



Informing national school feeding and nutrition policies and strategies in Bhutan

Nutrition situation

Bhutan's children are experiencing the triple burden of malnutrition - undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. All three conditions are linked to sub-optimal diets including inadequate dietary diversity, especially under-consumption of fruits, vegetables, lean animal-based products and plant proteins, and overconsumption of processed foods and beverages that are high in sugar, salt, and fat. In 2019, non-communicable diseases were responsible for 69 percent of Bhutan's disease burden and 71 percent of deaths.

Building human capital

Malnutrition: In numbers



1 in 2 children anemic



1 in 5 children stunted



1 in 3 adolescent girls anemic



Overweight
7.6% children
11% adolescents
33.5% adults



86% of Bhutanese do not eat enough vegetables & fruits

In Bhutan, WFP partners with the Ministries of Health (MoH), Education (MoE), and Agriculture and Forests (MoAF) to create an enabling environment for healthier school nutrition and the improved nutritional status of Bhutanese school children. In 2019, WFP partnered with MoH and UNICEF to revise the National Health Policy (2020-30) and develop the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020-25). WFP also supported MoE to develop the National School Feeding and Nutrition Strategy 2019-2030 (draft) in 2018. These policies aim to strengthen national goals and multi-sectoral collaboration required for effective national health and nutrition programmes and services.

School Nutrition

By transforming the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme (NSFNP), WFP is assisting MoE to improve the nutritional and health status of school children. Nutritious school meals provide an excellent opportunity to ensure children receive diverse, nutritionally balanced, and safe meals. This encourages parents to keep their children in school, develop physical and cognitive abilities, and build healthy eating habits that can continue into adulthood. With WFP support to purchase locally available, nutritious food from local smallholder farmers, the school meals programme also maximizes benefits for smallholder farmers and communities. WFP is also working with its government partners to analyze and optimize the supply chain costs for the NSFNP.

WFP supports the NSFNP to reach all rural schools in the country with school meals through:

- Collaborating with MoAF to connect schools with 9,000 farmers in five districts to provide diverse and nutritious foods for school meals. This also assures incomes for smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women.
- Constructing 23 new school kitchens and stores, and refurbishing 36 existing school kitchen and stores, which will support the expansion of school meals to additional rural schools across the country, and partnering with MoE to develop national standards for school kitchens, stores, and kitchen equipment.



- Collaborating with MoE on the use of SMP PLUS, a user-friendly software that optimizes school menus to be more nutritious, cost-efficient, and locally sourced. The roll-out of SMP PLUS to five districts has already resulted in the design of more cost-efficient nutritious meals while increasing dietary diversity, and increased the use of locally sourced food.
- Supporting the MoE to develop and implement a real time monitoring and reporting system that integrates nutrition, health, and education indicators to ensure evidence-based decision making.

WFP has seen successful results of these interventions with a 26 percent increase in dietary diversity in school meals from 2019 to 2021, and reduced food waste at schools from 2 percent in 2017 to 0.5 percent in 2019.

Healthy diets

WFP is assisting the MoE with research into dietary behaviours in support of a national social behaviour change (SBC) strategy, and to build capacity to improve the dietary and health practices of school children. The WFP supported SBC strategy will contain a comprehensive intervention package to promote nutritious diets, including integrating nutrition and health education into the school curriculum, production of a children's TV show, supporting MoE social media advocacy campaigns, and developing EduTriton - a digital and interactive game-based learning platform.

Adopting a whole-of-society approach, WFP partners with the Tarayana Foundation, a civil society organization, assisting rural and vulnerable population groups in four districts to eat and remain healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

COVID-19 response

COVID-19 constitute a significant risk to the nutritional status of children and communities. The direct and indirect impact of the pandemic, such as reduced household incomes, higher food price volatility, and reduced availability of fresh foods, have affected the quality of Bhutanese diets. WFP continues to work closely with its government partners to maintain and improve nutrition, hygiene and food safety during the pandemic, including WFP assistance to the safe re-opening of schools.

Food fortification

WFP supports the development of Bhutan's food fortification regulatory framework and compliance mechanisms through technical assistance and capacity strengthening to ensure food safety and quality assurance.

The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has prioritized food fortification as a public health strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies among school children using the NSFNP as a platform. With growing evidence on the effectiveness of the programme, the RGoB plans to scale-up the use of fortified rice to reach other vulnerable populations, including monastic institutions, and to gradually introduce fortified rice through the open market.

WFP works with its government partners to strengthen food testing capabilities, develop tools, and facilitate advocacy and policy dialogues and knowledge sharing events. With these foundations, WFP, together with RGoB, will sustainably expand the consumption of fortified foods in Bhutan.

School nutrition	Healthy diets	Food fortification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School menu optimization using School Menu Planner (SMP) PLUS • Farm-to-school linkages • Construction and refurbishment of school kitchens and stores • Food safety and quality assurance • Supply chain analysis and optimization • Real-time and robust monitoring and evaluation system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social behaviour change for nutritious food choices for school children • Capacity strengthening of government agencies • Nutrition education through curriculum and edutainment • EduTriton, a game-based learning app • Community outreach with Tarayana Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory and compliance framework building • Enhanced fortified food production capacity • Robust quality assurance system including laboratory analysis of fortified foods • Evidence generation and knowledge management • Advocacy and communication

