



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP Bhutan Country Brief January 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

WFP held consultations with various government and UN stakeholders for developing a social behaviour change communication strategy to improve dietary and physical practices among school-aged children in Bhutan. A WFP-supported education and public information series called "Zhego Delek" published in the national newspaper, Kuensel, raised awareness on the importance of nutritious food consumption and risks around food adulteration. On the agriculture front, WFP-supported farmers continued receiving support to enable them to harvest bountiful yields and earn cash. WFP also concluded the Multi-Partner Trust Fund project that benefitted over 3,300 farmers and created 668 job opportunities.

Operational Updates

1. WFP in collaboration with the School Health and Nutrition Division, Ministry of Education, and Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health is developing a social behaviour change communication strategy that will help improve dietary and physical practices among school-aged children in Bhutan. WFP consulted with stakeholders from various fields including government agencies, civil society organizations and private sectors. WFP held further consultation with stakeholders supporting persons with disabilities, nuns and monks, and initiatives in other countries such as the Eat Right initiative in India. WFP is supporting the design of guidelines and questionnaires for formative research to understand the behaviour of Bhutanese children better. These guidelines will be tested in the field.

WFP also supported the formation of a multi-sectoral SBCC task force including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture and Forests.

2. WFP, in collaboration with the Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) started a consumer education series called "Zhego Delek" by publishing the first article in the national newspaper, Kuensel. Since COVID-19 highlighted the importance of hygiene, food safety and nutrition, the series of educational brochures promote safe and nutritious food consumption as well as generate awareness about food adulteration risks.

3. WFP corporately [released a shorter version of a film](#) on rice fortification that generated awareness of Bhutan's work on the fortification front and its impact. The film also raised awareness on how WFP's assistance to the Government on the fortification work has played an instrumental role in ensuring that Bhutan no longer has cases of beriberi- a disease caused by Vitamin B1 deficiency.

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WFP Bhutan Strategy

Country Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

Total Requirement (in USD)	Allocated Contributions (in USD)	Feb-Jul 2021 Net Funding Requirements (in USD)
8.9 m	5.7 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

- The 43-day long national lockdown that was recently lifted affected support services to the smallholder farmers. The extension staff had difficulties in providing regular production support services to the farmers. Logistics and market access were severely disrupted due to restrictions on travel and mobility. This also led to postharvest losses, which denied the farmers of a good opportunity to sell their produce and earn income.
- 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.

4. The smallholder farmers in the WFP-supported districts of Trongsa and Zhemgang continued to produce good quality fresh vegetables for local consumption as well as for sales in local, district and national markets. Those farmers were able to sell 15 mt of vegetables in Thimphu market while selling over 52 mt of vegetables in local, district and inter-district markets.

5. In those districts mentioned above, the 'farm to school' linking program continued to receive support to renew the annual contracts for the supply of fresh local vegetables to the schools. Both the farmers and schools continue to support this program through their participation in the contractual agreement.

6. WFP submitted the annual report for the Multi-Partner Trust Fund project titled "Protecting livelihoods and reinforcing the tourism and agriculture sectors in Bhutan". In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the local Government, two poor districts of Zhemgang and Samtse were supported in the production of safe and nutritious vegetables.

7. The intervention enhanced local vegetable production while improving the linkages of farmers to markets. About 3,340 smallholder farmers and their household members benefitted from this project, through enhanced production and increased sales and income from their farm produce. There has been an increase by at least 20 percent in production compared to previous years and at least 668 full-time jobs were created for the farmers.

8. Even though Bhutan is exemplary in responding to COVID-19, the pandemic is reversing the steady development growth and affecting the livelihoods of a majority of the population. Therefore, WFP started to attend to the urgent capacity gaps in pandemic preparedness including the revision of the Roadmap for Disaster Risk Management in Bhutan, which will be expanded to also cover pandemic preparedness.

Photo page 1: WFP-supported farmers continued receiving various support to enable them to harvest bountiful yields (Photo @ WFP/Binai Lama)