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# Overview of Nutrition Activities in Bhutan 2019-2023

School Nutrition	Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture	Food Fortification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food safety through improved kitchen and storage facilities</li> <li>• Improved dietary habits through nutritious school meals and behaviour change campaigns</li> <li>• Nutrition education through school curriculums and interactive game-based learning</li> <li>• Strengthen supply chain efficiency for school meals</li> <li>• Real-time, robust M&amp;E systems for integrated nutrition, health and education data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of nutritious local foods for school meals</li> <li>• Capacity development of small holder farmers/groups</li> <li>• Strengthen capacities of government agencies</li> <li>• Support the development of Bhutan's 2040 Agricultural Strategy</li> <li>• Pilot climate resilient and nutrition-sensitive agriculture production in partnership with the World Bank, IFAD and FAO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory and compliance framework</li> <li>• Micronutrient survey</li> <li>• Building in-house production (blending) capacity</li> <li>• Strengthen quality assurances including laboratory testing and analysis</li> <li>• Advocacy and communication</li> <li>• Consumption of fortified food through institutional and commercial outlets</li> </ul>

## Nutrition situation

The prevalence of undernutrition from the 2015 National Nutrition Survey is at 21 percent for stunting, 4 percent for wasting and 9 percent for underweight. This is a reduction from 2010 when the prevalence rates were 33.5 percent, 6 percent and 13 percent respectively. Despite these impressive nutritional progress, Bhutan sees an increase in overnutrition and micronutrient deficiency contributing to the increasing level of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD), responsible for 69 percent of the reported disease burden in Bhutan. The prevalence of overweight among children under 5 was reported at 7.6 percent in 2010, more than double the rate reported two decades earlier and obesity rate among adult Bhutanese is 25 percent.

Anaemia continues to be a major public health issue with 44 percent of 6-59 months old children anaemic. Over 35 percent of non-pregnant women and 31 percent of adolescent girls are also anaemic - an important indicator of future health as 6 percent of girls are married by the age of 15 and 26 percent by age 18. More than 1 in 5 preschool aged children and 17 percent of pregnant women are deficient in Vitamin A.

The traditional Bhutanese diet is high in consumption of carbohydrates and animal fats, with low level of consumption of fruits and vegetables as 67 percent do not consume adequate fruits or vegetables. Salt consumption is also high at 9 grams a day, almost double the WHO recommended level of 5g/day. The ways of cooking and preparing meals are such that it tends to reduce the nutritional value of the food.

## WFP support to nutrition

After successfully handing over the operations of school feeding programme to the Royal Government, WFP has repositioned itself in Bhutan to assist in strengthening government owned nutrition, health and agriculture programmes contributing to enhanced nutrition and health benefits for the Bhutanese population.

WFP has committed to support the following activities in its 5-year Country Strategic Plan: (CSP) 2019-2023:



World Food Programme

“We want to invest as much as we can in wholesome development, emotional wellbeing, and resilience of our children and young people..... We will focus on nutritional requirements of our school children; we call it qualitative

rather than quantitative feeding of our school children.”

Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan

## School Nutrition

The transition to the National Nutrition Programme will ensure that children’s nutritional and health status are improved through provision of nutritious meals.

WFP supports the Ministry of Education (MoE) in this transition by **designing cost-optimized nutritious school menus based on local and seasonal food using an online menu optimizer platform.**

Through the consumption of nutritious school meals, school children are developing an appetite for healthy diets that continue later in life. Aimed at making a healthier and productive future population of the country with reduced rates of NCDs and micronutrient deficiencies, WFP assists the ministries of Education, Health and Agriculture in **developing a national social behaviour change communication campaign for improved dietary and health practices of school children (6-18 years).** This is further reinforced through nutrition and health education using the improved school curriculum, currently being developed with the Royal Education Council and UNICEF, for classroom teachings as well as developing a digital and interactive game-based learning platform.

Programme effectiveness is enhanced through **monitoring and evaluating systems using real-time, integrated nutrition, health and education data from schools** that feeds into evidence-based policy decisions.

To produce healthy and safe meals, schools require appropriate infrastructure. To facilitate this, WFP together with MoE is **developing national standards for school kitchen, stores and kitchen equipment.** The Royal Government is expanding school meals to additional rural schools where new kitchen and stores are required. WFP partners in this activity through construction of 27 new kitchen and stores as well as refurbishment of additional 34 existing school kitchen and stores across the country.

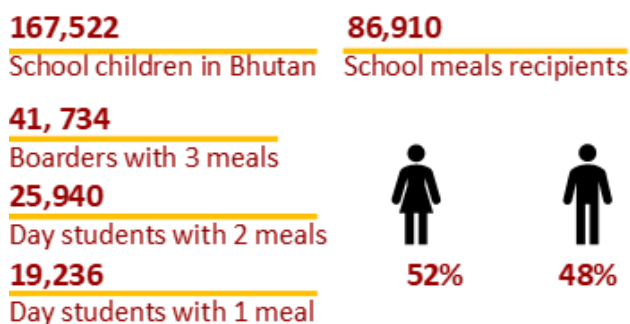
Being a mountainous country, transportation of food commodities to all schools across the country has significant financial implications to the Royal Government. The scale-up plan of the Government to reach 95 percent of all schools in the country by 2021 comes with additional costs. One way to bring about **cost efficiency is to reduce supply chain costs of the programme through WFP’s expertise.**

WFP further partners with the Ministry of Health in the revision of its National Health Policy (2020-30) and in developing the National Nutrition Strategy (2019-23) in partnership with UNICEF. These policies aim to increase national goals and multi-sectoral collaborations with other sectors required for effective national health and nutrition programmes and services.

## Nutrition-sensitive Agriculture

To meet the demand for nutritious foods for preparation of nutritious school meals and to support local agricultural production, WFP collaborates with the Ministry of Agriculture and

Forests in **enhancing the production and entrepreneurial capacity of local smallholder farmers groups.** This is in support to the Royal Government’s initiative to increase self-sustainability through increased local agricultural production and local economy. Assisting the **development of the Bhutan 2040 Agricultural Strategy,** WFP strengthens capacities of government agencies, smallholder farmers groups and **pilot climate resilient and nutrition-sensitive agriculture production in partnership with the World Bank, IFAD and FAO.**



## Food Fortification

Fortified rice, which was included in school meals in 2017, helps in meeting multiple micronutrient requirements of school children. Fortified oil with Vitamin A and D also forms part of the school feeding food basket. With introduction of fortification as a strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies among the Bhutanese, WFP supports the multi-sectoral Food Fortification Taskforce by **developing a regulatory and compliance framework** for the Food Fortification Programme that starts from an adoption of **Bhutanese standards for fortified rice.**

For smooth enforcement of the regulations, **capacities of relevant agencies are built and institutionalized.** WFP also supports construction of a blending facility to produce sufficient fortified rice and laboratory capacities for quality testing and analysis. With these foundations laid, WFP together with the Royal Government will expand the programme, bringing the benefits of fortified foods to other sections of the population. Taskforce by **developing a regulatory and compliance framework** for the Food Fortification Programme that starts from an adoption of **Bhutanese standards for fortified rice.**

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## Contact Information:

Svante Helms, Head of Office ([svante.helms@wfp.org](mailto:svante.helms@wfp.org))  
Further Information: [www.wfp.org/countries/bhutan](http://www.wfp.org/countries/bhutan)