



WFP's support to Nutrition in Bhutan (2019-2023)

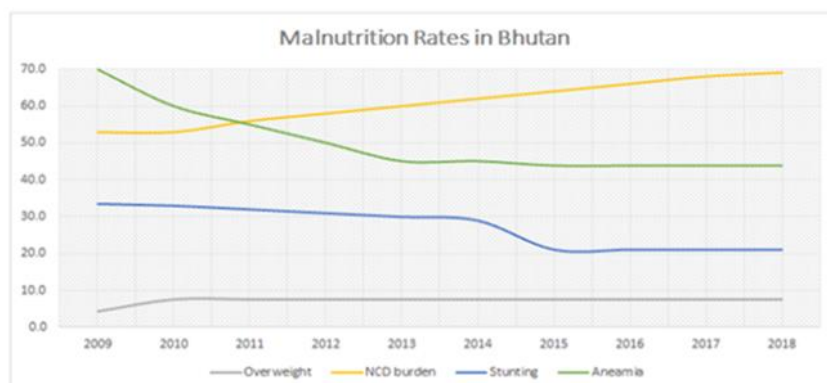
School Nutrition	Healthy Diets	Food Fortification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Menu optimization using PLUS School Menus Farmer to school linkages School kitchen and stores construction and repair Food safety and quality Supply chain analysis and optimization Real time and robust Monitoring and Evaluation System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Behavior Change (SBC) for healthy diets for school age children. Capacity strengthening of government agencies Nutrition education via curriculum and edutainment. EduTriton – game-based learning Community outreach with the Tarayana Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory and compliance framework building Micronutrient survey Enhanced production capacity Robust quality assurance systems including laboratory analysis of fortified foods Evidence generation & knowledge management Advocacy and communication
Informing national policies and strategies on nutrition		

Nutrition Situation

Bhutan is facing the triple burden of malnutrition with co-existence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition. Over the years, the health and nutritional status of children has improved with wasting and underweight prevalence reduced to 4 and 9 percent respectively. Stunting, however, is persistent at 21 percent while overweight/obesity is emerging and increasing in Bhutan's population with 11.4 percent of Bhutanese obese and 33.5 percent overweight.

Micronutrient deficiencies remain a major public health issue. Anemia, a proxy indicator for micronutrient deficiencies, is at 44 percent for 6-59 months old children. Over 35 percent of non-pregnant women and 31 percent of adolescent girls are anaemic - an important indicator of future health as 6 percent of girls are married by the age of 15, and 26 percent by the age of 18. More than 1 in 5 preschool aged children and 17 percent of pregnant women are deficient in Vitamin A. Amongst school aged children (5-19 years), several outbreaks of Vitamin B deficiencies including peripheral neuropathy and glossitis have been reported over the years.

Non-communicable diseases (NCD) continue to be the main health burden in the country, responsible for 69 percent of Bhutan's disease burden and 71 percent of deaths in 2019 caused by hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes. In terms of diets, the risk factor survey of 2019 records salt consumption at 8.3 grams, significantly higher than the recommended daily intake of 5 grams. School children are big consumers of junk food – 40 percent of students drink carbonated soft drinks and 32.2 percent eat fast food 4 days in a week.



NCDs account for 71% of all deaths in the country

COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 constitutes a significant risk to the nutrition status of children and communities. Direct and indirect impact of the pandemic such as reduced household income, higher food price volatility, reduced availability of fresh foods have affected the quality of Bhutanese diets. WFP is working closely with government partners to maintain and improve nutrition, hygiene and food safety during the pandemic including assistance to the safe reopening of schools.

Building Human Capital through better Child Nutrition

WFP is partnering with the Ministry of Health and UNICEF to revise the National Health Policy (2020-30) and develop the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020-25). These policies aim to increase national goals and multi-sectoral collaboration with other sectors required for effective national health and nutrition programmes and services.

WFP is assisting the Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve the nutritional and health status of children by transforming the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme. Nutritious meals help children achieve their full physical and cognitive potential to lead more productive lives. As a mountainous country, transportation of food commodities to all schools across the country has significant financial implications for the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB). Given the Government's plan to reach all rural schools with school meals in the country within the 12th Five Year Plan (2019-2023), WFP is working with government partners to analyze and optimize the supply chain costs for the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme.

Timely, multi-sectoral and quality data is critical for evidence-based decision making to improve programme effectiveness. WFP, along with the MoE has developed and rolled out a real-time, integrated nutrition, health and education monitoring and reporting system. A major success of this intervention has been the increased dietary diversity in school meals and reduced food waste at schools from 2% in 2017 to 0.5% 2019.



In order to meet the demand for healthy, locally sourced, nutritious school meals WFP is:

- Collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to connect 9000 farmers across the country with schools providing fresh and nutritious foods while assuring income for smallholder farmers.
- Working with the MoE to develop national standards for school kitchens, stores and kitchen equipment.
- Supporting the expansion of school meals to additional rural schools via the construction of 23 new kitchens and stores as well

as refurbishment of additional 36 existing school kitchen and stores across the country.

- Collaborating with the MoE to roll out PLUS School Menus, a user-friendly software tool which optimizes school menus by making them simultaneously more nutritious, cost-efficient and locally sourced. A pilot has demonstrated that meals can be designed at a 20% lower cost, with the same nutrient value and with a higher proportion of local food.

Healthy Diets

Sustainable transformation of health and nutrition requires interventions on both demand and supply side. WFP is assisting the RGoB in developing a national SBC strategy to improve dietary and health practices of school children (ages 5-18) by creating demand for healthier diets.

This is further reinforced through nutrition and health education using an improved school curriculum, currently being developed with the Royal Education Council and UNICEF as well as through developing a digital and interactive game-based learning platform.

Adopting a whole-of-society approach, WFP has partnered with Tarayana Foundation to work across 4 districts to help rural and vulnerable population groups eat and stay healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The focus of this nutrition and health outreach is on children and adolescents aged between 5-19 years.

Food Fortification

RGoB has prioritized food fortification as a public health strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies amongst school children using the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme as a platform. With growing evidence on the effectiveness of the programme, the Government plans to scale up the use of fortified rice to cover other vulnerable population groups including monastic institutions with gradual introduction through the open market.

Through its engagement with the food fortification taskforce, WFP provides technical assistance and capacity strengthening towards developing the regulatory framework and compliance mechanisms to ensure food safety and quality.

To ensure a successful food fortification programme and meet the future demand of fortified rice, WFP is:

- Supporting enhancement of national production capacity through the establishment of a fortified rice blending facility.
- Working with relevant agencies to strengthen the quality assurance system, food testing capabilities, and develop tools and create a trained cadre of professionals.
- Strengthening the capacity of relevant agencies across all aspects of the fortified rice value chain.
- Facilitating continuous advocacy and policy dialogue through exposure visits and knowledge sharing events.
- Investing in a micronutrient survey to create the evidence base needed to inform policy and regulatory measures including the national standards for fortified rice.

With these foundations laid, WFP together with the RGoB, would sustainably expand the consumption of fortified foods in Bhutan.

