (baseline) to 75% (endline) Target of 100% not achieved	No baseline value reported. Endline = 74% Target not mentioned	No baseline value reported. Endline = 65% Target not mentioned

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

²² A change of 3 percent or less in the indicator value was classified as "similar result".

In Bangladesh, the programme achieved improvement in the percentage of children who can name at least three good nutrition and dietary practices, increasing significantly from 42 percent at baseline to 91 percent at endline.²³ The evaluation also noted an improvement in the schools with access to clean water, increased numbers of latrines and better storage of food over the course of the programme.

In Cambodia, the evaluation found that training on health, nutrition and food preparation had been successful, with trainees able to recall the information learned. Household diets also improved, although no correlation between FFE programme and improved household diets was found.²⁴ The evaluation found that USDA supported schools receiving the school meals programme performed better than comparison schools with no school meals programme on several indicators. These included the percentage of parents being able to identify health and hygiene practices (87% vs 0%), and local sources of health information (92% vs. 2%). USDA supported schools were also more likely to have soap present at the hand-washing stations than in comparison schools (90% vs. 75%).

In Lao PDR, the evaluation report included less indicators than the other countries and found improvements in almost all. While the dietary diversity of households was not found to have changed significantly, the consumption of nuts, seeds, legumes, beans, dairy products and eggs had increased.²⁵ This indicates an improvement in nutrition practices but there is insufficient data in the reports to make conclusions with regard to improved health practices.

In Nepal, 87 percent of students and 91 percent of parents were able to identify at least three important health and hygiene practices; 100 percent of parents and students could identify at least one local source of information on good health practices.²⁶ All students were aware of the importance of a good and balanced diet; 67 percent mentioned it gives energy and 32 percent that it helped them grow.²⁷ This indicates that the training provided has been successfully recalled. However, the evaluation noted that more than a quarter of USDA supported schools (28 percent) still did not have permanent access to clean water.

Question 1 Summary of Findings

Overall, this review of evaluation findings indicates positive results in the achievement of the USDA McGovern-Dole's two strategic objectives. The review found that literacy (early grade reading) had improved in all four countries. However, the programme's literacy targets were not met in three of the four countries during the review's timeframe (2013-2018). In general, many of the programme targets were not met despite improvements in the indicators. Although Cambodia achieved its literacy target, this was partly due to the use of an indicator of reading ability at Grade 6 level, rather than assessing early grade reading proficiency (grade 2) as used in the other countries. This result is therefore not directly comparable with the other programmes. The Cambodia CO has since changed its literacy indicator for the new phase of programming so the endline findings will be consistent with the other Country Offices, and with USDA guidance.

Several evaluation reports note that success in improving literacy requires significant effort from the Ministry of Education, from school administrators and from teachers, all of which is outside the core competencies of WFP. Support from implementation partners with literacy expertise has therefore been noted as a key factor for success in the literacy field. Similarly, insufficient support has contributed to programmes not meeting their literacy targets.

Achievement of the second objective was more difficult to determine as there are many result streams that feed into the overall achievement. Comparison between results was made difficult because different Country Offices implemented different activities and therefore used different indicators for their programme monitoring. The programme in Cambodia was the only one that contributed to improvement on at least one indicator in each of the result streams. Overall, however, it is clear that the USDA supported FFE programmes have provided a strong platform for creating knowledge and awareness of good health and dietary practices.

²³ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

²⁴ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia. Evaluation Report, November 2017.

²⁵ NRM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

²⁶ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017). Draft Endline Evaluation Report. April 2018.

²⁷ Ibid.

Question 2. Have McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Programmes in the Asia/Pacific Region Enabled Governments to Successfully Transition to Nationally-Owned School Feeding Programmes During the Time Period 2013-2018?

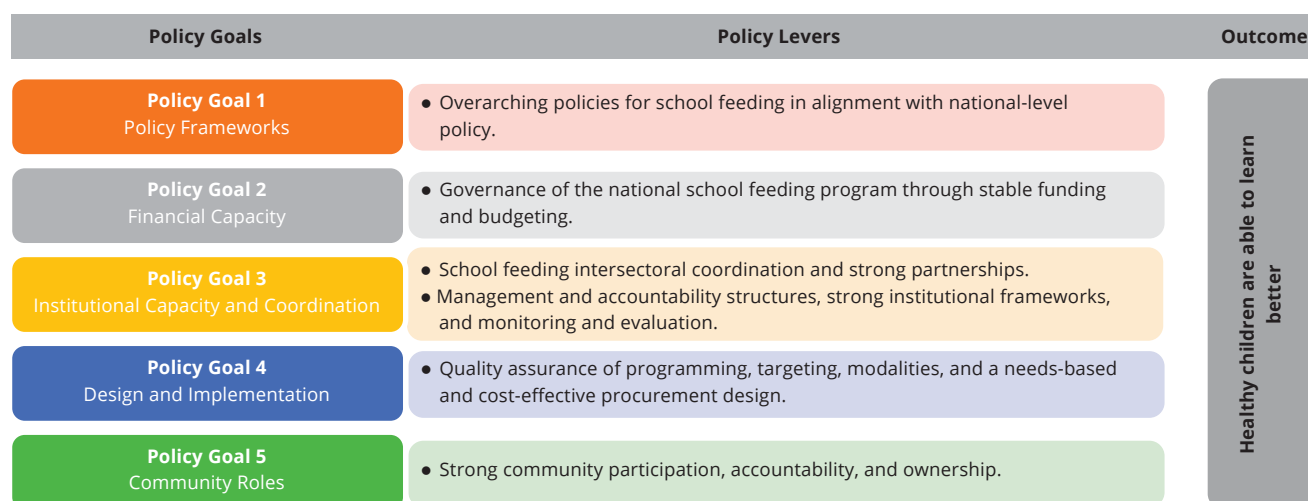
All four of the WFP Country Offices implementing McGovern-Dole programmes in the Asia/Pacific region are in the process of transitioning the USDA-supported school meals programmes to national government ownership. Each Country Office has been engaged in discussions with the government about the transition for several years, and they are now in different stages of the handover/transition process. Although the transition to national ownership was not specifically included as a topic for evaluation in all four countries, all the evaluation reports discussed issues around transition to national ownership as part of the discussion on sustainability.

WFP uses several indicators to track their progress on the transition including increased capacity of government institutions to manage and oversee school feeding programmes – including operating procedures and the presence of a management unit, the number of education policies, regulations and/or administrative procedures in each stage of development, the presence of a national school feeding policy.

To enhance the comparability and analysis of evaluation findings on the transition to national ownership, the SABER framework has been used. The SABER policy goals (Figure 2) provide a useful framework, enabling clearer comparison of evaluation findings between countries.

The SABER–School Feeding (SABER-SF) framework outlines an approach for assessing the school feeding policy situation and systems in any country to identify the gaps, and plan appropriate capacity development actions and/or road maps with the government and other stakeholders.²⁸ The framework helps countries strengthen their national school feeding programmes and/or transition to national school feeding programmes with solid policies and systems. SABER-SF is based on five internationally agreed standards that form the tool’s five core policy goals. The SABER-SF framework recognizes that effective school feeding programmes require a national policy framework, stable and predictable funding, sufficient institutional capacity for implementation and coordination, sound design and

Figure 2: The Five Policy Goals of SABER – School Feeding



Source: World Bank, WFP and The Partnership for Child Development (2016) Manual for SABER – School Feeding Exercise.

²⁸ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/26517/114317-WP-PUBLIC-SABER-SchoolFeeding-Manual.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

implementation, and community participation. Each of these five areas are ranked as latent, emerging, established or advanced. SABER assessment exercises have been carried out in Bangladesh in 2013 and 2016²⁹, and in Nepal in 2015³⁰ but the other countries have not gone through the assessment process.

SABER Policy Goal 1: Policy Frameworks

Overarching Policies for School Feeding in Alignment with National-Level Policy

All four WFP Country Offices have been working with their national governments for several years to build a policy environment that supports the implementation of national school meals programmes. In all four countries, WFP has been highly engaged with the process of getting school feeding into national policies, including providing technical guidance, and encouraging multiple ministry engagement in policy development.

Currently, Lao PDR is the only country to have a specific, approved, national policy on school feeding.³¹ Bangladesh is in the final stages of policy approval³² and Nepal plans to start development of a policy in 2020.³³ Although Cambodia does not have a specific school feeding policy, the endline evaluation (2017) indicates that school feeding is mentioned in multiple, relevant, national food, nutrition, health and/or social protection policies.³⁴ For example, the National Social Protection Policy Framework (2016-2025) and the National School Health Policy. Both these documents highlight the importance of the school feeding programme in child development and educational achievement.

In Cambodia, WFP has also supported the Council for Rural and Agricultural Development to prepare a Social Assistance Policy Framework, which includes the key targets and benchmarks for the transition to national ownership. The government is also in the process of developing their Education Sector Policy (2019-2023), which will also include mention of school feeding and its role in supporting educational outcomes. In addition, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and WFP are currently developing a National Scholarship Framework to support the implementation of take-home rations.

In Lao PDR, the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2016-2020 includes sectoral plans of various departments including a School Meals Action Plan (SMAP). Likewise, in Nepal, the National School Meal Programme (NSMP) constitutes a key component of the School Sector Development Plan, and the National School Health and Nutrition Strategy and the Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Plan-II. The Government of Nepal recognizes School Meals Programmes as the largest social protection safety net, supporting their commitment to ensuring both “access to quality education for all” and the “right to food”. The recently promulgated Free and Compulsory Basic Education Act (FCBE 2018) commits that “no child will be hungry”, guaranteeing school meals to school children in districts with low performing human development indices.

Evaluation findings also indicate that the school feeding programmes implemented by WFP, align well with national policies and strategies. In some countries, WFP has changed the form of their own school feeding activities to better align with the national policies and preferences. For example, in Lao PDR, during 2015-2017, WFP gradually shifted from mid-morning snacks to school lunch with commodities provided by USDA.³⁵ This aligned better with the Government’s preference to provide a full meal instead of a snack. Similarly, in Cambodia, WFP is currently piloting a Home-Grown School Meals Programme in some USDA supported schools providing a mix of locally procured and imported foods to better align with the government’s preference to provide locally grown commodities instead of food imported from the U.S.³⁶

Overall, the evaluation reports indicate that WFP has been a key player in supporting the national governments to make specific reference to school feeding in their national policies. WFP has also supported the establishment of strategic partnerships and leveraged support from multiple government institutions. All four WFP Country Offices have lobbied and advocated for nationally owned school feeding programmes utilizing various platforms and opportunities at the national and local level and ensuring integration within different sectoral plans and policies. The SABER exercises in both Bangladesh and

²⁹ World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: *Dhaka - 23-24 August 2016*

³⁰ Gill, N (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report

³¹ NRM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

³² Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018. And communication with Bangladesh team via email: 24/04/2019 – The latest draft of the nutrition-sensitive National School Meals Policy was approved by the inter-ministerial committee in March 2019, the penultimate step of formal adoption by the government. The policy is expected to receive final approval in October 2019.

³³ Communication with WFP Nepal team via email: 25/04/2019

³⁴ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia. Evaluation Report, November 2017.

³⁵ NRM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

³⁶ The KonTerra Group (2018) Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant FFE-442-2016/015-00 for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia covering school years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Nepal rated the government's school feeding policy environment as "emerging". For Bangladesh the rating was due to a recognition that a national school feeding policy was in the process of being drafted, but limited mention of school feeding in other sectoral policies. For Nepal, the emerging rating was due to school feeding being mentioned in national planning documents but there was no national school feeding policy, and no situation analysis on school feeding.

SABER Policy Goal 2: Financial Capacity

Governance of the National School Feeding Programme through Stable Funding and Budgeting

Stable funding and budgeting by the governments continues to be a challenge for transitioning the USDA supported schools into government ownership. Currently, three governments (Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal) provide funding for either in-school or take-home ration activities.

In Bangladesh, the National School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas (NSFPPA) is currently implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education's (MoPME) Department of Primary Education and funded fully by the Government. Originally implemented by WFP, in 2011 the government took over activities in two upazilas,³⁷ then expanded to additional areas through a phased handover plan. By 2016, the Government was implementing school feeding activities in 72 upazilas, covering 2.53 million children and the government had also provided US\$3.6 million to WFP to support additional upazilas.³⁸ However, there is not yet a transition plan regarding funding for the McGovern-Dole supported schools. WFP continues to provide technical assistance and capacity strengthening for the Government. The 2016 Bangladesh SABER exercise rated the Government's financial capacity at "emerging". This is partly because government funding of the NSFPPA is not stable and cannot cover all the school feeding needs in the country. It relies on a special project of the MoPME that will expire in 2020. WFP is currently working with the Government to ensure the School Feeding Policy is approved later this year. This will provide the greatest chance of obtaining a permanent source of government school feeding related funding. The emerging rating was also due to lower level administrative units not having any budget line for school feeding.³⁹

³⁷ Local administrative unit.

³⁸ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

³⁹ World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: *Dhaka - 23-24 August 2016*.

⁴⁰ The KonTerra Group (2018) Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant FFE-442-2016/015-00 for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia covering school years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

⁴¹ NRMCM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018.

In Cambodia, government implementation and funding of the school feeding programme has improved in recent years. The Government of Cambodia has been contributing 2,000 MT of rice to WFP each year since 2007. In addition, since school year 2012/13 WFP has been progressively handing over the implementation of the USDA supported food-based take-home rations (THR). The Government is currently implementing the THR activity through cash grants. In school year 2014/15, the Government took full responsibility for the budgeting and implementation of the THR programme in the districts they cover, and the Government's expansion of the cash THR programme is ongoing. WFP and the Government are continuing discussions about the possibility of transitioning a larger part of the school meals programme (in-school meal) to national ownership. However, at the time of the most recent evaluation, the 2018 Mid-Term Review, there was no allocated school feeding budget line to accommodate such a plan.⁴⁰



Micronutrient fortified biscuits. © WFP Photo Library

In Lao PDR, there are three main school meal providers, with the government being the smallest. WFP supports 1,446 schools in 30 districts in seven provinces; Catholic Relief Services supports 360 schools across seven districts, and the Government provides lunch in 312 schools in 10 districts across five provinces with funding from the World Bank. In addition, the Education Development Fund provides meals to four schools and Humana People to People supports two schools.⁴¹ The Government therefore continues to largely rely on donor funding for the implementation of school meals. This is a major barrier to transition to full national ownership, with stakeholders worried about the timely transfer of funds to schools once the government takes over. In 2018, WFP supported a cost-benefit analysis of

school feeding programmes in Lao PDR to help show the benefits of a national school feeding programme. The latest evaluation report of the for Lao PDR indicates that “the absence of a specific budget line for school meals puts the entire onus of running the school feeding programme on communities.”⁴² The School Meal Handover Plan, signed in May 2018 emphasises that the Ministry of Education and Sports needs to include the school meal expenditure of current WFP supported schools in the national budget. More information on community engagement in all four countries can be found ahead under SABER Policy Goal 5: Community Roles.

The Government of Nepal implements and funds a cash-based National School Meal Programme (NSMP) where children are provided with mid-day meals in schools. The Government and WFP signed an Operational Agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in alignment with WFP’s five-year Country Strategic Plan (CSP 2019-2023), endorsing a graduation and sustainability plan and adding WFP/USDA supported schools into the NSMP. The plan indicates that the Government will transition seven WFP/USDA in-kind supported districts to the Government’s cash-based NSMP by the end of WFP’s Country Strategic Plan in 2023. Aside from the in-school meal component, the Government is also interested in a country-wide scale-up of early grade reading programmes (the McGovern-Dole literacy component) which will eventually cover all USDA supported districts.⁴³ The SABER assessment rated the Government’s financial capacity at “emerging”. This was because although Nepal has school feeding funded through the national budget, the amount of funding allocated to that budget line does not cover all needs.⁴⁴

SABER Policy Goal 3: Institutional Capacity and Coordination

School Feeding Intersectoral Coordination and Strong Partnerships. Management and Accountability Structures, Strong Institutional Frameworks, and Monitoring and Evaluation.

In all four countries, the responsibility for school feeding predominantly lies with the ministries of education, and within those, each country has allocated specific responsibilities to different offices or units at national level. Several evaluation reports also make mention of sub-national school feeding governance structures and coordination forums at both national and sub-national levels, however the capacity of these

structures at different levels is not clear. Adequate programme monitoring by government staff remains a challenge.

In Bangladesh, there is a project office under the Directorate of Primary Education called the School Feeding Programme in Poverty Prone Areas. This office has the responsibility for the management of the NSFPPPA. WFP Bangladesh has provided capacity strengthening support at all levels through trainings, workshops and conferences. This included technical assistance on areas such as policy development, programme design and procurement, project design, management, monitoring and evaluation, logistics, procurement and selection of NGOs and biscuit factories, quality control, and providing impact evidence of alternative school feeding modalities. The 2016 SABER assessment ranked Bangladesh’s institutional capacity and coordination as “advanced”. This was due to three main factors: the presence of a multi-sectoral steering committee to coordinate the implementation of school feeding; the presence of a Project Implementation and Management Unit at national level which is reasonably staffed and resourced; and the coordination between different levels working well and schools having School Feeding Management Committees at school level.⁴⁵

In Cambodia, WFP has supported the establishment of multiple school feeding coordination bodies including a national level Project Coordination Committee and a School Feeding Task Force established in 2011. These structures have been replicated at sub-national level through the establishment of Provincial, District and Local School Feeding Committees. A national level Scholarship Office was established within the MoEYS’s Department of Primary Education in 2017 specifically to take the responsibility for managing the scholarship programme and looking into potential options for implementing a HGFS.

In Lao PDR, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is the nodal agency for the implementation of nationwide school meals. Within the MoES there is an Inclusive Education Centre Unit for the oversight and scaling up of the NSMP. WFP Lao PDR has conducted several capacity strengthening exercises with the MoES, including workshops, trainings, and overseas study tours. However, the evaluation report indicates a weakness of government structures for addressing the complex and cross-sector issues of food and nutrition security. Programme stakeholders in some provinces reported being aware of the transition from

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017). Draft Endline Evaluation Report. April 2018.

⁴⁴ Gill, N (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report

⁴⁵ World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: *Dhaka - 23-24 August 2016*

WFP implementation to national ownership but were not aware of their roles and responsibilities.

The Nepal NSMP (cash-based) is implemented through the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD), formerly Department of Education. The USDA-supported FFE Programme is managed by a project unit at the national level operating under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. There are also offices in every district, embedded in district education and coordination units (Food for Education Units) where the meals are provided. Both the government and WFP engage with multiple stakeholders for the smooth functioning of the programme, at the central and district level. Like Bangladesh, Nepal's SABER assessment ranked Nepal's institutional capacity as "advanced" due to its multi-sectoral technical committee that coordinates the implementation of school feeding at national and local levels. The assessment also judged Nepal's staffing for school feeding to be sufficient.⁴⁶

SABER Policy Goal 4: Design and Implementation

Quality Assurance of Programming, Targeting, Modalities, and a Needs-Based and Cost-Effective Procurement Design.

Each of the four USDA supported countries are implementing a range of different school feeding

activities. The school feeding activities that will be transitioned to national ownership are also different, reflecting the different WFP programmes, the different contexts of each country, and the different capacities and interests of the governments (Table 6). To support appropriate programme design, aligned to government preferences and capacities, in some countries, WFP has supported school feeding related research as described ahead.

The Government of Bangladesh currently provides school children with micronutrient fortified biscuits, the ration previously provided through USDA support. Although the nationally owned programme is currently implemented in only 72 upazilas, the government plans to eventually cover all students in primary schools (currently around 22 million students). This plan is outlined in the latest draft of the National School Feeding Policy.⁴⁷ WFP has supported the piloting of a new food option – hot meals – to be able to compare the efficiency and effectiveness with the current provision of micronutrient fortified biscuits. The study found a significant drop in anaemia among students consuming hot meals. As a result, the Government plans to roll out hot meals during the next phase of programming by transitioning from micronutrient fortified biscuits in a phased, gradual approach.⁴⁸ The SABER assessment rated Bangladesh's design and implementation as "emerging". This was due to several factors including the M&E system still requiring external

Table 6: Plans for transitioning school meals to national ownership

	Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
Name of government school feeding programme	National School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas (NSFPPPA)	-	-	National School Meal Programme (NSMP)
Handover of WFP SF/FFE programme commencement	2011	Take-home rations handed over starting 2012/13 RoadMap signed in April 2015.	School Feeding Handover Plan signed in May 2018	Operational Agreement – Phase 1 (7 schools) to transition by 2023
USDA supported meal	75 g micronutrient fortified biscuits	Food-based take-home rations Food-based in-school meal	Food-based mid-morning snack that was revised to a mid-day meal	Food-based mid-day meal
Government supported meal	75 g micronutrient fortified biscuits Planning to transition to hot meals starting in the next 5 years	Take-home rations (through cash scholarships). Transition of in-school meals still in discussion	Mid-day meal (through cash transfers to schools)	Mid-day meal (through cash transfers to schools)

Source: Compiled from evaluation reports

⁴⁶ Gill, N (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report

⁴⁷ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

⁴⁸ Communication with WFP Bangladesh team via email: 24/04/2019

(WFP) support with data collection done intermittently and limited use of monitoring data to improve the programme; targeting criteria and methodology were still under development; national standards for the food basket and modalities were still under development with a preference for meals still using biscuits in the interim; and the procurement was still managed by WFP on behalf of the Government.⁴⁹

WFP and the Government of Cambodia have a transition plan (Road Map) with the MoEYS, outlining the steps to complete national ownership by 2021.⁵⁰ WFP started to handover the THR activities in 2012/13 and will continue to do so in a phased approach until the end 2019. The Mid-Term Review (2018)⁵¹ indicates that the eventual scale of a nationally-owned in-school meal programme remains unclear. As of the time of the Mid-Term Review (August 2018), no decision had been made about whether the MoEYS intends to take over all the in-school meal activities in USDA supported schools (in three provinces), or all the schools where WFP is currently implementing school feeding through the Country Programme (in nine provinces), or indeed establish school meals programmes in other locations. WFP supported a feasibility study on Home-Grown School Meals to help the government make decisions regarding the most appropriate design for the future nationally owned school feeding programme. WFP also supported an Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment to establish the role of school meals in social protection. It is envisaged that after the transition, WFP will continue to provide technical support.

In Lao PDR, WFP and MoES have recently jointly drawn up a School Feeding Handover Plan with a phase-wise approach of the transition and the transfer to MoES. This plan was approved and signed in May 2018. At the time of the endline evaluation (October 2018) workshops were planned for the National Assembly Members to sensitize them on the handover. Private sector participation is also envisaged. On complete handover of all schools to MoES, WFP plans to continue monitoring, supervising and providing technical support to these schools.

The Nepal NSMP is implemented in 29 districts out of 75 and serves as social safety net as a part of the government's education equity strategy. The main

design issue yet to be agreed by WFP and the government is that the NSMP is cash-based and the USDA programme is food based. Transition therefore requires either the use of locally grown food produce or a shift towards a cash-based school meals model. Therefore, WFP and the Government together are currently exploring and piloting a cash-based modality under the NSMP in two districts of Nepal.⁵² The SABER exercise ranked Nepal's design and implementation as "emerging" due to a monitoring and evaluation plan and unit being in place. This unit oversees the Education Management Information System, which captures some school feeding specific indicators. National standards for the procurement of food and logistics exist for the in-kind programme but not for the cash programme.⁵³

SABER Policy Goal 5: Community Roles

Strong Community Participation, Accountability and Ownership

The evaluation reports indicate that in all four countries, communities are highly engaged with the USDA supported school feeding programmes. Parental and community participation on the School Management Committees (SMC) is high across programmes, as is voluntary engagement of people to support construction, meal preparation and other activities.

In Bangladesh, community members participating on the SMCs are very committed to the programme and have a good sense of ownership. SMC members are involved in management activities, monitor the delivery of micronutrient fortified biscuits to schools and its distribution to the students, biscuit storage and controls, and package disposal. Although the evaluation reports indicate that not all members of the SMC interviewed participated in trainings provided by the project, they still managed to get the information required to perform the tasks.⁵⁴ The SABER exercise ranked Bangladesh's community roles as "emerging" due to schools having committees involving teachers, parents and community in the school feeding implementation and the communities monitoring appropriate utilization of the food. There were however no mechanisms in place yet for the community to hold the school feeding programme accountable at the different levels.⁵⁵ Transitioning the programme to hot meals will require ongoing support from communities.

⁴⁹ World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: *Dhaka - 23-24 August 2016*

⁵⁰ The KonTerra Group (2017) Baseline report for WFP Cambodia and the USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education (FFE) programme 2017-2019. December 2017.

⁵¹ The KonTerra Group (2018) Mid-term review of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant FFE-442-2016/015-00 for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia covering school years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

⁵² Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2018-2021). Draft Final Baseline Study Report. October 2018.

⁵³ Phuong, J (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report

⁵⁴ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

⁵⁵ World Bank (2016) Presentation of SABER results: *Dhaka - 23-24 August 2016*

Similarly, in Cambodia, the communities are very engaged with the programme – providing the cooks (volunteers), occasionally providing fresh food items, and participating on the SMCs. Local councils contribute to the cook's payment to ensure ongoing implementation of the programme.

The evaluation report of the Lao PDR McGovern-Dole programme also indicates that the community is actively involved in the school lunch programme, and notes that the programme has resulted in a tangible change in people's perception of the benefits of education. The evaluation found that in more than 90 percent of surveyed schools, the communities have been contributing to the school lunch through the supply of vegetables, eggs, and meat, and by cooking. About 90 percent of surveyed parents have contributed to the school meals, either in cash or in-kind (which includes labour). Other forms of contribution included labour for constructing kitchen, dining space, storage, school garden or contributing cash. The programme has also engaged community members for construction and

rehabilitation of kitchen, dining area, storage rooms and hand-washing stations in schools.⁵⁶

As in the other countries, in Nepal, engagement of the community members is an integral part of school meal implementation. The community initiative contributes to the proactiveness and effectiveness of the operation. It is the community members who are responsible for the transportation of food materials from Government Final Delivery Points to the schools. The SMC and Food Management Committee (FMC) mobilizes the community member and assigns the responsibility of transportation of food materials from Final Delivery Points to school on a periodic basis. The Nepal SABER assessment ranked the community roles as "established". School management committees composed of parents and teachers are responsible for managing school feeding. A regular social auditing system is in place at the community level. Guidelines on how communities can monitor and provide or receive feedback on school feeding planning, implementation and evaluation need to be strengthened.⁵⁷

Question 2 Summary of findings

Overall, WFP has made significant efforts to transition the USDA FFE programmes to the governments across the Asia/Pacific region. All four country governments are highly engaged in school feeding and working with WFP and other partners to develop a sustainable way forward towards national ownership. WFP has worked hard over several years to produce a policy environment in each country that is conducive to national ownership of school feeding. Although only Lao PDR currently has a specific school feeding policy, Bangladesh has also made significant inroads towards an approved national policy on school feeding. Cambodia is in the process of developing a specific Scholarship Framework to support the implementation of cash scholarships (for THR) for primary school children and plans to develop a school feeding policy are underway in Nepal. As the policy environment is closely linked with the government's ability to finance programmes in a sustainable way, this element of work is key.

Evaluation reports indicate that the Government of Bangladesh started taking over WFP school feeding schools in 2011. However, there is not yet a transition plan regarding the McGovern-Dole supported schools. Currently Cambodia has a Road Map to transition ownership to the government by 2021, and the first phase of transition of the Nepal programme is described in an Operational Plan due for completion in 2023. The current Cambodia grant ends in 2019 and the current Nepal grant ends in 2021 so this phase of programming will not see the full transition to the government in either country. WFP and the Government of Lao PDR signed a School Feeding Handover Plan in May 2018 and it is in the early stages of implementation.

The governments of all four countries have specific units/offices in place, responsible for the management and implementation of school feeding activities. This is a major step in the transition to national ownership, as the ministries of education agree to take on the responsibility for the programme. However, the financial commitment from the governments have not yet been fully articulated, with concerns noted in several evaluation reports that government funding is not yet available on a permanent basis and/or that the systems are not yet in place to ensure timely provision of funds to schools.

WFP has also worked closely with the ministries of education to ensure that the design of the school feeding activities going forward align with the governments' preferences, capacities and interests, and are not restricted to the USDA programme design. As a result, each country should eventually implement school feeding activities that they are able to sustain.

⁵⁶ NRM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

⁵⁷ Gill, N (2015) Nepal School Feeding SABER Country Report

In Bangladesh, the government has taken over the distribution of micronutrient fortified biscuits as per earlier USDA support. However, WFP and the government are currently piloting hot in-school meals and this is likely to be the model that the government will implement eventually. The design of the nationally owned in-school meals in the other countries is yet to be determined. At this stage it appears that none of the countries are taking over USDA's food-based approach using imported food. All four countries are currently looking at using cash-based approaches and/or HGSP approaches.

The USDA supported programmes have therefore been used not as a template for future school feeding models, but as a stepping stone to help governments understand the benefits of school feeding, help them realize that a nationally owned school feeding programme is more sustainable and also learn from the USDA model to work out an appropriate programme design that can be implemented by the government given their preferences and capacities.

The final evaluation report from Bangladesh indicates that the Government is also interested in taking on the literacy activities of the USDA programme. Nepal already has a National Early Grade Reading Programme, so the literacy component of the USDA programme will be carried on through there. In Cambodia, with WFP's support through the implementing partner World Education, the government has developed three Early Grade Reading Standards which will enable the literacy activities to continue. There is no mention of transitioning the literacy activities in the Lao PDR evaluation report.

Lastly, it is clear that all four USDA programmes are implemented with strong involvement from the local communities. The communities are highly engaged and play major roles in the implementation including providing labour for construction and cooking and providing vegetables to supplement the dry ration ingredients. The communities also participate in the management and decision making of the programme. This is important for the ongoing implementation and sustainability of the programmes.

Table 7: Summary of Findings on the Five SABER Policy Guides

		Bangladesh	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Nepal
1. Policy Framework	School feeding policy in place	Nearing approval	Scholarship Policy in place but no policy regarding in-school meals	Achieved	Development planned for 2020
	Multiple national policies mention SF	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
2. Financial Capacity	National SF programme in place	Achieved	Government runs cash scholarships in place but no in-school meals programme	No government run school meals programme	Achieved
	Permanent national funding in place	Government funds a national programme but no plan to finance the USDA-funded schools	Government funds cash scholarships in some districts but no plan to finance the USDA-funded schools	No government funding	Government funds a national programme but no plan to finance the USDA-funded schools
3. Institutional Capacity and Coordination	Government body in place to manage SF	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
4. Design and Implementation	Design of handed over SF programme decided	Achieved	Cash scholarships agreed but design of in-school meals not agreed	No agreement on preferred school meals modalities	Achieved
5. Community roles	Strong community engagement and participation	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved

Question 3: What are the Factors that Positively or Negatively Influenced the Ability of the Programmes to Reach Their Objectives?

The analysis of success and failure factors across the FFE programmes showed that most were specific to each country, related to the context. However, there were some factors that were consistently mentioned by evaluation teams across the region.

Success factors that were identified in multiple countries included the support from communities, close collaboration with government institutions and partnerships with education agencies to achieve literacy objectives. Insufficient incentives for cooks and other community members who help run the school meals programme was the only factor identified to negatively influence the ability of WFP Country Offices to achieve the intended results in more than one country.

Bangladesh: The positive factors identified as having contributed to the results include the programme's alignment with national policies, close collaboration with and permanent technical support to government institutions and partnering with a local institution to promote quality in education. School Meal Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations were identified as a key factor in monitoring teacher and student attendance, and in making school gardens sustainable. Mother gatherings were found to have helped increase hygiene, nutrition and dietary awareness, while creative teaching techniques improved student attentiveness.

On the other hand, precarious school infrastructure, shortage of teachers, overcrowded classes and temporary school closures due to floods were some of the external factors identified as impeding the success of the programme. The evaluation team also found that the implementation of too many complementary activities hampered the overall efficiency of the programme⁵⁸ and reduced its ability to achieve the objectives.

Strong collaboration with the government and a focus on capacity strengthening has promoted the sustainability of school meals. Investing in staff to specifically work with the Directorate of Primary

Education (DPE) has contributed to the success of the programme. Multi-sectoral engagement in policy design was also noted by the evaluation team as a contributing factor for the successful development of the National School Feeding Policy.

Cambodia: The support and commitment of the MoEYS was considered crucial for the success of the programme; MoEYS personnel were involved at district and provincial level and participated in regular school feeding meetings. This was considered a major success factor of the FFE programme. Another was the significant inputs from local communities, who contributed to the programme with the provision of cooks, firewood, water and vegetables.⁵⁹



Children in Kalikot in western Nepal wash their hands at school. This is part of a joint project between WFP and USDA to improve children's health and nutrition.

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Furthermore, a well-managed, strong, innovative and flexible Country Office, in particular the contributions of the experienced education, Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM), and supply chain teams, were

⁵⁸ Econometria (2018) Final Evaluation of McGovern-Dole-supported School Feeding Programme in Bangladesh: March 2015 – December 2017. September 2018.

⁵⁹ The KonTerra Group (2017) Endline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education (FFE) Programme for WFP Cambodia. Evaluation Report, November 2017.

identified as one of the main factors contributing to the success of the programme.⁶⁰ Partnering with strong implementing partners in country was also critical to success. A phone-based feedback mechanism also helped to solve problems and thus improve the results for the programme. Last but not least, several other agencies who were implementing reading, teacher training, and infrastructure rehabilitation and construction activities in the USDA supported schools were found to have contributed to the results of the FFE programme.

Lao PDR: The evaluation team identified several success factors including close collaboration with government institutions, close collaboration with other agencies, close collaboration with local government recognized partners, capacity building activities and support from communities. In addition, creating an improved learning environment at school as well as at home, and engaging with parents was found to help improve literacy among students.⁶¹

On the other hand, lack of water access, inadequate incentives for cooks and storekeepers, insufficient training of cooks, storekeepers and teachers, insufficient focus on capacity building, and a weak monitoring system with insufficient training were found to have negatively influenced the results of the FFE programme in Lao PDR.⁶²

Nepal: The final evaluation of the 2014-2017 Nepal FFE programme does not include a discussion of the success. On the other hand, the following factors were found to have negatively influenced the results of the FFE programme in Nepal: limited geographical coverage, insufficient cooperation with other agencies and insufficient incentives for cooks and other community members who help run the school meals programme.⁶³

The evaluation team noted that complementary activities were carried out in only a limited number of schools, thus the results achieved in the various USDA supported schools showed immense variations.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ NRM (2018). USDA McGovern-Dole FY14 Endline Evaluation in Lao PDR. Report of Endline Evaluation. October 2018

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sambodhi Research and Narma Consulting (2018) USDA McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program in Nepal (2014-2017). Draft Endline Evaluation Report. April 2018.

Recommendations for Future Programming and Evaluations

Programme Related Recommendations

- WFP Country Offices implementing USDA McGovern-Dole FFE programmes should note the key factors that have contributed to the success of the Asia/Pacific programmes and try and replicate them where possible:
 - Strong collaboration with national governments
 - Close collaboration with education partners for the implementation of literacy activities
 - Strong community support
- **Improving literacy (early grade reading):** Formal partnerships with agencies specialized in literacy activities provides a stronger opportunity for the programme to engage in literacy activities. WFP Country Offices implementing McGovern-Dole FFE programmes should therefore ensure that there is an implementation partnership established with an agency that has specialized skills in literacy and/or education.
- **Increased use of health and dietary practices:** WFP Country Offices to continue to provide schools with support to improve the school health and hygiene environment through their implementing partners, including ensuring that supported schools have access to clean water and appropriate sanitation facilities. Providing training on health, hygiene, nutrition and safe food preparation is also important to promote the use of good health and dietary practices.
- **National ownership:** WFP Country Offices should continue to build on the work already done to transition the USDA supported school meals programmes to national ownership.
- Learning from the challenges and successes from other programmes in the region should be disseminated to ensure all programmes can benefit from the lessons learned.

Monitoring and Evaluation Related Recommendations

- WFP Evaluation Managers with support from Regional Evaluation Officers and WFP's Office of Evaluation should ensure that all evaluation teams are briefed on the USDA McGovern-Dole FFE Results Framework and ensure that appropriate assessment of achievement of objectives and targets are included in the evaluation reports.
- WFP Country Offices should ensure that each programme has clearly defined indicators and targets and that these are monitored throughout the programme. Baseline and endline target values should be established for all programme indicators. If results of the baseline study shows that the targets have been set too high, COs should consider revising them to a more realistic level immediately after baseline, as allowed under USDA guidelines.
- Evaluation Managers should ensure that evaluation TORs systematically include evaluation questions that relate to the enabling/hindering factors – both internal and external to WFP.
- Regional Evaluation Officers and School Feeding Evaluation Officer supporting MGD evaluations should continue supporting COs commissioning MGD evaluations and promote a common approach on the use of SABER to assess transition towards nationally owned programmes.
- WFP's School Feeding Division in consultation with WFP's Office of Evaluation and Regional Bureaux to explore with USDA opportunities for securing funding to conduct a McGovern-Dole synthesis of a wider range of evaluations across regions, possibly ex-ante.

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