

CHANGING LIVES IN BHUTAN



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Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo

Kuzuzangpo

I am pleased to share the first issue of WFP Bhutan's quarterly newsletter 'Changing Lives in Bhutan'. WFP's partnership with Bhutan dates back to 1974 with the introduction of the school feeding programme. Today, having successfully transitioned the feeding programme to the Royal Government of Bhutan, WFP serves the people of Bhutan as a technical partner, working closely with the Government in building resilient food systems, securing food and nutrition security, addressing malnutrition, and strengthening emergency preparedness and disaster risk management capacity.

In this issue, we present the activities implemented in partnership with government agencies, including, the newly established partnership with the Tarayana Foundation.

At WFP, we strive to pursue our commitment to the people of Bhutan with renewed zeal, as the country recovers from the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We remain committed to 'Saving Lives, Changing Lives' in Bhutan.

Carrie Morrison

Carrie Morrison

Representative and Country Director

HEALTHY

26_P5_H3_n_m-a



Beans



Mango



Spinach



Milk



Dal



Carrot



Cabbage



Egg



Rice



Watermelon

NOT HEAL



Chocolate



Pizza



Tomato



Momo



Chicken

To promote healthy eating habits among children and adolescents

In January 2022, during a five-day WFP supported workshop, a social behaviour change (SBC) strategy and action plan were developed to promote and motivate healthier eating habits among school children and adolescents.

Twenty-four participants, representing 12 districts, from the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, participated in the workshop. The participants were engaged in prioritizing food consumption behaviours, target audiences, SBC activities, nutrition messages, and key monitoring and evaluation indicators.

WFP will work with the Health and Wellbeing Division (HWD) under MoESD to implement the SBC strategy, action plan and a healthy diets advocacy pilot project. This will involve both in-school and out-of-school activities, events and communications and advocacy products designed to increase nutrition knowledge, change social norms and influence dietary habits. The campaign will be introduced in 15 schools in Chhukha and Thimphu districts from July through October 2023, and include a nation-wide social media campaign.

The SBC campaign was developed in response to Bhutan's triple burden of malnutrition, which includes undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. According to National Nutrition Survey (2015), one in three adolescent girls is anaemic and preliminary data from the 2022 education information management system indicates that 14 percent of school children in classes pre-primary to 12 are overweight. These issues stem from poor quality diets, characterized by underconsumption of nutrient-dense foods, and overconsumption of nutrient-poor staple foods, ultra-processed snacks, and junk food.

To inform the SBC strategy and action plan, WFP, MoESD and MoH carried out qualitative formative research in July 2022 in 25 schools across the country. Awareness on healthy or unhealthy foods were high among students and their caregivers. However, it was found that healthy foods were less available and affordable than cheap, convenient, and ultra-processed snacks. There were also deeply rooted socio-cultural norms related to vegetarianism, poor food-related habits like skipping meals, and lack of skills for preparing healthy meals.

Drones for emergency preparedness and response

In January 2022, WFP and the Department of Local Governance and Disaster Management organized a five-day training on use of drones for emergency preparedness and response.

Eighteen officials from 13 government agencies, including the Royal Bhutan Army, Royal Bhutan Police, Department of Geology and Mines, National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology and De-Suung (national service volunteers) were trained by WFP and Bhutan Flying Labs.

Classroom sessions were provided with practical training on the use of drones for emergency response, including mapping, data collection and analysis, and search and rescue. Participants were engaged in scenario-based training in a pre-approved area where they solved complex tasks like pre-flight planning, drone operation, image processing, identifying affected areas, and carried out search and rescue operation.

A trainer from WFP Drones teach a participant how to fly a drone Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo





Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo

A drone's eye view on emergency response

It's 8:26 a.m. in Paro, west of Bhutan's capital Thimpu. A group of men and women, attending a workshop, are enjoying a light moment over morning tea and breakfast when their phones begin to buzz and beep in chorus.

"ALERT ALERT ALERT," reads the message, which includes an aerial photo of a community delineated in red. "An earthquake has hit this area marked in red, with reports of survivors, damaged buildings, and critical infrastructure throughout. There is a village outlined; we need it to be mapped and analysed."

The message provides further information on an emergency operations meeting, drone use clearance from the authorities, and instructions to always fly the drone within the visual line of sight. By the time the areas have been scanned and mapped by drones, damage assessed, and victims rescued, it's close to 4 p.m.

This surprise simulation exercise came at the end of the five-day workshop for 18 Bhutan government officials — ranging from the police and army to hydrology and mining agencies — on frontline and emergency response, hosted by trainers from WFP Drones and Bhutan Flying Labs.

The training fits into a broader effort by WFP and the Bhutan government's disaster management services to build the country's capacity in using drones for emergency preparedness and response. This is key for this mountainous, Southeast Asia nation located in one of the most seismically active zones in the world. Bhutan is also highly prone to floods, forest fires, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods.

"Having a bird's-eye view can help humanitarians get a better grasp of the whole picture. Drones can provide rapid post-disaster assessments and map out large areas accurately, saving both time and improving emergency response efficiency," says Elizabeth Bourke, a drone expert with WFP's IT emergency preparedness and response branch.

Bhutan counts among 30 countries worldwide where WFP offers different drone-oriented activities — from prepositioning equipment in high disaster-risk countries and strengthening local emergency preparedness efforts to supporting emergency responses when disaster hits.

In Bhutan, WFP's drone training supports government efforts increase drone use in monitoring glacial lakes, mapping forest fires, and conducting search-and-rescue and disaster-impact analyses. Among other areas, the trainings focus on areas like thematic applications of drones, manual flights, mission planning and data processing — all using disaster simulation exercises involving drones.

Participants receive hours of drone flying time on each day of training to build their manual skills, and learn to analyse drone images to speed up emergency response. All of this knowledge helps to better react in the aftermath of a disaster, where access to information is critical to allocate resources and each people needing assistance.

For Major Tshering Namgyal from the Royal Bhutan Police, leveraging drone technology is important for Bhutan since it costs little to operate and builds capacity in dealing with difficult weather conditions and emergency search-and-rescue missions. "We also learnt about the evolution of drones, data acquisition, analysis and use, and regulations within the country and outside," he shares.

"Hopefully this shared experience will allow the stakeholders who are participants of the workshop to stay in touch and work towards a safe locally-led enabling future," says WFP's Bourke.

Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo





Contestants cook healthy meals during the cooking contest finale in Thimphu. Photo: WFP/Phuntsho Wangmo

NUTRITION & FOOD SECURITY

Community advocacy for healthy diets

In February 2022, WFP and the Tarayana Foundation supported a cooking competition, advocating for healthy diets among rural and vulnerable populations. Following an initial round of competition in the districts, ten farmers from Zhemgang, Trongsa, Tsirang and Lhuentse districts reached the finale in Thimphu on February 28

The competition showcased community members' cooking skills and knowledge, and facilitated the sharing of original recipes that were nutritious and locally sourced. The contest aimed at promoting creativity, enhancing cooking skills, and strengthening knowledge on nutrition, while building confidence in basic food preparation. WFP's support to Tarayana is part of a project that aims to improve healthy eating in the four target districts through advocacy for healthy diets.

*Members of an all-women farmers group Tshangkha, Trongsa
Photo: Tshangkha Agriculture Extension Office/Dechen Pelden*



FOOD SYSTEMS & RESILIENCE

Linking farmers to markets

Fifteen schools in Trongsa district renewed their contracts with local smallholder farmers for procurement of vegetables and fruits for school meals. The contract renewal was facilitated by the Regional Agriculture Marketing and Cooperatives Office under the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in partnership with WFP. The linkages between smallholder farmers and schools have increased income for the farmers by twofold, while improving food diversity and nutrition of the school meals.

WFP facilitated the linking of six farmer groups from Zhemgang, Tsirang and Dagana districts with the Khemrig Namsum Cooperative to export 2 mt of ginger and turmeric to Malaysia. WFP, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Department of Agriculture Marketing and Cooperatives, strengthens farmers' capacity in optimal agriculture practices, climate resilient production, post-harvest management, value chain development, market access, and enhanced supply chains.

Students and staff of Chungkha Primary School observe the National School Nutrition Day with officials from MoESD and WFP. Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo



SCHOOL NUTRITION

Observing national school nutrition day

Chungkha Primary School in Chhukha was awarded the first prize for the “Healthy meals we prepare” contest on 23 March, coinciding with the National School Nutrition Day.

WFP Country Director, Carrie Morrison, awarded the prize, comprising of kitchen equipment, to the school in a simple ceremony at the school. The contest was organized by the MoESD and WFP with support from KOICA, in December 2022. The second and third prizes were awarded to Drukgyel Central School, Paro, and Kabesa Central School in Punakha.

Twenty one schools under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme participated in the competition.

The winning entry showcased preparation of a healthy school meal for their students, using fresh vegetables from the School Agriculture Programme garden, rice fortified with eight essential vitamins and minerals, lentils, and herbs and spices to ensure the meal was tasty without using excessive salt. The entry was submitted to the global “Healthy meals we prepare” campaign organized by WFP, FAO and School Meals Coalition.

The contest was organized to bring attention to the need to improve the quality of school meals and to celebrate the efforts of school and kitchen staff to improve the health and nutrition outcomes of school children.



98,502

students receive
at least one meal
a day



16

school kitchens and
storage units
constructed and
refurbished



498

schools under the
National School
Feeding and Nutrition
Programme



2,855

smallholder farmers
linked to schools



Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo



Batha, 43, is the sole kitchen staff at Chungkha Primary school. Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo

SCHOOL NUTRITION

Feeding the future

In a small kitchen, darkened by soot, Batha, 43, checks if the rice is cooked. Waves of steam from the giant electric cooker fills the air as he loosens the fortified rice with a wooden spatula. It is 11:30 am. Soon, the 71 students of Chungkha Primary School will be lining up for their mid-day meal.

Batha is yet to prepare the egg curry, a Thursday special, and lentil soup, on a wood-fed oven. He is the only kitchen staff and cooks three meals a day. While 50 students who are boarders get all three meals, the rest, who are day scholars receive breakfast and lunch. The school, which was established in 1985, provides boarding facilities to students from pre-primary to grade six.

Batha, who lives three minutes' walk from the school, starts his day at 4:30 am, peeling and chopping vegetables and meat, and ensuring that the kitchen is clean. He has worked for the school for 19 years - 16 as the cook and three years as the caretaker.

From cooking meals with food items from WFP and the Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited, to using more of locally sourced food items, Batha said that he saw the transitioning of the WFP supported feeding programme to a government owned programme.

Starting this year, the school was also part of the School Menu Planner (SMP) PLUS roll-out. The SMP PLUS is WFP's innovative web-based tool which optimizes school menus to make school meals more cost effective, more nutritious

while increasing the proportion of locally sourced food items.

He has also attended trainings for cooks, which helped him understand the importance of healthy and nutritious meals for children.

Wearing a clean hat, apron and a mask over his mouth, Batha explains what he learned from the training. "I learnt about the nutrients in the vegetables and meat, and why it was important to reduce oil and salt consumption," he said. "Herbs and spices were recommended as alternatives to salt."

It is hard work, using wood-fed stove to cook meals for a large number of hungry children, but Batha feels immensely satisfied to be able to serve them with hot meals every day.

Students are served fortified rice as part of school meals in Bhutan. Photo: WFP/Kinley Wangmo





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