



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP Bhutan Country Brief October 2020



The Resident Coordinator presenting WFP in Bhutan, through the Speaker of the Parliament, with the Nobel Peace Prize 2020

Operational Context

Bhutan will transition to lower Middle-Income Level status by 2023 and considers WFP's support critical to this transition process.

The national poverty rate, as measured by the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per person per day (PPP), has fallen from 23 percent in 2007 to 8.2 percent in 2017.

Although people's overall nutritional status has improved, health problems related to a lack of nutritional and balanced diets remain a challenge, including micronutrient deficiencies.

Bhutan remains highly vulnerable to earthquakes but lacks the necessary data information systems, response plans and coordination systems to adequately prepare for emergencies.

WFP has been present in Bhutan since 1974.



Population: **0.73 million**

2015 Human Development Index: **132 out of 188**

Income Level: **Lower middle**

Chronic malnutrition: **21.2% of children between 6-59 months**

Highlights

In a final annual work plan review with the Government, WFP maintained its commitments towards zero hunger and aligned these with the Prime Minister's four priority activities for the COVID-19 response (employment generation, increased production, import substitution and export promotion).

Operational Updates

1. During the discussion with the Government on annual work plans, WFP committed to supporting agriculture production of nutritious crops including winter vegetables, to facilitating post-harvest management research and equipment, as well as supporting food processing and value addition. These will build towards achieving self-sufficiency and import substitution.
2. WFP also agreed to focus on facilitating linking of farmers and farmer groups to markets (schools, institutions, local and national markets). WFP will also provide value chain support to link agricultural primary production to agribusinesses (storing, processing, and marketing) that are aligned to employment generation, import substitution, and export promotion.
3. Together with the Department of Disaster Management, WFP will be conducting a three-day dissemination workshop of the findings of the earthquake impact assessment which was jointly conducted with Durham University (UK) at the end of November 2019. The workshop will focus on the earthquake impact and impact analysis tools for Bhutan and share the key findings. Based on the findings the key disaster risk management sectors will kick-off sectoral earthquake preparedness action plans which will be tested through a functional simulation.
4. Recognizing the urgent needs in storage systems for food and emergency supplies, WFP is handing over to the Department of Disaster Management, a container and five mobile storage units, which have now arrived and will be used for storage of food, agricultural produce or act as multi-purpose halls. This comes after WFP's handover of three mobile storage units in March 2020.

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WFP Bhutan Strategy

Country Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

Total Requirement (in USD)	Allocated Contributions (in USD)	Jan-June 2020 Net Funding Requirements (in USD)
8.9 m	5.3 m	0.0 m

Strategic Result 1: Everyone has access to food

Strategic Outcome 1: School-age children, women and vulnerable groups in Bhutan have improved nutrition in line with national targets by 2023

Focus area: Root Causes

Activities:

- Assist the Government in its transition to a national school nutrition programme based on an integrated approach to school feeding that connects school feeding with nutrition education, school health and school agriculture and embeds gender across all activities, strengthened supply chains and school nutrition infrastructure optimization.
- Provide technical assistance to the Government and the national food production and trade sectors to ensure that sound policies are in place and ensure quality and safety of fortified foods, especially rice, throughout their supply chains.

Strategic Result 5: Countries have strengthened capacities to implement the SDGs

Strategic Outcome 2: Government has strengthened capability to address food security and nutrition challenges and prepare for and respond to crises, including those resulting from climate change, by 2023.

Focus area: Root Causes

Activities:

- Provide the Government with gender-informed and vulnerability-focused capacity strengthening relevant to its management of national emergency resources, development, enhancement and testing of national emergency response plans and coordination systems, through WFP's leadership of the emergency logistics and communications sectoral working group.

Challenges

- Bhutan has limited awareness about its disaster risks, compounded by the fact that the country has not faced major disasters in recent times. There are also some knowledge gaps on the relationship between disasters and its impact on food security. In response, WFP is working with government partners to increase national disaster awareness.
- While the implementing partners in nutrition are highly committed, their numbers are limited, which hinders their ability to support the implementation of national health and nutrition strategies. WFP is therefore supporting the Department for Disaster Management to build stronger national capacity to prepare and respond to disasters.

5. In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, WFP commemorated the World Food Day 2020 on the theme "Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together. Our Actions are our Future." On this occasion, the honourable Minister of Agriculture launched a video on the rice fortification programme in Bhutan. Going forward, the rice fortification video will also be aired by the Bhutanese Broadcasting Service (BBS) in order to educate consumers about the programme. Additionally, WFP was part of an inter-agency panel discussion with representation from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Amidst the global health crisis of COVID-19 and the recent recognition of WFP's work with the Nobel Peace Prize, the panel discussion was an opportunity to reflect on this year's theme while resolving to work together with counterparts to address issues related to food, nutrition, agriculture.
6. To mark the Disaster Risk Reduction Day and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP supported the Department of Disaster Management in purchasing and distributing handwashing facilities, masks and other personal protective equipment to the most vulnerable groups of the population.
7. In response to frequent outbreaks of glossitis amongst students in some feeding schools, the Ministry of Education organized a consultation meeting in October, in which WFP participated with technical inputs and recommendations on way forward. As a result of science-based advocacy from WFP, the multi-sectoral task force under the leadership of the Ministry of Health, agreed on possible contributing factors and that a detailed investigation is required to establish a cause-effect relationship. As Vitamin B2 deficiency is a suspected cause for further investigation, WFP is now supporting the development of a management protocol for school and local health authorities while exploring technological solutions to add B2 to fortified rice.



Release of a video on rice fortification in Bhutan by the Minister of Agriculture and Forests (Photo: © WFP/Manasi Shukla).