

Summary Evaluation Report

Evaluation for evidence-based decision making



Evaluation of the Namibia National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) 2012- 2018

Introduction

This is an evaluation of the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) for the period 2012-2018, jointly commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – Namibia Country Office. The evaluation was intended to answer the question: *“To what extent have the objectives set out in the 5-year school feeding road map been achieved and what factors have affected achievement of results?”*. It was guided by 20 sub-Questions addressing evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. The intended users of this evaluation report include Government of Namibia, WFP, and other stakeholders in the private and not-for-profit sectors, with an interest in school health and nutrition.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The NSFP provides a daily serving of fortified maize meal porridge to pre-primary and primary school learners in both rural and urban areas. NSFP aims to promote school enrolment, attendance, retention and performance of boys and girls as well as to improve their nutritional status. The overall objective is stated as: *“to promote equitable participation in quality learning and education for all children in Namibia during all seasons by providing nutritious and healthy food through schools that are inherently part of the social and economic life and development of communities”*.

As per the NSFP Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (MEP), there are five (5) key outcomes associated with the achievement of the NSFP objective. Four are directly related to educational performance while the fifth relates to learners’ nutritional status, these are;

- 1. Access:** All eligible primary learners are enrolled at schools, with progress measured by the increase in enrolment;
- 2. Adherence/reduced drop out:** Enrolled learners adhere to school, with progress measured by reduced numbers of children dropping out;
- 3. Attendance:** Enrolled learners attend classes regularly, measured by reduced rates of absenteeism;
- 4. Promotion:** Enrolled learners successfully graduate to subsequent grades, measured by rates of children moving from one grade to the next and transitioning to second level of education;

- 5. Food security:** Guaranteed minimum caloric intake of all school learners during school days regardless of their household’s capacity to provide food.

The objective of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved and the factors that affect such achievements.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach combining; qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. There was review of secondary data sources provided by WFP and MoEAC as well as analysis of data bases hosted by the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the NSFP Management Information System (NASIS). Data collection took place from the 9th of September to 2nd of October 2019.

Key Findings

These are summarised below according to the evaluation criteria and twenty evaluation questions;

Evaluation Criteria 1: Relevance

The NSFP has been and remains relevant in terms of contributing to meeting food security needs and in providing a safety net for vulnerable children and communities, by assuring one hot meal a day while at school. This has proven particularly important during the current economic downturn and on-going drought where it serves as a complementary measure to other social protection and drought relief measures. The programme has moreover contributed to creating demand for school, with learners enrolling, remaining in and completing school.

Feedback from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) present a mixed picture with respect to the level of NSFP alignment, and complementarity with other Government policies and programmes. Calls for enhanced coordination, coherence and collaboration have long been made and are reiterated in the recently approved 2019 National School Feeding (NSF) policy. At national level, NSFP does feature in a number of higher level reporting frameworks and the programme is represented at a number of forums. MoEAC has some well established relationships with

other Government Ministries. At the regional levels and at the front line of service delivery, the degree of collaboration is more limited, with the programme operating somewhat in a silo, and opportunities for joint action not always recognised and/or exploited.

WFP Technical Assistance (TA) has been by and large relevant and appropriate to the needs of MoEAC at different levels. Key indicators of relevance are that TA is grounded in sound diagnostic work, is client owned and demand driven, builds on WFPs comparative advantages such as supply chain management, data analysis and food systems, and is supported by a mature working relationship. The analysis of TA effectiveness however reveals some shortcomings in delivery approach and focus.

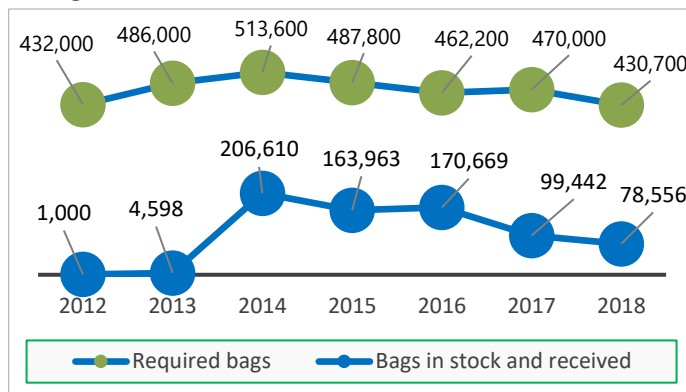
TA to the MoEAC in support of the NSFP constitutes WFPs main focus in Namibia. WFP has also provided selected TA to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in the area of Food Security, and to the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MPESW) with respect to Social Protection. The NSFP is very much at the nexus between food security and social protection. WFP is strategically placed to support government to facilitate linkages between these policy arenas and to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. Whilst this has been happening implicitly to some extent through TA provided to MoEAC, OPM and MoPESW, more could be done to ensure efforts are focused not only within each policy arena but between them as well.

The evaluation of the NSFP across the different evaluation criteria has allowed for the identification of a number of adjustments with respect to programme design and implementation that could enable it to better contribute to national development objectives. The most relevant adjustments include: i) enhancing coordination arrangements and opportunities; ii) rolling out the Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) approach; iii) mainstreaming gender in programme design and implementation and iv) strengthening the indicator framework to better capture results and improve the evidence base.

Evaluation Criteria 2: Effectiveness

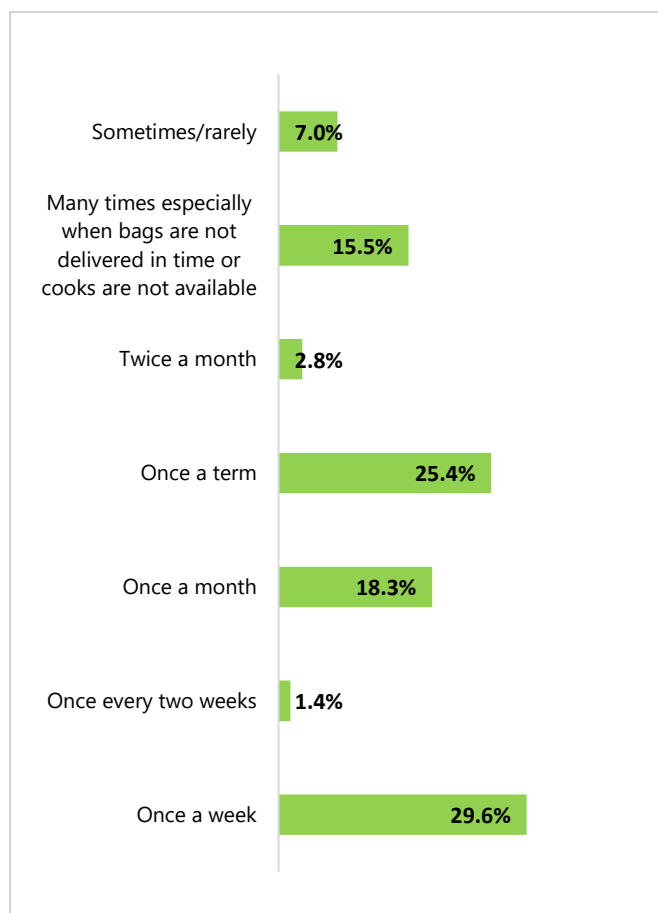
To what extent have the expected outputs and outcomes been achieved (as outlined in the NSFP Road Map and M&E plan) and equitably distributed across target groups? At output level, programme performance has been mixed. The biggest reported concern is the late delivery of maize blend to schools.

Figure 1: Quantities of Food Required and Received in bags (Source: NASIS)



Late delivery has a knock-on effect on the ability of schools to serve meals on a daily basis according to specified standards. With respect to arrangements for storage, preparation and serving of meals, there is clear evidence of improvement over the evaluation period but the very high targets set remain to be achieved.

Figure 2: How often school meals are not served (N=71) (Source: NSFP Evaluation (2019) school survey data)



Reference:

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Many schools continue to serve food with sub-standard storage and cooking facilities and almost all schools have no sheltered eating areas. Implements for cooking and eating are typically in short supply. The issue of remuneration of cooks remains a challenge.

Figure 3: Proportion of Schools Serving Food Every Day (Source: NASIS data 2014-2018)

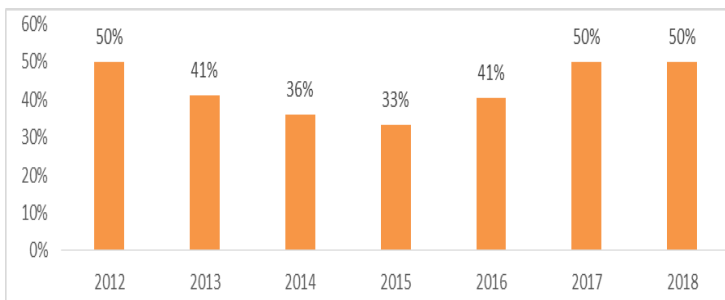
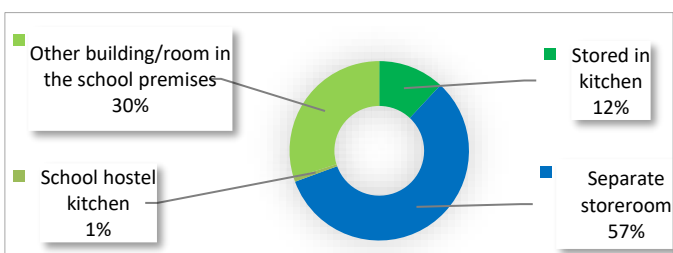


Figure 4: Type of Food Storage facility (N=134) (Source: NSFP Evaluation (2019) school survey data)



Programme performance at outcome level is based on overall educational performance outcomes. Therefore it is not possible to establish direct attribution between programme outputs and wider educational outcomes. What is clear is that educational outcomes have improved over the evaluation period and it may be concluded that the programme has contributed to increasing levels of enrolment, attendance, retention and completion. The evaluation also identified a number of unforeseen and unintended outcomes such as perceived household dependency on the school meal, stigmatisation in mostly urban and peri-urban schools and in few rural schools related to the programme being seen as a programme for the poor and genderisation of community level roles and responsibilities with respect to school feeding.

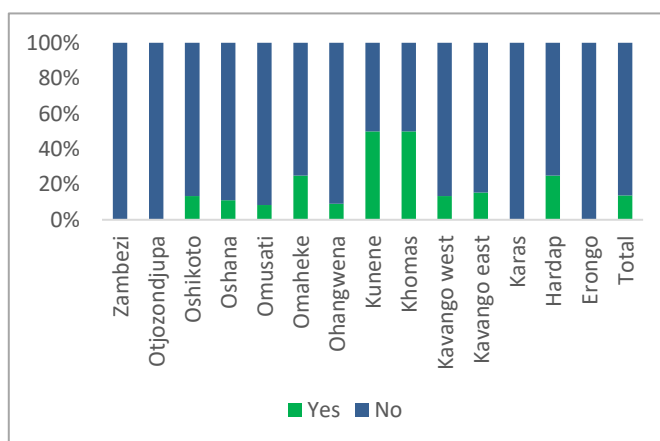
Despite good diagnostic work, the high level of ownership for the TA provided to MoEAC, and a positive working relationship between MoEAC and WFP, there is a question mark over the effectiveness of the TA in terms of building sustainable NSFP delivery capacity. At the TA output level, objectives have been largely achieved and TA support may be deemed effective. It is clear that the Ministry is very satisfied with the support provided and that many of the priority actions listed in the roadmap

have been tackled. At the TA outcome level, however, the picture is more mixed.

A major underlying reason relates to staffing constraints faced by the MoEAC. Simply put, the Ministry is constrained to mobilise the right numbers of persons with appropriate skills and competency to run the programme at all levels. This raises questions of sustainability and effectiveness of the capacity development model being used.

Improvements in learning and ownership lie at the core of capacity development. Sustainable capacity cannot be realised in the absence of ownership, whilst ownership without learning will not achieve performance improvement. With respect to learning, TA interventions included training events, study tours, knowledge sharing events, and the development of promotional materials. There was also the placement of short and long term experts within the Ministry. With respect to promoting ownership, TA sought ways to broaden awareness, understanding, interest and support for the NSFP at all levels.

Figure 5: Cooks who have received training by region (N=138) (Source: NSFP Evaluation (2019) school survey data)



Some of the training events listed above could play a dual role, combining the delivery of technical knowledge with elements of advocacy and campaigning. Whilst it is possible to identify the potential role that these different interventions can play towards learning and ownership, it is much more challenging to assess the extent to which lasting ownership has been created across all stakeholder groups or how far learning has been translated into routinised performance improvement, although overall it may be discerned that understanding and ownership for the NSFP has broadened over the evaluation period.

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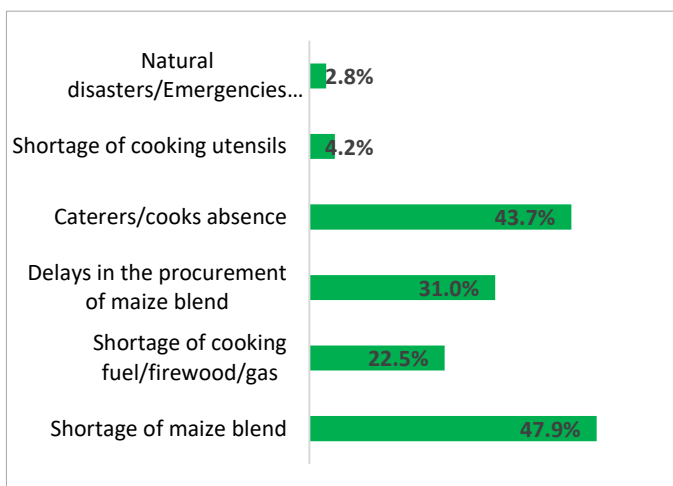
Evaluation Criteria 3: Efficiency

The average cost of NSFP borne by MoEAC at all levels is estimated at NAD 326.80 (US\$ 22.00)¹ per child per year. The total cost of school feeding including community level contributions and those from WFP is NAD 359.10 (US\$ 24.20) per child per year. These costs are a significant rise from the costs as projected in 2012, which estimated the unit cost on the learner would be NAD 282 (US\$ 18.96) – representing a 27.3% increase over a 5-year period.

Capital, commodities, transport, staff, and administration remain the most relevant categories. Within these categories, commodities take up about 81% of the total costs leaving only 19% to meet the other costs. While this might seem desirable, it might also signal an under investment in programme support components such as M&E and staffing.

The evaluation team was unable to provide a robust response to the efficiency question in relation to the TA because the criteria for judging the effect TA support could have on programme cost management is not well defined. Whilst WFP facilitated the conduct of a Cost Analysis in 2014, it is not clear how this information was subsequently acted on. Whilst TA supported the development of NASIS and the MEP, the observed weaknesses in reporting through NASIS, impacting on the reliability and timeliness of data, will have limited the opportunity to use such data to manage costs. For example, data on actual food delivered compared to food ordered, and on actual consumption patterns at the school level is difficult to obtain.

Figure 6: Reasons for School Meals Not Being Prepared (N=71)



Where are the opportunities for cost savings to improve efficiency without sacrificing effectiveness? The evaluation concludes that the overall unit cost per learner

is optimal in its current state and a reduction below NAD 359 per learner per year could potentially reduce the quality of the programme. This is because the National Cost Assessment (NCA) was unable to establish any excesses in expenditure that might be of significant effect on the overall cost of the programme.

Evaluation Criteria 4: Impact

The NSFP results framework as reflected in the MEP only specifies results at the output and outcome levels. Therefore, there are no impact level measures specified for the programme. Accordingly, the evaluation has not been able to conduct a systematic analysis of results at the level of impacts. What is provided is a set of ideas and insights obtained during the course of the evaluation which provide pointers on possible longer term impacts of the programme with respect to:

- i) For boys and girls: the expectation that learners will progress to secondary school and eventually equip themselves with know-how and skills to progress to tertiary education and/or to allow them to compete in the labour market;
- ii) for households: the prospect of raising an educated and healthy child who will be expected to provide support to other family members, offering a pathway out of poverty and vulnerability due to savings in household income over time;
- iii) for schools: the prospect of achieving better results across the school population and obtaining a reputation for being a performing and caring institution;
- iv) for communities: stronger performing schools can be expected to elicit pride and confidence in the functioning of their local institution. This might attract higher levels of participation in the School Board thereby strengthening links between the community at large and the school.

Evaluation Criteria 5: Sustainability

The future sustainability of the NSFP will depend on the presence of a number of factors, many of which have been referred to in the discussion of other evaluation criteria. A selection of the most significant factors are examined with respect to NSFP relevance, performance, leadership and capacity. It is argued that if programme relevance can be demonstrated, if high levels of performance can be achieved and if capacity and leadership can be nurtured, then the sustainability of the programme in an evolving political, economic and environmental context is all the more likely.

¹ 1 US\$ = 14.8434 NAD

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The Evaluation Team understands that the MoEAC took over the full management of the NSFP in 1996. The team has, therefore, approached the question of sustainability from the point of view of assessing the current capacity of the NSFP delivery system and the effect this has had on programme performance. Broader public sector management challenges related to decentralisation and human resources management that impact on delivery are identified. Whilst challenges associated with the bedding in of new work processes associated with decentralisation are noted, opportunities in terms of enhanced coordination and accountability are recognised. The attraction and retention of staff to fully support programme implementation has remained a challenge. Instability in the workforce can undermine efforts to build sustainable capacity.

This impacts on the functioning of some of the core delivery processes, particularly supply chain management, the management of information and M&E, and the storage, preparation and serving of meals at schools. The non-availability of the NSFP manual for users mainly at school level is a further weakness rendering it more difficult to assure and sustain standard operating procedures. It is noteworthy that programme performance has depended heavily on local leadership and commitment at the school level to innovate and seek coping strategies, where core systems have failed to perform optimally.

Evaluation Criteria 6: Learning

Programme effects on gender are examined from the perspective of learners and the community at large. The evaluation notes that whilst boys and girls have benefitted equally from the NSFP, there are sub-sets of learners that are at risk of not enjoying the full benefits. These relate to various aspects of vulnerability including, disability, the specific circumstances of pregnant learners, the requirements of the girl child to have access to appropriate menstrual management facilities and the stigma associated with older boys being perceived as poor and the impact this can have on their sense of masculinity. With respect to the community at large, the evaluation notes that the manner in which responsibilities are assigned to support school feeding duties tends to reinforce gender roles and stereotypes with women being predominantly involved in food preparation.

Issues related to the opportunity cost for women providing free labour are also discussed, given that many cooks spend as much as 6-8 hours a day supporting school feeding, time which could be used to meet other household responsibilities and/or seek alternative sources of paid income.

In terms of identifying remaining gaps and challenges in implementation of the roadmap, MEP and TA

agreements, a rapid stock-take of progress against the roadmap's five standards was conducted as a proxy for all three reference documents. The stock take acknowledges a good level of progress overall.

However, there are many areas that remain a work in progress and a few, where action remains to be taken. It is noted that the updates conducted in 2014 and again in 2016 have helped to keep the roadmap current and relevant providing a reference for MoEAC and WFP to routinely review where efforts have made impact and where additional effort is required. Based on a review of the gender analysis checklist, there was very little evidence of attention paid to gender integration in the roadmap.

The checklist explored various categories that reflect how far the interests and needs of women, men, boys and girls were taken into account.

With respect to the application of good practices in relation to knowledge sharing and evidence-based programme design, the ET notes that the concept of good practice is not defined. Various methods were indeed used to promote learning and knowledge sharing. The extent to which good practices were applied was however difficult to discern. The evaluation has confirmed the overall relevance of the support provided, the overall satisfaction of MoEAC and the generally high level of effectiveness.

Going forward, WFP is encouraged to review the robustness of the way in which it plans capacity development support, ensuring that it is underpinned by effective capacity diagnostic and accompanied by explicit intervention logic and monitoring framework.

The ET meanwhile has identified various actions that could be considered good practice with respect to improving evidence-based programme design. These include the diagnostic work carried out at start of evaluation period which led to the roadmap, the setting-up of NASIS as a management, learning and reporting tool along side the MEP, and the application of WFP's Cost Assessment Tool as a means for better understanding cost parameters.

Evaluation Criteria 7: Benchmarks for Design Improvements and Home-Grown School Feeding

The recently adopted National School Feeding Policy reconfirms Government commitment to adopting the HGFSF approach. Discussions on HGFSF are not new with the idea already in discussion at the time the Road Map was launched in 2012. Overall there is a good level of appreciation of what HGFSF entails and of the considerable challenges that will need to be addressed if the approach is to be viable.

The ET's consultations with stakeholders reaffirmed the high level of commitment of stakeholders to HGFSF, the

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appreciation of the challenges that need to be addressed and the opportunities that are already in place to build upon. It is noted that MoEAC plans to launch four pilots to test out different modalities in different parts of the country and intends to do so with the support of WFP.

The ET proposes the following set of design considerations:

- i) clarify the linkages between the different objectives of HGSF;
- ii) accommodate regional contextual variations into a generic HGSF approach;
- iii) take account of the cost implications of adopting the HGSF Approach;
- iv) take account of current operational bottlenecks, recognising the additional complexity of the HGSF;
- v) recognise the need to establish and maintain strong relationships with other state and non-actors;
- vi) identify a range of different value-chains, which offer potential to respond to the HGSF agenda;
- vii) pay specific attention to gender dimensions of women's participation in HGSF.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

NSFP has evolved from a pilot initiative into a nationally funded and executed programme operational in all regions and reaching over 377,000 learners. This is a commendable achievement. MoEAC as custodian of the programme has reached out to WFP for technical support and guidance to assure application of good practice and improved results. Through this collaboration, a strong partnership has been forged. NSFP enjoys broad support and appreciation, with its contribution to relieving hunger and promoting access and retention unquestioned.

It remains relevant particularly in a period of recurring drought and economic downturn, responding to core Government policy frameworks whilst providing relief to learners and carers/ parents alike. Yet the delivery system is operating sub-optimally, a situation that consequently undermines intended impacts. Where core systems underperform, achievements depend heavily on local leadership and commitment at the school level to innovate and seek coping strategies. Systemic challenges identified already in 2012 have to some degree been overcome and it is clear that WFP TA has helped MoEAC to address a number of these. Yet there are a number that persist—most notably challenges related to staffing at national and regional levels, which impact on sustainability, quality assurance and efforts aimed at continuous improvement.

Going forward, getting core delivery systems right has to be a priority, including paying attention to core capabilities for delivery. This is because it is these that will determine whether the programme performs to expectations or not. At the same time, there is reason to cautiously explore and test out a new generation NSFP guided by the Home Grown approach, mindful however of the additional complexity this is likely to arise. NSFP has the potential to be more than a feeding programme, by building on its strategic position within the school environment, and serving as a platform and catalyst for promoting social inclusion and community resilience. For that to work, it will require a much more deliberate effort to promote inter-sector/agency collaboration/cooperation at all levels. Gender in this context needs to be treated as an integral part of any change strategy/intervention logic for the programme and any external assistance provided.

Call to Action: Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this evaluation leads to the following recommendations;

1. Evidence Based Decision-Making

To ensure programme decision-making is guided by evidence and learning, MoEAC, with support from its development partners should further enhance both the MEP and MIS of the NSFP. These enhancements include:

- 1.1 Developing tools for measuring progress against MEP outcome 5 on improving nutritional and dietary status, possibly accompanied by periodic anthropometric assessments within select schools;
- 1.2 Integrating selected NSFP monitoring data into EMIS;
- 1.3 Expanding NASIS to include routine cost/ expenditure monitoring;
- 1.4 Incorporating indicators that recognise women's contribution to programme delivery;
- 1.5 Recording the numbers of learners actually receiving a meal, by gender and age/ grade, on a daily basis;
- 1.6 Rectifying remaining bottlenecks/ adjustments with respect to NASIS functionality;
- 1.7 Developing a MoEAC dissemination strategy to routinely analyse, publish and communicate NASIS data to relevant users, including parents.

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2. Guaranteeing Delivery of Fortified Porridge to Participating Schools

To ensure learners receive a meal each school day without exception, urgent actions are required to resolve existing supply chain bottlenecks and optimise standard operating procedures. Recommended actions include:

- 2.1 Conducting a diagnostic study of supply chain bottlenecks with a view to proposing a set of short term remedial actions and longer term solutions;
- 2.2 Developing procedures and assigning clear responsibilities to ensure the systematic, timely and routine quality checking of maize blend along the supply chain;
- 2.3 Reviewing existing guidelines and preparing a directive on the correct procedures to follow with respect to handling of expired and/ or spoilt maize bags;
- 2.4 Expediting the transfer of responsibility for procurement of transport services to regions in line with the ongoing decentralisation process.

3. Sustaining Delivery Capacity

To assure the long-term sustainability of the NSFP, action is required to ensure that adequate human resources are mobilized, trained and retained at all levels. This is especially important in light of ongoing decentralization to regions, intentions to expand the programme's reach beyond primary and introduction of new modalities such as HGSF. The following actions are proposed:

- 3.1 Reviewing the minimum staffing requirements to support the implementation of the NSFP at national and regional levels, and carry out a time-bound recruitment drive;
- 3.2 Developing a NSFP training module and induction programme for all new staff joining the programme at all levels;
- 3.3 Reviewing and redrafting the Programme Manual, ensuring its distribution to all staff working on NSFP and availability online;
- 3.4 Exploring ways to motivate NSFP staff through the introduction of appropriate rewards, incentives and sanctions;
- 3.5 Introducing training on school feeding and health into teacher training curriculum at tertiary institutions

4. Storage, Handling and Preparation of meals at School Level

To ensure that the storage, handling and preparation of meals meets expected standards as envisioned in the NSF policy, various actions should be undertaken that ensure

schools have the necessary infrastructure and associated non-food items (NFI). Actions comprise:

- 4.1 Distributing standard drawings, specifications, and guidelines for the construction/ upgrading of school kitchens, storerooms and handwashing facilities;
- 4.2 Including kitchens, kitchen equipment, storerooms and hand washing facilities as part of the basic infrastructure provided to schools in new builds, upgrades or expansions;
- 4.3 Issuing a directive and guidance on the availability of Universal Primary Education Grant (UPEG) for National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) NFI purchases;
- 4.4 Developing updated guidance and a directive with respect to arrangements for remunerating NSFP cooks, in line with provisions of the NSF Policy;
- 4.5 Exploring feasibility of utilising kitchens and storage facilities attached to school hostels where NSFP schools are in close proximity.

5. NSFP fulfilling its role as a vector for social transformation, gender equality and community resilience

To help realise the NSFPs potential as a vector for social transformation, gender equality and community resilience, various actions are proposed that will enable the programme to work in a more integrated manner with related policy frameworks and interventions. These include:

- 5.1 Establishing the long recommended national NSFP coordination forum/ committee (or a sub-committee under an appropriate existing forum);
- 5.2 Convening an adhoc task force/ working group to explore specific opportunities for collaboration between the NSFP and relevant health, watsan, gender and social protection programmes;
- 5.3 Drafting and adopting a NSFP Gender Action Plan advocating for gender-transformative results in the NSFP;
- 5.4 Aligning the NSF policy with relevant Policy provisions relating to educationally marginalised children, to OVCs and the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy;
- 5.5 Identifying specific activities to promote greater male engagement in school feeding activities;
- 5.6 Establishing strong connections with networks of gender focal points across government at all levels.

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6. Programme Cost and Long-Term Financing

With ambitions to further scale up the programme to reach more learners, demand higher delivery standards including school feeding infrastructure and broaden the school feeding menu, further analytical work is required to understand current and future costs. The following actions are proposed:

- 6.1 Commissioning a comprehensive school level cost assessment to determine the different resource mobilisation strategies used and arrangements made for storing, preparing and serving meals at different schools;
- 6.2 Commissioning a comparative analysis of alternative school feeding modalities to inform policy makers as to the costs and benefits of different modalities.

7. Home Grown School Feeding

To facilitate the testing, adoption and implementation of Home-Grown School Feeding as envisioned in the NSFP policy, and cognizant of MoEAC intentions to launch a set of HGSF pilots, actions should be taken to support learning and to accompany the scaling up process. These include;

- 7.1 Establishing a multi-actor reference/steering group, reflecting the different interests and role players in HGSF;
- 7.2 Drafting a clearly defined plan of action cum roadmap to guide the implementation of the pilot activities, cognizant of design parameters proposed in this evaluation;
- 7.3 Developing clear guidelines on the use of school gardens to support the NSFP;
- 7.4 Undertaking a mapping of all privately-sponsored school feeding initiatives to learn how sponsored schools are managing the storage, preparation, and quality assurance of a diversified menu;
- 7.5 Ensuring that gender-sensitive indicators are developed that track changes in women's participation in the food production storage and distribution processes;
- 7.6 Developing an agreed conceptual framework of the scope of the HGSF concept.

8. Effective Delivery of Technical Assistance for Capacity Development

Given the overall positive contribution that WFP TA has made towards the NSFP, actions should be taken to assure the continued relevance and effectiveness of external support going forward. These include:

- 8.1 Updating the revised Roadmap so that it takes full account of progress made to-date, as well as identifying remaining and/ or new tasks/challenges;
- 8.2 Introducing a framework for annual mutual reporting and accountability on effectiveness of the partnership;
- 8.3 Focusing future WFP support on strengthening capacities at the sub-national/regional levels;
- 8.4 Developing a capacity strengthening/development strategy to guide future TA support to the NSFP.

9. Promoting NSFP Inclusiveness and benefits for all learners

To ensure that the objectives and benefits of school feeding are well understood by all NSFP stakeholders, and that there is strong demand and ownership of school feeding among all learners and schools, actions are required to reinforce understanding as well as to facilitate the voices of participants to be heard. Actions should include:

- 9.1 Developing an advocacy strategy to reinforce the message that NSFP is an inclusive programme that benefits all learners and all schools and is not only targeting the poor;
- 9.2 Establishing a school level complaints and grievance system that enables NSFP stakeholders to feedback concerns as well as to propose ways to improve programme operations.

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