

Evaluation Brief

Decentralized evaluation for evidence-based decision making

Gambia DEV 200327: Establishing the Foundation for a Nationally Owned Sustainable School Feeding Programme in the Gambia

SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

In 2012, WFP began DEV 200327 in partnership with the government of The Gambia (GoTG), with the main objective of establishing the foundation for a nationally owned and sustainable School Feeding Programme (SFP). The project targeted vulnerable children with the following expected outcomes: 1) increased access to education and human capital development, 2) increased equitable access to utilisation of education, 3) increased market opportunities for producers and traders; 4) ownership and capacity strengthened to reduce malnutrition and increase access to education; 5) progress made towards nationally owned hunger solutions. These results were to be achieved through 1) capacity development, for a future hand-over; 2) daily school meal operations (cash-based transfers and monthly family take-home rations).

The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Country Office and covered the entire period of its implementation from August 2012 to December 2017. It provided evidence-based findings to inform operational and strategic decision-making for school feeding programme and lessons learned that supported the transition to the TI-CSP and the CSP.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The objectives were to assess and report on the performance of the project for the purposes of accountability and learning. The evaluation was nutrition-sensitive by mainstreaming the contributions of SF for education, its links to social protection, and the procurement of locally produced food commodities. Gender equality and emancipation of women were a crosscutting area of attention.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team used a combination of mixed methods. Quantitative methods of analysis were hardly used, as all statistical data available contained only aggregated information on outcome indicators which made no distinction between SFP beneficiary and non-beneficiary schools. Qualitative methods, including desk review, semi-structured interviews and direct observation in schools, were extensively used to mitigate this weakness and allowed some degree of analysis by providing information regarding the results of SF for pupils' school performance.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

The SFP is certainly relevant as a social safety net as it constitutes an important form of nutritional and financial support to many vulnerable and food insecure families. The intervention is aligned with priorities of the Government of The Gambia (GoTG), WFP and other partners, particularly on capacity development. The project was adapted to the wider context in the sense that it paved the way to a hand-over of the managerial, operational and even financial responsibilities for the SFP to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) after decades of WFP-led school feeding practices.

Effectiveness

The intervention effectively prepared the foundation for a nationally owned and sustainable SFP. The first main objective has been achieved to a very large extent, but not in its entirety. Very important steps towards capacity strengthening for a hand-over of the SFP and for initiating local purchases were found. A step-by-step road map for guiding the remaining stages of capacity strengthening of MoBSE was being prepared at the time of the evaluation.



The second strategic objective has been achieved to a large extent, but not completely due to the irregularity of the school meals. Overall, although significant results of the project were noted, the incomplete monitoring of project's indicators made it difficult to fully assess the degree of its achievements and the impact of SF on the school performance of the pupils.

Efficiency

Funding shortfalls, amounting to half of the approved budget, occurred for every region in the country and throughout the whole period. As a probable consequence, there have been too many interruptions in the flow of the food supply to the schools. After the introduction of direct cash transfers to a selected number of schools in 2016, the same pattern of delays continued, caused by late transfers, partly linked to late or insufficient reporting by the schools on the preceding transfers.

The cost per meal in the CBT modality was higher than in the in-kind modality. The CBT modality is about 28% more expensive but offers perspectives for multiple impacts: 1. school meals that benefit children in their growing and learning processes, 2. a significantly increased collaboration between the community and the school that must be very active, and performance based, and 3. the establishing of a regular market for part of local food production.

The average cost of one school meal over the past years corresponds rather well with the average cost of school meals in a series of other low-income African countries. This points to a satisfactory level of efficiency of the implementation of this project

Sustainability

Preparation for the future hand-over to the GoTG was an essential element in the design of the project. Even if the capacity of the MoBSE is still insufficient for a fully effective take-over of the SFP, valuable stepping stones on the roadmap towards a nationally owned school feeding programme were found. The existence of a National School Feeding Policy and of a specific budget line for SF in the national budget are examples of progress towards sustainability. The project still did not fully achieve its goal of preparing the transition of the SFP from the WFP to the GoTG, but efforts were still ongoing at the time of the evaluation.

Impact

School meals have been a significant income transfer, and food support to poor families and communities creating more than 5 million USD since the start of the project. The local economy is also being significantly supported by the local purchases, although most of the food purchases for the school meal preparation are, however, made from traders, and not from farmers directly.

The project contributed to the participation of girls in primary schools and in their communities, which promoted the completion of primary education of girls and increased the participation of local female farmers in the school feeding food market.

The earlier entry to school of pupils, as result of school meals, is likely to have a long-term positive effect on the school careers of a large number of pupils. However, so far, because of the limited monitoring of the school performance parameters of the assisted schools, no positive correlation could be found between school meals and better school results.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

This project, which envisaged the gradual strengthening of the MoBSE to progressively take over the responsibility of the SFP, is overall a very beneficial action, as it also promoted local procurement and community mobilization and participation. DEV 200327 was adequately designed and corresponds to the needs of vulnerable and food-insecure families in the poorer districts. It constitutes a systematic transfer of the value of food to these poorer families and allows them in this way to keep sending their children to school, even at a very early age.

School feeding is highly valued throughout Gambian society and an important factor in support of this project's success is the increasing manifestation of a clear political commitment to the development of a homegrown SFP on the part of the GoTG.

Recommendations

R1 The WFP should urgently improve its monitoring of the education parameters that should show evidence of the positive impact of school feeding

R2 The WFP should facilitate the preparation of a realistic and consensual operational plan or road map for the hand-over of responsibilities for the school feeding programme from the WFP to the MoBSE

R3 WFP should avoid as much as possible the systematic interruptions of both food supply and cash transfers to schools.

R4 WFP should create conditions for the design of improved implementation mechanisms, procedures, norms, and monitoring systems.

R5 WFP should assist the MoBSE to upgrade and improve the existing mechanisms of accountability and security at school level, in relation to school meals

R6 WFP should assist the MoBSE in promoting the purchase of locally produced food

R7 WFP should assist the MoBSE to explore and find possible solutions for processing and preparing of «coos» (from maize and millet).

R8 In partnership with UNICEF and contingent on funding WFP should hand over the school meal programme with fully refurbished school kitchens, and with good sources of potable water for cooking and drinking.

R9 WFP should review the take-home ration of rice of the cooks and transfer the cash-equivalent in school implementing the CBT modality.