



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

### Healthy diets

The Bhutan Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020–2025) seeks to improve the nutritional status of schoolchildren and adolescents, including those in monastic institutions, through improved nutrition knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices. Based on behavioural research into food and snack consumption, a comprehensive Social Behaviour Change (SBC) Strategy and Action Plan was developed by WFP with government partners, including the Ministry Education and Skills Development (MoESD), Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL). The SBC strategy contains both in and out-of-school SBC activities, campaigns, and materials.

### Challenges

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

In 2022, WFP partnered with the MoESD and MoH to undertake a qualitative study of dietary behaviour in schoolchildren, adolescents, and their influencers. While knowledge and awareness on healthy and unhealthy foods

were relatively high, other determinants of poor-quality diets were identified, such as:

- Poor accessibility and affordability of healthy foods, with abundant accessibility to inexpensive, convenient, and ultra-processed snacks.
- Deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and emotions on vegetarianism, eating nutrient-poor foods such as rice and potatoes, and using salty flavour enhancers such as *ezay* (chilli paste) and pickles.
- Lack of cooking skills to prepare healthy meals or knowledge of substituting healthy ingredients for unhealthy ones.



- Poor food-related habits, such as skipping breakfast or snacking on unhealthy foods after school and then skipping dinner.
- Eating junk food as part of meals, discarding healthier options such as vegetables, pulses and animal products.
- Increased solitary and mindless eating of junk food by children in front of screens, and less mindful eating of well-balanced meals as a family.
- Consumption of unhealthy junk food as part of the development of social bonds with friends.
- Children using their preferences for snacks and junk food as part of asserting their independence and identity creation.

## Solutions

WFP partners with, and provides technical assistance to, the MoESD's Health and Wellbeing Division (HWD) to influence food choices made both inside and outside of schools through a package of SBC activities and materials.

WFP supported the development of a National SBC Strategy and Action Plan to address specific drivers and barriers not just through provision of information, but with targeted policy and programmatic tools and campaigns.

## WFP nutrition initiatives

- WFP supports a civil society organization, Tarayana Foundation, to implement community SBC activities in 16 villages in the four rural districts of Zhemgang, Tsirang, Trongsa and Lhuentse.
- In 2021, WFP developed the *Healthy Drukyl* social media campaign in partnership with the Prime Minister's Office, targeting mothers and caregivers of schoolchildren with nutritional guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic period.
- WFP supported the inclusion of nutrition into Bhutan's school curriculum with major topics integrated into different subjects by grade

levels, including science, biology, social studies, English, and Dzongkha.

- 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.



The premiere poster for *Pinda's Magic Bowl*

- In 2022, WFP supported MoESD with a *Healthy Zheyila* social media campaign for National School Nutrition Day. The campaign targeted mothers and caregivers of schoolchildren and reached over 30,000 viewers on social media. A daily quiz competition and healthy plate contest were held, and video recipes were shared. The campaign continued with weekly posts on healthy lunchbox ideas and 'did you know?' series.
- In 2022, WFP and HWD organized a "Healthy Meals We Prepare" contest for schools under the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme. The objective was to acknowledge and encourage school staff to prepare healthy meals for children. The winning entry was submitted to the global "Healthy Meals I Prepare" campaign organized by WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the School Meals Coalition.
- In 2023, WFP continues to support a multi-agency SBC taskforce in developing a multi-media SBC package that will include both in and out-of-school communication activities and materials. This is piloted in Chhukha and Thimphu districts, currently.

