



Using social behaviour change to promote healthy diets among children and adolescents

Healthy diets

The Bhutan Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NNSAP) 2020 – 2025 seeks improvement of the nutritional status of school-age children, including those in monastic institutions, through improved nutrition knowledge, skills, and practices as a strategic result area, with a comprehensive social behaviour communication change (SBCC) strategy as an important means to achieve this. WFP Bhutan partners with the Ministries of Health (MoH) and Education (MoE) to research food consumption behaviour and develop well targeted SBC strategies, campaigns, and materials.

Challenges

Bhutan is currently experiencing a transition in nutrition and food consumption patterns among its populations, especially school-age children and adolescents. Nearly one in three adolescent girls is anaemic and one in ten school children are already overweight, a problem that is increasing. Micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition result from the same problem - poor quality diets, dominated by nutrient-poor rice, and limited consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables or nutrient-dense foods like meat, pulses, and dairy.

At the same time, inexpensive and ultra-processed foods, including carbonated soft drinks and unhealthy foods high in sugar, salt and fat have begun to proliferate in shops around the country. These products, such as instant noodles, are replacing more traditional and nutrient-dense foods, further exacerbating the forms of malnutrition. Although school children and parents have considerable knowledge about healthy and unhealthy foods, this knowledge does not translate into action.

Solutions

To address these threats to the health and well-being of the next generation, WFP partners with the Ministry of Education (MoE), and provides technical assistance to its School Health and Nutrition Division, to improve the nutritional status of school children and adolescents. While helping to improve the quality of school meals, WFP is also endeavouring to influence food choices inside and outside schools through social behaviour change (SBC).

In 2022, WFP, SHND and MoH carried out formative behavioural research to gain a deeper understanding of what drives food consumption behaviours, and to identify barriers to improving diet quality. WFP is supporting the development of a national SBC strategy that will address these barriers, not only through provision of information, but also with targeted policy and programmatic tools and campaigns. These will be piloted in 2023 and monitored to identify efficient and cost-effective solutions.





WFP nutrition initiatives

WFP has supported SHND to implement other nutrition educational activities. These include:

- In 2020, supporting Tarayana Foundation, a community services organization to implement community SBC activities in 16 villages of four rural areas in Zhemgang, Tsirang, Trongsa, and Lhuentse districts, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2021, the development of the Healthy Drukylul social media campaign, in partnership with the Prime Minister's Office, targeting mothers and caregivers of school children.
- Development of a game-based learning platform for children called EduTriton to make learning about nutrition more fun and active in school.
- Supporting inclusion of nutrition into the school curriculums with major topics to be integrated into different subject lessons by grade level. The subjects include science, biology, English, Dzongkha and social studies.
- Production of Pinda's Magic Bowl, a five-episode children's TV programme focusing on healthy eating. The series, developed in English and Dzongkha, aired in Bhutan in June and September 2022, and is now available on YouTube channels – [BBS Channel 3](#) and [UN Bhutan](#).
- In 2022, the development of the Healthy Zheyula social media campaign, which was launched ahead of the March 28 National School Nutrition day. The WFP and MoE campaign, with a reach over 30,000 viewers, was delivered on Facebook and Instagram, targeting the mothers and caregivers of school children. A daily quiz competition and healthy plate contest were held, and video recipes were shared. The campaign continued on Facebook and Instagram, with weekly posts on healthy lunchbox ideas and 'did you know' series.

