



**WFP EVALUATION**

# **Baseline Evaluation of WFP School-Feeding Program for USDA McGovern-Dole Grant [FY 2020-25]**

Decentralized McGovern-Dole Baseline Evaluation Report

WFP Country Office: Lao PDR

Agreement Number: USDA-FAS-10.608-0700-20-(439) Laos

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Project Duration: 2020-2025



World Food Programme

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## Background

This baseline evaluation of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Food for Education Grant supported School Feeding Program (SFP) in Lao PDR, commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Country Office (CO) Lao PDR, evaluates the baseline situation in September 2021 for the FY20–FY24 award cycle. WFP Lao PDR has received USD 25 million to implement the USDA McGovern-Dole FY20 SFP. The program, implemented in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), will provide a package of school health and nutrition activities, including school meals to approximately 64,156 pre-primary and primary school students in 707 schools in 17 MoES priority districts. For this, WFP will procure canned fish, fortified oil, and a portion of fortified rice under the Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) component of the program.

## Objectives

The baseline study aims to provide a situational analysis before the program begins; to establish baseline values for all performance indicators and review targets; to validate program design assumptions, and to provide program implementation suggestions for the five-year program.

## Methodology

The evaluation followed a mixed-method approach to address the key information areas under the five OECD-DAC (Development Assistance Committee) criteria of *relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability* of the program. The baseline sample was spread across all 11 provinces covering 17 program districts. 34 schools were sampled randomly for the evaluation, two per district, using the demographic variable of remoteness,

ensuring adequate representation of ethnic groups residing in rural remote locations. For the literacy assessment, 20 schools in four districts of Khammouane province were randomly sampled. The sampling of students ensured equal representation of boys and girls. The primary data sources include quantitative surveys with students, equally split among boys and girls, and their parents; In-depth interviews (IDIs) at schools and community level; key informant interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders at the national and provincial levels, specifically from MoES, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Ministry of Health (MoH), WFP and CRS; and physical observations of school infrastructure. All school-level data includes disaggregated analyses by sex, wherever appropriate. Data from all sources were synthesized and triangulated to arrive at programmatic findings, ensuring their validity, reliability and credibility.

## Limitations

The limitations of the study are: (i) Qualitative discussions were conducted telephonically, which made it difficult to capture specific forms of observational and non-verbal data; (ii) the behavioural indicators were captured via interviews, not directly observed, making responses susceptible to social desirability bias; (iii) as a result of the Covid-19, the recorded values for certain indicators, particularly around literacy and nutritional intake, might be lower than that during the pre-Covid times; (iv) Since the target schools for Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) and Model schools have not been identified yet, the two programmatic variables could not be used for developing sub-groups among intervention sample at the time of baseline; (vi) lastly, data collection could not be undertaken in Longcheng district, Xiasonboun. Due to a lack of a timely

response from the Government of Laos and the need to continue with the project, it was decided not to include Longcheng district in FY20 WFP Laos.

### **Key findings**

The program design is completely aligned with ESSDP and NSMP, with a vision to improve the educational and nutritional target of the country and meet the SDG targets. McGovern-Dole-SFP FY20 is directly in-line with WFP's CSP. The program focuses heavily on enhancing the capacities of the government across national, provincial and district levels, and the local communities to enable them to take ownership of school meals by 2025.

The baseline findings indicate that all program villages are not at the same level at the onset of the program. Schools in remote locations are relatively more vulnerable as a group to malnutrition and poor education outcomes. Poverty is one of the most critical determinants of absenteeism in schools.

People reflected a general readiness to adopt the program as well as new health and nutritional practices, provided they receive adequate support to pursue the same.

In order to ensure that the farmers benefit from the program, it is essential to not only increase their farm production but also identify ways and means for increasing their incomes.

Role of women in leadership roles, particularly at the village level seems fairly limited. Women, particularly from the ethnic groups, living in remote rural locations are less likely to be involved in strategic and financial decision making, which are predominantly reserved for men.

### **Key Observations**

- (1) Need to intensify community mobilization and awareness activities, particularly around introducing nutritious food items not consumed traditionally by certain communities (for instance, lentils);
- (2) Use of digital mediums for capacity building of district officials and stakeholders at the community level;
- (3) Need to diversify livelihoods and establishing market linkages for farmers;
- (4) Need to have higher intensity of SFP implementation in villages in remote locations and those inhabited by ethnic groups;
- (5) Allot fixed responsibilities for development and maintenance of school garden;
- (6) Increase platforms for engagement of VEDCs with the community, and offer non-monetary incentives through gamification.