

# School-based programmes (SBP) Impact Evaluation Window

Concept Note



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# Executive Summary

This note provides an overview of the School-based programmes (SBP) Impact Evaluation Window and guidance for WFP offices and partners interested in participating.

The SBP Impact Evaluation Window aims to provide rigorous evidence that informs policymaking and decisions that country offices and governments need to take when designing and implementing such programmes. The SBP Impact Evaluation Window was developed jointly by the WFP's Office of Evaluation (OEV), the School-Based Programme (SBP) division, and the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit.

Windows are part of OEV's [new strategy](#) for centrally managing and supporting impact evaluations (IEs) commissioned across WFP. The following are the main features of an IE window:

- **OEV-managed:** OEV leads the selection, setup, delivery, evidence synthesis and dissemination of results for each IE included in a window;
- **Programmes supported:** Programmes selected by OEV for inclusion in a window participate in a management support capacity;
- **Co-funded:** OEV covers the cost of evaluators engaged in each impact evaluation selected for the window. Programmes fund their interventions and contribute to data collection costs. Data collected for impact evaluation purposes can however serve wider M&E purposes;
- **Building bodies of generalisable evidence:** Windows produce clusters of IEs assessing similar questions and interventions, in order to provide greater generalisability and predictive power of findings. This requires each evaluation to generate evidence that contributes to higher-level questions identified for the window.

Interventions are selected based on standardised criteria: a) the ability to produce relevant evidence for the window; b) the utility of evidence to future programme or policy decisions; and c) the timing and feasibility of evaluation designs that provide a rigorous measurement of impact.

Funding and capacity constraints will also be taken into consideration on IE selection. Each IE window aims to support at least six impact evaluations over a three to five-year period. To be considered for inclusion in the SBP IE Window, WFP offices should apply by the deadline indicated in calls for expressions of interest. Applications outside calls for expression of interest may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

# 1. Induction

1. School-based programmes (SBP) interventions are one of the most extensive social safety nets worldwide. They are intended to promote health, nutrition, learning, and the creation of human capital, while at the same time, they are expected to stimulate local economies by providing reliable output markets when school meals are procured locally. In early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 388 million children in 161 countries benefited from school feeding programmes. More than 80% of countries have adopted school feeding interventions, a considerable increase from 42% in 2013. The current global investment for school feeding is estimated to be between US\$41 billion and US\$43 billion per annum, with the majority of these costs being covered by domestic funds (WFP 2021).

2. The World Food Programme (WFP) launched its School Health and Nutrition Strategy in January 2020. The generation and sharing of knowledge are a critical component of this strategy for two main reasons. First, WFP needs to improve how to document, measure, and produce evidence through its work to be accountable to donors, partners, target beneficiaries, and governments. Second, as a leading international agency working on school feeding, WFP has the ambition to influence a global agenda on this issue. Rigorous impact evaluations on WFP programmes provide the opportunity to marry these two objectives: to be accountable for results and to contribute to the evidence and research agenda that will help governments advance national objectives relating to School Health and Nutrition.

3. WFP launched its first Impact Evaluation Strategy in November 2019. A key component of the strategy is the articulation of Impact Evaluation (IE) Windows. These are portfolios of impact evaluations managed and co-funded by WFP's Office of Evaluation, with the aim of building bodies of generalisable evidence in high-priority areas of WFP's work.

4. WFP country offices and governments are often faced with difficult decisions involving trade-offs when designing and implementing school health and nutrition interventions. The School-Based Programmes (SBP) IE Window aims to inform policymaking and decisions on SBP interventions by generating relevant evidence around such trade-offs. SBP interventions address both "in-school" and "out-of-school" objectives. First, in-school objectives focus on improving the well-being of schoolchildren based on school feeding as well as more broad school health and nutrition programmes. School feeding interventions consists of the provision of food (meals, snacks, or take-home incentives conditional upon school attendance) to children or their households through school-based programmes. School health and nutrition interventions consist of a holistic and integrated multi-sectorial package of support for children, including: deworming; vaccination; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence prevention; nutrition education; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). These activities can help lower dropout rates and bring more out-of-school children into classrooms, as well as improving health, nutritional intake, and girls' well-being. Second, out-of-school objectives focus on supporting local communities and the wider economy. For example, home-grown school feeding (HGSF) interventions, where school meals are sourced from local smallholder farmers, have the potential to improve their agricultural production and income by linking farmers to the wider output markets. Additionally, take-home incentives such as cash or voucher transfers may also have economy wide effects by stimulating demand in local markets. This IE Window will provide rigorous evidence on programme impact and cost-effectiveness analysis using comparable and standardised evaluation designs. The generated evidence will be used to guide and inform WFP Country Offices as well as governments in designing and implementing school-based programmes.

5. The School-Based Programmes (SBP) IE Window will also provide rigorous evidence to support WFP's school feeding technical advisory and advocacy efforts. The strategic evaluation on the contribution of school feeding to the sustainable development goals found that a lack of evidence regarding the impact of school feeding programmes on nutrition and gender outcomes represented a challenge in advocating for school feeding (WFP, 2021b). It also identified a gap in evidence for effectively advocating for school feeding in emergency contexts, and value of considering school feeding as a shock-responsive mechanism (WFP, 2021b). This IE Window aims to provide rigorous evidence on the gendered effects of different designs of school-based interventions, as well as evidence on the impact of school health and nutrition interventions in emergency settings or in the presence of shocks.

6. The SBP IE Window is developed jointly by the WFP's Office of Evaluation (OEV), the School-Based Programme (SBP) division, and the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit. Additional

academic research partners will be involved to provide greater and deeper expertise given the multi-sectorial nature of school-based programmes interventions.

## 2. School-based programmes

7. The State of School Feeding Worldwide (2021) estimates 388 million children worldwide currently benefit from school feeding. These are children from pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools in 161 countries. The vast majority of countries deliver school feeding as part of an integrated school health and nutrition intervention including other essential health and nutrition components, including: deworming; vaccination; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence prevention; social and behavioural change communication; vision screening; nutrition education; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). It is estimated that the current global investment in school feeding is between US\$41 billion and US\$43 billion per annum (WFP 2021).

8. School feeding programmes have been implemented for centuries, with the earliest records dating back to the 18th century in Europe. The provision of school meals for children had become widespread in most high-income countries by the nineteenth century, and later became a tool which went beyond alleviation of short-term hunger in schoolchildren to programmes with broader benefits for children and the community. More recently, following the food, fuel, and financial crisis of 2008, governments recognised that school feeding programmes offer an attractive long-term social protection investment, as well as a safety net in times of crisis, expected to provide multiple benefits to vulnerable groups such as in-kind income support to families, learning and access to education, and greater health and well-being.

9. When appropriately designed and well implemented, School-Based Programmes are intended to contribute to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including: no poverty (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequalities (SDG10), and strengthened partnerships (SDG17) (WFP 2020a).

10. School feeding programmes can be implemented in many different ways, depending on interventions' objectives, constraints, and operational requirements. Broadly, school feeding distribution can be divided in two categories: on-site school meals and snacks or take-home rations.

11. In-school feeding can include meals or fortified high-energy biscuits and snacks which are provided daily, conditional on attendance on that day. Meals can be provided at breakfast, mid-morning, lunch, or a combination. Meals can be prepared in schools, in the community, or can be delivered from centralised kitchens. Fortified high-energy biscuits and snacks are cheaper and easier to distribute than meals and are particularly used in humanitarian contexts as they are easier to scale-up. Meals provide more calories than snacks, but may require storage, cooking facilities, and community participation.

12. Take-home rations are mostly provided monthly, conditional on meeting a particular attendance target, usually not less than 80 percent. While meals and snacks can increase children's energy and micronutrient intake, take-home rations are shared with the entire family, and may contribute less to improving children's nutrition status. Take-home rations are the most expensive modality but provide more consumption support to the entire household and do not require school infrastructure (Bundy et. al 2009; WFP 2013).

13. School feeding can be combined with complementary health and nutrition interventions. These include micronutrient fortification of food (iron, iodine, vitamin A, B-vitamins, and zinc), micronutrient supplementation, deworming treatment, and water sanitation and hygiene interventions.

14. School health and nutrition implementations also vary depending on where the food is produced and procured. In a standard school feeding model, school meals are largely procured through direct imports or from major hub cities in the countries. However, there is a growing interest from governments to increase the proportion of "local" procurement, where school meals are purchased from local producers. The goal is to create a virtuous cycle—schools can easily procure meals at a lower transportation cost, farmers benefit from easily accessing output markets and generating additional sources of income, and communities can build resilience through more dependable sources of income. On the other hand, procuring from individual smallholder farmers can come with increased transaction and contractual costs. There might also be other risks associated with food quality and reliability of supply if farmers do not have the capacity to meet quality standards due to poor post-harvest management and they may fail to deliver quality meals on time. Alternatively, instead of distributing take-home rations, other modalities include transferring cash or vouchers to be spent directly by households in the local markets, representing a significant opportunity for increasing local sourcing and providing an opportunity for establishing a safety net social protection system that encourages school attendance. An increasing number of

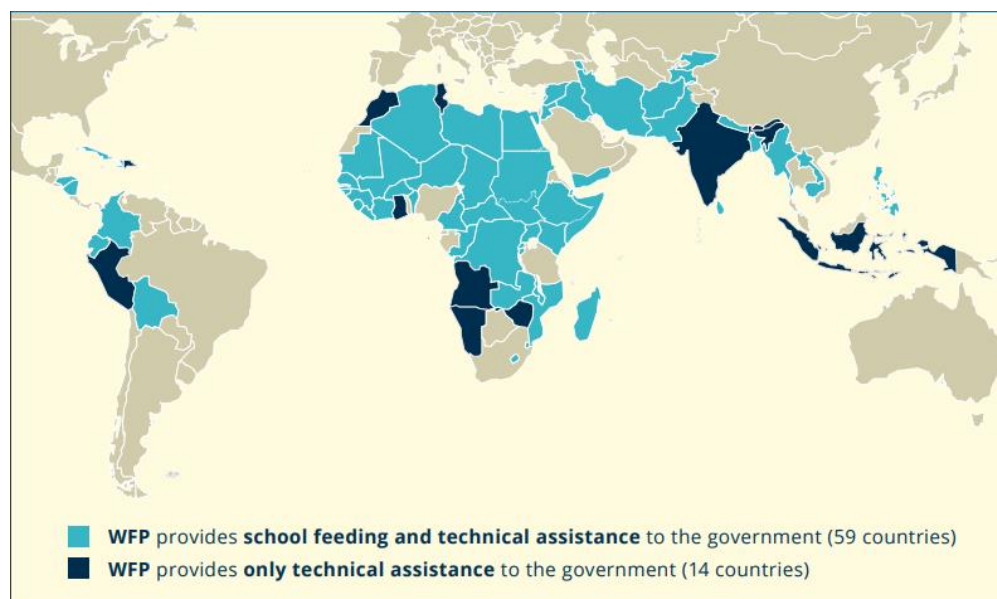
countries have started to adopt HGSF models or alternative distribution modalities, which require greater evidence on the costs and benefits of these new models.

15. At the time of writing, the world is still heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of schools worldwide has precipitated the largest education crisis in history, with more than 1.5 billion children worldwide deprived of schooling (UNESCO 2020). Nearly 370 million children in 199 countries were suddenly deprived of school feeding programmes (WFP 2020c). The consequences of this include loss of access to food at school and to education, as well as other equally severe social consequences, including greater risks of abuse and of inappropriate employment. These risks threaten girls in particular, because long-term school dropout is linked with increased child labour, child marriage, and transactional sex (WFP 2021). Even if countries gain some control over the epidemic and schools gradually reopen, it might still be challenging to bring back children who have been out of school for a while. It is estimated that 20 million more secondary school-aged girls will be out of school by the time the crisis passes.<sup>1</sup> The disproportionate effect on girls makes the role of school health and nutrition programmes all the more important in providing incentives for parents to send their children back to school, and for children to stay in school.

### 3. School-based programmes in WFP

16. In 2019, WFP provided school meals or snacks for 17.3 million children and implemented or supported school feeding programmes in 74 countries. WFP provided school feeding support to over 90,000 schools, support to smallholder farmers through home-grown school feeding programmes in 40 countries, take-home rations in 18 countries, and cash-based transfers in over 30 countries.

**Figure 1: WFP School Feeding Programmes**



Source: *WFP School Feeding Programmes in 2019*: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000120501/download/>

17. WFP presented its new approach to school feeding in its School Feeding Strategy 2020–2030 (WFP 2020a). The strategy delineates how WFP will work with governments and partners to jointly ensure all primary schoolchildren have access to good quality meals in school, accompanied by a broader integrated package of health and nutrition services.

- To take a context-specific approach and adapt its role to the particular country situation, WFP identified three main contexts with different roles and objectives to achieve. The list of countries for all contexts is provided in Appendix 1.

<sup>1</sup> a Malala fund article. <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19>. Accessed on 16 Feb 2021.

- **Context 1** (Crisis or humanitarian settings): WFP will scale-up and provide operational support in countries that do not have the capacity to ensure vulnerable children are covered. In accordance with 2019 data on WFP School Feeding Programmes, 29 countries were identified.
- **Context 2** (Stable low-income and lower middle-income countries): WFP will support the transition and scale-up of national programmes, providing technical assistance and improving the scale and quality of national programmes. Twenty-four countries were identified.
- **Context 3** (Middle-income countries): WFP will support the consolidation and strengthening of national programmes. Nineteen countries were identified.

18. WFP's target for the next ten years is to provide school feeding to 35 million children in 29 of the most fragile and low-income countries under Context 1. WFP will work with national governments of the remaining 43 stable, low- and middle-income countries to reach 38 million children (Contexts 2 and 3) by transitioning and scaling-up nationally owned programmes.

19. The SBP division has been working on a draft theory of change that spells out WFP vision and contribution towards SDGs (See Appendix 2). The theory of change identifies different areas through which WFP SBP programmes take place at different levels: children, family, smallholder farms and other actors in the value chain, community, and government. Each level has its own pathway, which interconnects with the others, leading towards the final outcome statements which are that all girls and boys, especially vulnerable have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and that smallholder farmers and actors (especially women) in local value chain improved livelihoods, which will also lead to the reduction in harmful practices and improved social protection, social cohesion and resilience. According to the theory of change, girls and boys will have the opportunity to achieve their full potential by improving learning outcomes, physical and physio-social health and increase access to education. Improved smallholder farmers' livelihoods will come from strengthened local food systems, and increased access to income-generating activities and access to credit and producing inputs, thanks to increased access to local markets and strengthened local actors' capacities.

20. In the effort to transition school health and nutrition programmes to national education, health, and social protection sector plans, it is important to understand how school-based interventions contribute to the three goals of social protections: protection, promotion, and prevention. School health and nutrition programmes offer protection and relief to poor households—providing children's macro- and micronutrient intake, alleviating child malnutrition; helping households reallocate food to other family members; and allowing households to save on food costs and invest the money saved on other needs. School-based intervention also promotes in three ways: by connecting children to educational opportunities and helping them accumulate human capital; by allowing households to make savings and investments in their livelihoods; and by promoting local agricultural development and economic activity. Finally, school feeding can help prevent more households from falling into poverty because of shocks (both idiosyncratic shocks that only affect one or few households, as well as covariant shocks that affect entire communities) as it reduces the need of families to resort to negative coping strategies, especially taking children out of school to save money.

## 4. Evidence on School Feeding Outcomes

21. In 2020, WFP conducted a literature review of the available recent evidence on school feeding programmes (WFP, forthcoming). The review is based on three systematic review papers as well as 17 experimental or quasi-experimental studies published between 2009 and 2019 that were conducted in low- and middle-income countries. Following the theory of change, above, the review explored three major outcome areas: (1) education, (2) health and nutrition, and (3) local economy and agriculture, relying on studies that collected micro-data at the beneficiary level (i.e., children and households). The most reported outcomes are health and nutrition, followed by education. On the other hand, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on outcomes on the local economy and agriculture as these are more relevant in the context of HGSP, which is an emerging, but less frequent model of school feeding programmes. The review also discussed impacts by gender when the results were available in the review papers. None of the included studies in the review investigated the impact of school feeding on secondary school-aged children or pre-primary children.

22. The review finds that school feeding programmes are effective in improving enrolment. Most studies find enrolment increases to some extent (Aurino et al. 2018 in Ghana; Aurino et al. 2019 in Mali; Bittenheim et al.

2011 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic; Kazianga et al. 2012 in Burkina Faso), while the magnitude varies by baseline enrolment levels and the effects are stronger for subgroups such as more disadvantaged populations. In addition to enrolment, studies also agree that school feeding interventions are effective in improving learning and cognitive abilities, while they differ in their magnitudes. On the other hand, the effects on attendance and absenteeism are ambiguous. Kazianga et al. (2012) counterintuitively finds that attendance rates may go down—students who are enrolled only because of school feeding are the same group of students who are less likely to attend classes regularly, driving down the average attendance. Finally, evidence suggests that school feeding programmes improve mathematics and reading scores (Aurino et al. 2018; Chakraborty and Jayaraman 2019; Kazianga et al. 2012), and cognitive abilities as measured by Raven's test and digit recall (Aurino et al. 2018; Nga et al. 2009, 2011). However, given that the number of studies is small, more evidence on these outcome areas would be useful.

23. On nutrition and health, studies typically looked at micronutrient status and anthropometric outcomes. Overall, school meals and biscuits fortified with micronutrients improve concentration of Iron, Vitamin A, Zinc, Folate, Iodine, and Vitamin B12 among others (Abizari et al. 2012; Adelman et al. 2019; Buttenheim et al. 2011; de Gier et al. 2016; Hieu et al. 2012; Kuong et al. 2019; Nga et al. 2009, 2011; Osei et al. 2010; Perignon et al. 2016). On anthropometry, there are a small number of studies showing the effects on height-for-age (Gelli et al. 2019; Singh et al. 2014) and weight-for-age (Singh et al. 2014; Kazianga et al. 2014; Buttenheim et al. 2011). However, there are a similar number of studies who do not find any significant effects suggesting that these outcomes are generally noisier and more powered studies could be beneficial.

24. The effects of school feeding on the local economy and agriculture are generally under studied, despite a growing interest in HGSF. At the time of writing, there is no published study using experimental or quasi-experimental methods that evaluates outcomes on the local economy and agricultural production of either standard school feeding programmes or HGSF.

25. The review also identified only one study, Aurino et al., (2019), investigating the impact of school feeding in fragile or emergency settings which could represent an opportunity for contribution brought by this impact evaluation window.

26. Furthermore, the review identified that there is little evidence on specific subgroups or contexts of interest. For example, there is limited evidence on the impact of school feeding on pre-primary children or secondary school students. Given that primary education is near universal even in developing countries, investigating the impact of school feeding on the enrolment rate for secondary schools is a policy relevant question.

27. The review finds significant gender heterogeneity in the impact of school feeding interventions. In particular, there is evidence suggesting that the impact on learning and nutrition may be bigger for female students. Kazianga et al. (2012) find that the impact of take-home rations is stronger for girls. Similarly, Aurino et al. (2018) find that government school meal programmes are more effective for girls in improving in learning and cognition outcomes. Gelli et al. (2019) show the provision of school meals increased height-for-age for girls only. In addition to learning and nutrition, one study suggests important spillover effects within households. Kazianga et al (2014) finds that take-home rations improved weight-for-height of the younger siblings of the beneficiaries but the effect is twice as large for male siblings than female siblings, which implies that food may be allocated disproportionately within households. While a few studies explored gender effects on learning and nutrition, the evidence of school feeding on child marriage, protection, early pregnancy, agency, aspirations, intra-household time and labour allocation is still scant, representing an important area the window should focus its effort.

28. In addition to the literature review, WFP's OEV and World Bank's DIME consulted with dozens of academic experts on school feeding research as well as with the internal School Based Programming division at WFP to better understand the evidence needs (see the list of people consulted in Appendix 3). Additionally, to identify questions that are operationally useful, OEV and DIME organised workshops in November and December 2020 to generate inputs from WFP school feeding practitioners as well as academic researchers on what they think are the important and relevant research questions. During the workshop, it emerged that the some of the main areas of interest from the participants were on the impacts on nutrition outcomes, physical health, small-holder farmer markets, and social cohesion.

29. Finally, there is also considerable evidence coming from previous evaluations WFP and other organisations already conducted. Appendix 4 will provide a concise summary of such evidence.



# V. Window-Level Learning, Evaluation Questions, and Hypotheses

30. The SBP Window provides an opportunity to synthesise lessons across impact evaluations. Recent decades witnessed an explosion in academic and grey literature as well as the spread of experimental methods throughout social sciences and evaluation. Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) and other groups of researchers highlight how this increase in publications has unfortunately not always led to significantly more knowledge about what works in different contexts. EGAP refers to this as a 'crisis of external validity' and proposes using clusters of coordinated studies as one way to address it. This is referred to as the Metaketa Initiative.

31. Windows will build on this approach and try to overcome the crisis of external validity by producing clusters of IEs designed to increase the generalisability and predictive power of findings. OEV and DIME will work with the Technical Advisory Group, and other possible academic partners, to develop a pre-analysis plan for the window that helps guide programme selection and the design of IEs.

32. Ensuring the comparability of IEs supported by the window is challenging and requires a two-track approach: 1) Prioritising the evaluation of interventions that are similar in design and target outcomes; and 2) Synthesising evidence from similar interventions across contexts over time.

33. To support the comparability and synthesis of IEs, the SBP Window seeks to answer common evaluation questions in different contexts. Based on our literature review, internal and external consultations, and workshops, we identified two main avenues through which this Window can make the biggest impact for WFP SBP operations.

34. First, looking at in-school components, we plan to examine how varying intervention modalities and complementary interventions affect children's education, health, and nutritional outcomes. For example, school feeding interventions can be implemented as on-site school meals and snacks or as take-home rations and incentives. Meals can include breakfast, lunch, or both and can be either prepared at the school, in the community, or delivered from centralised kitchens. Snacks with fortified food are commercially produced and can be provided to complement meals or as a standalone implementation modality. Take-home incentives include either food rations or cash and vouchers provided to families to purchase food, conditional on children attending school. In addition to school feeding, school-based programmes include various complementary interventions, including: deworming; vaccination; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence prevention; social and behavioural change communication; vision screening; nutrition education; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

35. Second, looking at out-of-school components, we seek to investigate how alternative delivery or procurement systems affect the local economy and agricultural households, in addition to children's health and nutritional outcomes. For example, take-home incentives using cash or voucher transfers may have spillover effects on other family members who are not the direct beneficiary of such transfers. Households may also allocate the resources differently across consumption and investment opportunities when the transfer is more fungible. Moreover, the transfers may stimulate demand in local markets, benefiting the broader local economy. Another school feeding model that has implications on the broader local economy is HGFS. By requiring schools to procure a certain quantity of school meals from local smallholder farmers, it may improve farmers' agricultural productivity and income, which could further benefit school-aged children.

36. The Window will examine following outcomes: (a) Health and nutritional outcomes—the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, overweight, and obesity) as well as food security, dietary quality, dietary diversity, and nutritional behaviours; (b) Human capital outcomes—cognitive abilities and student learning such as literacy and numeracy skills; (c) Gender—girls' education, protection, pregnancy, early marriages, agency, aspirations, and intra-household time and labour allocation, (d) Social protection—households' consumption, savings, investments, and shocks; (e) Local economy—smallholder farmers' income, market access, agricultural outcomes, and employment; and possibly (f) Social cohesion—trust, conflicts, social relations, and contribution to communities.

37. The Window will also consider how different intervention modalities and procurement systems might have different implication for a climate change responsive approach to feeding children, for example, by reducing the length of supply chains and adopting a zero-tolerance response to waste.

38. Investigating the impact of school-based interventions on girls' well-being is more important than ever. Following the disruptions caused by COVID-19, and with prolonged school closures, there is the concrete risk of increased child labour, child marriage, and transactional sex. School-based programmes can play an important role as a social safety net protecting girls and young adolescents during this prolonged shock and supporting them to go back to school. This analysis will require careful consideration of the research tools and practices employed, including innovative age and gender-sensitive measurement tools and practices. Depending on resources and budget availability, impact evaluations conducted within this window will also include gender and equality research and evaluation practices, including: real-time sharing mechanisms to increase accountability, participation and engagement of the survey participants; and use mix or multiple evaluation methods, including micro-narratives to bring the perspectives and views of the people we serve. The exact questions and methods used will be determined by the scope of interventions, risks to participants, and resources available.

39. In summary, the Window aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do different programme's interventions, including modalities (in-school, take-home rations, or cash/voucher) or complementary activities, contribute to children's outcomes? How do these effects vary by age and gender?
- To what extent different programme's interventions (modalities or complementarity activities) contribute to greater girls' wellbeing?
- To what extent do different procurement systems (e.g. imported food versus locally grown school meals) increase effectiveness of programmes at improving food security and nutrition in supported communities?
- To what extent do different programme's characteristics support households' consumption and food security in the presence of shocks?

## VI. Ethics

40. It is paramount for the School-Based Programmes (SBP) IE Window and all individual impact evaluations to meet the highest ethical standards. Evans (2021) provides practical ways to ensure the ethics of randomised controlled trials. The evaluation and research design will need to be justified as to why an RCT is the best way to generate evidence around any specific school feeding interventions. evidence and learn. One important consideration is whether there is genuine doubt as to the merits of a particular intervention that is hard to study without using RCTs. When using RCTs, the SBP IE Window will ensure that all individual impact evaluations take protection against risks towards participants and implementers seriously and put in place adequate measures. Studies will obtain approval from institutional review boards (IRBs), and local review boards when applicable. The evaluation teams will make serious efforts to engage with local scholars to further minimise unnecessary risks to subjects and local populations. The data collection process will ensure informed consent and adequate treatment of data. Adequate tools, processes, and infrastructure will also be put in place when collecting sensitive information such as health and nutrition and gender-based violence data.

## VII. How the Window Functions

41. Windows are designed to develop a portfolio of impact evaluations that can be synthesised over time to build bodies of evidence in WFP priority areas. Specific impact evaluations are selected for the window based upon expressions of interest from operational and programme teams and supporting documentation. OEV has limited capacity and funding available for windows, so careful consideration will be given to the commitment of individual offices and programme teams during the selection process. Programmes selected for inclusion in a window participate in a management-support capacity, most notably through an Evaluation Committee, which oversees individual IEs and approves associated products. Table 1 provides a summary of roles and responsibilities.

**Table 2: Example of table**

Tasks & Responsibilities	Window Steering Committee	Window Reference Group	Technical Advisory Group	Other HQ Programme Teams	RBs	COs	CO Programme Teams
Window Preparation and management	A/D, L	-	P	P	P	P	P
IE Funding Decisions	A/D, L	-	-	-	S	A/D	S
IE Selection	A/D, L	P	P	S	P	A/D	P
IE Design, Delivery and Analysis	A/D, L	P	P	S	S	A/D	P
Window Synthesis	A/D, L	P	P	S	S	S	S
Regular Window Communications	A/D, L	P	S	S	P	P	S
Window Dissemination	A/D, L	P	P	S	P	P	S

*Note:* A/D: approve/decide; L: lead (takes overall responsibility to undertake the step); P: participate actively in step; S: support the process with specific tasks if required.

42. The following criteria are used to assess proposals for the inclusion of a WFP programme:

- **Ability to produce relevant evidence for the window:** Programmes selected for the window need to have an existing infrastructure and capacity to implement some forms of school feeding interventions on a reasonable scale. Programmes also need to clearly specify the expected outcomes. Priority will be given to contexts where WFP is directly implementing activities or has direct operational control over it (Context 1 countries).
- **Utility of evidence to future programme or policy decisions:** Proposals need to clearly articulate how the generated evidence is going to be used. Priority will be given to programmes that intend to use the evidence for future programme or policy decisions. Additional consideration will be given to the utility of evidence to partners;
- **Timing and feasibility of evaluation designs that provide a clean measurement of impact:** Programmes need to apply for the window before an intervention is delivered or before significant programme changes are undertaken, such as scaling-up to a new population or adopting a new intervention modality in delivery and procurement systems. Priority will be given to programmes at the early design stage that have the flexibility to incorporate different impact evaluation approaches.

### Box 1: School-based programme Impact Evaluation Window

#### Purposes

- Accountability: Test WFP assumptions about interventions and optimise operations;
- Learning: Answer major questions that support WFP to achieve strategic outcomes and programmatic impact;
- Technical advisory: Provide evidence on impact and cost-effectiveness to inform technical advisory roles with governments in Contexts 2 and 3.
- Thought Leadership: Influence policy, practitioner, and academic communities based on evidence of what works to achieve WFP's targeted strategic outcomes.

#### Principles

1. Uphold evaluation norms and quality standards set by OEV and relevant governing bodies;
2. Ensure the clear utility of evidence generated for programmes and populations involved;
3. Measure what is important, not just easy, in the best possible ways (e.g., strong identification and measurement strategies for meaningful outcomes, including behavioural measurement where appropriate);
4. Ensure transparent and ethical IE processes (e.g., double-blind review of concept notes, registration of IE designs, ethical clearances, peer review, third party pre-publication replication, publication of results and findings, including null results);
5. Support individual evaluation studies that together contribute to building generalisable bodies of evidence (e.g., predefined themes and comparable interventions);
6. Pre-planned formal synthesis of evidence generated by all IEs delivered through the window using a meta-analysis strategy designed to learn about contextual drivers of differences in results across projects.

43. Box 1 introduces the purpose and principles for the SBP IE Window. The principle of utility (2<sup>nd</sup> principle in Box 1) means that data collected for the evaluation should also be useful throughout the intervention (e.g., targeting, monitoring, course corrections, reviews, etc.). The timing of any impact analysis is determined by the nature of the intervention and the outcome of interest. If the outcome is something that should be measurable within weeks or months of the intervention, that would be the earliest point when analysis can be conducted. For example, take-up of a programme can be measured quickly, while changes in anthropometric outcomes or socio-economic outcomes would be expected to materialise only after sufficient time following the intervention. OEV and DIME will produce analysis in line with major programme and policy decisions.

44. Another selection criterion is willingness to employ the best possible identification and measurement strategies (3<sup>rd</sup> principle in Box 1). WFP's Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) defines IEs as those which "assess the positive and negative, direct or indirect, intended or unintended changes in the lives of affected populations in receipt of WFP interventions" (p.12). WFP guidance refines the definition of IE by clarifying they are used to measure changes in development outcomes of interest for a target population that can be attributed to a specific programme or a policy through a credible counterfactual.

45. Identification strategies are used for establishing the counterfactual, or comparison groups, needed to understand whether changes measured in an outcome are *causally related to* an intervention. A common identification strategy used in IEs is the randomisation of some aspect of an intervention assumed to be causally related to an outcome of interest. For example, if the aim of the evaluation is to estimate the impact of different implementation modalities on improving health and education outcomes of school-aged children, the random assignment of schools or communities to different implementation modalities (e.g., control group versus in-school meals versus in-school meal locally produced versus take-home ration using cash or vouchers) generates comparison groups to test this hypothesis. Any randomisations should be implemented in ways that are ethical and consistent with principles of good programming. Examples include randomising at village or district levels rather than at individual levels, randomising the order in which programmes are rolled out, or randomising between alternative approaches that are ex ante considered similarly effective, depending on the contexts. WFP does not require every impact evaluation to use randomisation, but the methods used should be the best possible for answering the question and establishing a credible counterfactual.

# VIII. Governance, Funding, and Partnerships

46. **Governance structure:** To maintain the independence, quality, and credibility of each IE, OEV leads their selection, setup, delivery, evidence synthesis, and dissemination of results. The process of establishing window-level evaluation questions, selecting programmes or interventions for inclusion, and approving evaluation outputs (e.g., reports and communications) is governed by three distinct and mutually reinforcing governance functions.

47. *Window Steering Committee* oversees the window, selects IEs, and approves products:

- The Committee is comprised of members from WFP (SPB and OEV) and the DIME unit of the World Bank.
- The Committee will meet regularly throughout the window. Once proposals for the window are received, the final selection of IEs included in the window is made by the Committee, with review from the Reference Group and Technical Advisory Group.
- The Committee will also oversee the analysis and ensure its methodological rigour and quality. Upon completion of the analysis, the final IE report and associated products require approval from the Committee.

48. *Window Reference Group* reviews outputs without management responsibilities:

- The Window Reference Group will be comprised of focal points from relevant WFP HQ programme teams and RAM, as well as other organisations, institutes, and donors with an interest in the evaluation of School Health and Nutrition programmes. See Table 2, below, for a list of potential partner types included in the outreach plan for this Group.
- The Reference Group serves a dual purpose. First, it provides the window with additional expertise from international actors involved in school health and nutrition programming and measurement. The Group can thus guide the window's evaluation focus to be most responsive to global demand. Second, the Group will serve as the first point of contact for global engagement efforts and outreach events associated with window products.
- Though the Committee will make all final decisions, the Group will be actively involved throughout the window process in an advisory capacity. They may influence which programmes are selected for the window, the evaluation design and analysis, and the synthesis and dissemination.

49. *Technical Advisory Group* is a subset of the Reference Group that guides and informs window pre-analysis plans and oversees formal synthesis:

- The Group will consist of up to four academics who are leaders in a specialty field relevant to the window. Members will come from a mix of disciplines.
- The Group will support the technical capacity of the window, providing advice on questions of methodology regarding planning an IE, measuring outcomes, and conducting the analysis, among other topics.
- Acknowledging the multidisciplinary nature of school-based programmes, this window will seek active partnerships with other academic researcher(s) with expertise in the areas of child and adolescent health, nutrition, and learning.
- As part of the Reference Group, the Technical Advisory Group will participate regularly in all phases of the window, starting from the selection of proposals. In addition, they will provide technical advice on an ad hoc basis.

50. *Evaluation Committee* is programme- or country-specific and oversees individual evaluations:

- Once programmes are selected for inclusion in the window, the relevant programme teams form part of the Evaluation Committee for their IE.
- Together with OEV and DIME, the Evaluation Committee will identify a field coordinator to support the country M&E team with their data collection and related analysis for the duration an IE.
- Evaluation Committees are responsible for supporting the design of their IE (e.g., selecting evaluation questions, scope, methods of analysis, data, and timeframes, etc.). They will also deliver interventions in a manner aligned with the agreed IE design.
- In contexts where it is not WFP directly implementing the activities, and these are implemented by or with the government, the evaluation committee will also include government officials, to ensure adequate buy-in and support from the government.
- Attempts will be made to identify and include academic researchers from the selected countries.

51. **Funding sources:** Funding is required for two cost areas: 1) IE expertise; and 2) intervention and data collection costs. Responsibility for funding is shared in a way that encourages high quality output.

- *Impact evaluation expertise:* To ensure the quality of the complete analysis, OEV covers the cost of evaluators engaged in each window. This funding covers the cost of technical support throughout the evaluation process from preparation to reporting and dissemination, and includes associated activities such as learning events, results dissemination, and policy engagement.
- *Intervention and data collection:* An important signal of commitment to IE is the willingness of an office or programme to co-fund. Country offices participating in the window will supply funding for the intervention itself, as well as the data collection. Because IEs rely on data to measure changes in outcomes associated with interventions, the data needed is often useful for both monitoring and evaluation purposes. The M&E budget for each country, then, is the most intuitive source of funding for data collection.
- *Auxiliary funding:* Finally, to make the window accessible to a diversity of programmes, OEV will support country offices in mobilising additional funding from donors in cases of countries with smaller budgets unable to cover data collection costs.

52. **Global Engagement:** A key value of the Window lies in WFP's ability to use evidence in-house and for global engagement. As the window is organised around previously identified evidence gaps, WFP will bring a unique contribution of evidence that would otherwise be missing from global dialogue. Throughout the window, and particularly when results from individual evaluations become finalised, the Steering Committee will develop consistent, targeted policy messages corresponding to the evaluation questions established.

- *Engagement points:* The first entry point of engagement is through the Evaluation Committees (country offices) involved in each IE, as results from the IE can be used as learning for future implementations. The second entry point is through partnered divisions at WFP headquarters, where the School Based Programme (SBP) division, and the Research Analysis and Monitoring (RAM) division can disseminate results to country offices working with similar interventions. The third entry point is through the Reference Group, comprised of global partners who have already been identified as important stakeholders in window-related sectors.
- *Activities:* To aid engagement, OEV will disseminate results using both events and publication products. In order to increase the accessibility of the final report for each evaluation, OEV will complement the report with additional products such as policy briefs or blogs. In addition, OEV will host events around window-relevant themes. The Steering Committee may also take advantage of other events at WFP headquarters or regional offices, or events promoted by partners from the Reference Group, to share lessons learned from the window.

**Table 2: Partnership targets for window outreach**

Partner type	Purpose	Reference Group	Technical Advisory Group	Funding Source	Policy Engagement target
Academic institutions	Technical advisors; have capacity to support IEs and provide overview of evidence and gaps	√	√		
Civil society	Implementing partners; can advise on both programming and evaluation	√			√
Learning Networks	Evidence consumers; sources of tools and methods for health, nutrition, education, agriculture and gender evaluations	√			√
Other UN agencies	May have similar interventions and/or research; can coordinate for research synthesis or joint evaluations	√		√	
Government Partners	Implementing partners; determine success of IE in country; consumers of evidence	√		√	√
Private sector		√		√	√
Donors	Sources of funding, and key targets of influence with evidence generated	√		√	√

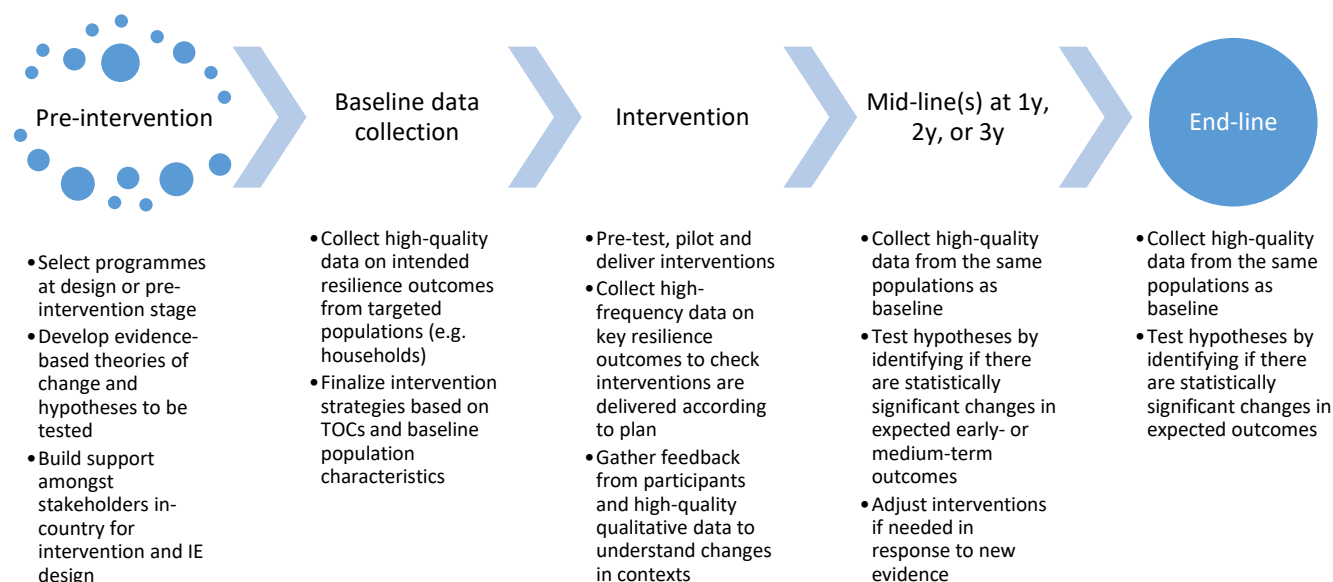
53. **Partnerships:** Successful management, funding, and policy engagement will require a strategic set of partnerships with experts in IE from other organisations. DIME will act as a main partner providing both technical assistance and direction for the window. With a portfolio covering over 170 interventions, DIME has extensive experience managing IEs on a wide range of topics. In addition to their support, the window will identify additional academic partner(s) in the areas of child and adolescent health, nutrition, and learning. Finally, the window will also benefit from a set of partners involved in the Reference Group and other capacities.

# IX. Participation in the School-based programmes IE Window

54. Participation in the window will involve country-level collaboration from programme teams at each step of the IE process.

- **Step 1:** The first step towards participating in the window is to submit an expression of interest to OEV. The Steering Committee will then do an initial screening to select programmes which are suitable for the window.
- **Step 2:** Country offices will then nominate a programme team member to attend an initial workshop, where they will partner with academics to develop an IE plan. The resulting IE concept note and academic proposal will then be sent to the Steering Committee for review and approval.
- **Step 3:** Before and during implementation of the programme, country offices will work closely with OEV to collect data that complements existing M&E needs, and to ensure adherence to the IE strategy throughout the programme. OEV and DIME will manage IEs implemented in the selected countries and supply an in-country technical specialist for each IE to oversee evaluation activities on the ground. The length of time needed for Step 3 depends on the outcome of interest. Figure 2 provides an example of a typical impact evaluation process.
- **Step 4:** Depending on intervention timelines and the outcomes of interest, IEs may have multiple rounds of data collection and analysis. While mid-term analysis will be conducted after mid-line data collection, the final analysis occurs after the end-line collection. OEV and DIME will ensure analysis rigour and will aim to produce results at a timing useful for informing programme and policy decisions.

Figure 2: A typical impact evaluation process



55. **Synthesis:** An IE is finished when all the data collection, analysis, and reporting have been completed to answer the questions agreed on at the design stage. However, the window analysis will not be complete until the individual evaluations are synthesised according to the window pre-analysis plan. To ensure the utility of evidence produced throughout the window process, OEV and DIME will actively assess stakeholders' awareness and interest in topics related to the window (e.g., IE designs, measurement, analysis, targeting, etc.) on a regular basis and produce targeted products to meet their needs. Table 3 provides a consolidated timeline for window activities.



**Table 3: Window timeline**

Activity Areas	2021				2022				2023	2024
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
<b>Component 1: Preparation</b>										
Call for expressions of interest	■									
Fundraising	■	■	■							
Launch event		■								
First workshop: IE design		■								
<b>Component 2: Support to Impact Evaluations</b>										
IE design support		■	■	■	■					
IE management support		■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
IE data collection support		■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
IE analysis			■	■	■	■	■	■		
IE report drafting			■	■	■	■	■	■		
<b>Component 3: Events and Communication</b>										
Thematic learning events					■		■			
Thematic papers					■		■			
Update bulletin for partners					■	■	■	■		
Update blog					■	■	■	■		

# Appendix 1: Country list

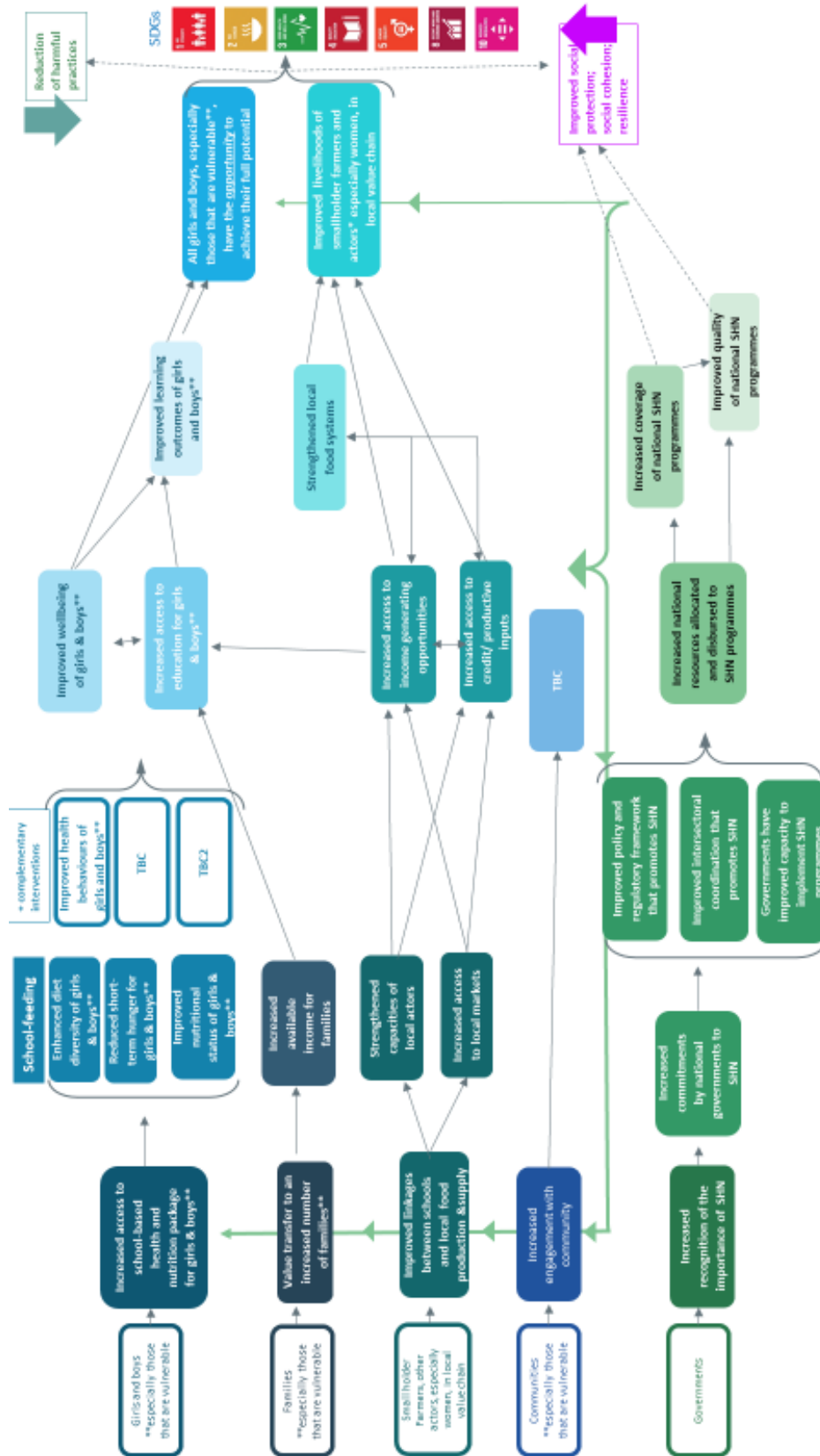
According to 2019 data on WFP School Feeding programmes, countries identified in the three categories are:

- Context 1: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, the Republic of Congo, the Republic of Yemen, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Zimbabwe (29 countries).
- Context 2: Angola, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Bangladesh, Benin, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eswatini, Honduras, Iraq, Kenya, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal, Tajikistan, Uganda, Zambia (24 countries).
- Context 3: Algeria, Armenia, Bhutan, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Namibia, Peru, the Philippines, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia (19 countries).

Two countries (São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste) are not categorised. Additionally, there are 41 reported countries doing local procurement and HGSF. These are:

- Context 1: Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, the Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan (20 countries).
- Context 2: Benin, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Honduras, Kenya, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia (13 countries).
- Context 3: Algeria, Armenia, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, the Philippines, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Sri Lanka (eight countries).

# Appendix 2: Draft Theory of Change School-based programmes



# Appendix 3: List of people consulted

- Adriana Pepe (WFP—SBP)
- Alessio Orgera (WFP—RBP)
- Ana Urgoiti (WFP—RBP)
- Aulo Gelli (IFPRI/CIGAR)
- Carmen Burbano (WFP—SBP)
- Clare O'Brien (WFP—Social Protection Unit)
- Collin Bradley (USDA)
- Donald Bundy (LSHTM)
- Edna Kalaluka (WFP—SBP)
- Edward Lloyds-Evans (WFP—SBP)
- Elisabetta Aurino (Imperial College London)
- Ellie Morefield (USDA)
- Frances Kemeze (AfDB)
- Giulia Baldo (WFP—RBP)
- Grace Igweta (WFP—RBJ)
- Harold Alderman (IFPRI/CIGAR)
- Jason Compy (USDA)
- Jessica Bourdaire (WFP—Nutrition)
- Jutta Neitzel (WFP—SBP)
- Katherine McBride (USDA)
- Lisa Bennett (USDA)
- Luca Molinas (WFP—RBC)
- Marco d'Enrico (FAO)
- Maria Tsvetkova (WFP—RBC)
- Matilde Agostini (WFP—RBC)
- Michala Assankpon (WFP—RBP)
- Niamh O'Grady (WFP—SBP)
- Sergio Lenci (WFP—OEV)
- Silvio Diadone (FAO)
- Tabi Karikari (AfDB)
- Trixie-Belle Nicolle (WFP—RBJ)
- Yohan Chambaud (WFP—SBP)
- Participants to the SBP IE Window pre-concept note workshop on 24th November and 16th December 2020.

## Appendix 4: Evaluation evidence

WFP's Office of Evaluation recently commissioned a strategic evaluation on school feeding and its contribution to the sustainable development goals (WFP, 2021b). The review confirmed that continued research and evaluation had confirmed the relevance of school feeding as having multiple potential outcomes in safety nets, education, nutrition, and support to the local economy. It has also led to more emphasis on interactions and interdependence between education, nutrition and health outcomes and to strong advocacy for treating school feeding as part of an integrated package of school health and nutrition using schools as the delivery platform. The strategic evaluation identified an increasing number of initiatives and pilots of HGSF initiatives, aiming to support local production through school feeding the strategic evaluation. However, according to the evaluation, there are significant challenges with the implementation of a more complex and decentralised approach. As a result, most initiatives have operated at a relatively small scale, with their sustainability and strategic significance still uncertain. The evaluation also found an increasing recognition of the role of school feeding as a safety net. However, examples of school feeding being systematically integrated into wider national systems for social protection are still relatively rare. Finally, the evaluation highlighted the importance of school feeding in humanitarian contexts. However, it is important to recognise that these contexts may highlight different school feeding objectives. Moreover, interventions need to be tailored to particular sub-contexts (e.g. conflict vs. natural disasters, sudden onset emergencies vs. protracted crises, refugees vs. host communities) and may require a complete reconfiguration of existing school feeding operations.

WFP also conducted several Decentralised Evaluations on school feeding. Recently published evaluations include studies conducted in [Cambodia](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Rwanda](#), [Haiti](#), and [Ethiopia](#), which all represent evaluations of McGovern-Dole interventions. USDA created the School Meals Learning Agenda for the McGovern-Dole (MGD) International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program (USDA, 2016), which highlight key research and evaluation questions in the area of school meals. The evidence gaps identified in the document are organised by the following groups: (i) programme implementation (ii) education/literacy (iii) health (iv) nutrition (v) agriculture with a cross-cutting theme of sustainability.

Finally, UNESCO conducted a synthesis evaluation including 147 independent evaluations commissioned by UN and development organisations between 2015 and 2019 for the achievement of equality and inclusion in education - SDG 4 Target 5 (UNESCO, 2019). The report finds that school feeding was one of the strongest interventions along with cash transfers on improving education outcomes. In line with the findings of the review reported in section IV, school feeding is found to increase primary school enrolments, especially in areas with high food insecurity and humanitarian settings such as drought-affected regions and refugee contexts. The report also cautioned against unintended consequences, including overcrowded classrooms and overstretched teaching staff. This study found limited evidence of impact related to reducing inequality and recommended future evaluation to understand how interventions can be better at reaching children and youth with disabilities and well as indigenous and ethnic minority groups.

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