



WFP EVALUATION

Final evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole funded school feeding project (FFE-679-2017/020-00) in the Republic of the Congo - 2018-2023

Decentralized Evaluation Report – Volume 1



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SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES



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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This report covers the final evaluation of the World Food Programme (WFP) McGovern-Dole school feeding project in the Republic of Congo (FFE-679-201/020-00). This project (hereafter referred to as McGovern-Dole) is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The final evaluation represents the last part of a process that included a baseline study and a mid-term evaluation.
2. The objectives of the evaluation are accountability and learning about which aspects of the project worked and which did not. Expected recommendations relate to the implementation of the next McGovern-Dole project in the country (FY21). The users are the WFP country office (CO), the ministries associated with the project,¹ the sub-recipient partners² and the USDA.
3. The main aim of the McGovern-Dole programme is to improve literacy among primary school children. To this end, it seeks to contribute to improving the quality of teaching, distributes school meals as an incentive to attend school, and intervenes in hygiene, health and nutrition practices to reduce absences due to illness. The project operates in 410 schools in seven departments selected based on their prevalence of food insecurity.³
4. The project has benefited 92,000 children, 47 percent of them girls. It was implemented from September 2017 to November 2023 with a budget of US\$ 29.9 million provided by the USDA, plus a donation of 446 tons of canned sardines from Japan.
5. The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, enabling comparison with the baseline study and the mid-term evaluation, and between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The main methods used to gather information were a desk review, a quantitative survey in schools, a literacy knowledge test for pupils, and qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions and observation conducted in 20 schools. A total of 1,295 women and 1,475 men were consulted. Data collection took place from February 25 to March 24th, 2023. The main limitations of the evaluation are the lack of documentation on the activities carried out, especially under the second strategic outcome, and its limited usefulness as the FY21 project has already been approved and therefore lessons learnt from the evaluation cannot be integrated in its design.

Context

6. The country was affected by a long period of recession from 2014, aggravated in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse in world oil prices. The economic situation has been improving since 2021.
7. Poverty and food insecurity have increased in recent years. The crisis in Ukraine is exacerbating this situation. Rising food prices are having a major impact in a country that is highly dependent on food imports.
8. The education system is characterized by poor performance in terms of access, quality, efficiency and results. This is reflected in a low primary school completion rate, which particularly affects girls, and insufficient skills at the end of primary school. Indigenous children face particular constraints and are catered for in the Observer, Réfléchir, Agir (ORA) schools in the Sangha and Likouala departments.
9. School feeding has been developing since the 2000s with the support of WFP and the Non-Governmental Organization International Partnership for Human Development. The national policy was drawn up in 2016, with an emphasis on local purchasing. Currently school feeding is essentially

¹ Ministry of preschool, primary and secondary education and literacy (MEPSA in French), Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action.

² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

³ Pool, Bouenza, Lékoumou, Plateaux, Cuvette, Sangha, Likouala.

implemented by WFP in the 7 departments of intervention of the project. The government directly manages school canteens in 20 schools.

10. The nutritional situation has improved slightly in recent years, but the prevalence of stunting remains a cause for concern in some departments. Other health challenges affect the Congolese, notably communicable diseases linked to precarious hygiene and sanitation conditions.

11. Gender inequalities are reflected in girls' lower access to education. Gender-based violence is a critical issue, with high rates and widespread social acceptance.

Evaluation findings

Project relevance and coherence

12. The project's overall goal of improving literacy and the strategy defined to achieve it are relevant to the needs identified. Two elements could have been better considered. Malaria and respiratory diseases seem to be among the primary causes of sick leave, whereas the project focuses solely on the prevention of diseases related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). While the project does address gender equality objectives are through promoting equitable access to elementary school and women's participation in canteen management committees, other issues, such as gender-based violence which needs to be addressed from an early age, could have been considered.

13. The project was able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing take-home rations to prevent deterioration in children's nutritional status.

14. The project is entirely based on food imports, which is at odds with the national school feeding policy and the 2022-2023 Food Crisis Resilience Plan. WFP is implementing school feeding activities based on local purchases in other schools; the two approaches should be complementary. Similarly, the project is not fully aligned with WFP's nutrition policy, which advocates strengthening nutrition-sensitive food value chains, as with an approach fully based in food imports it does not support nutrition-sensitive value chains at national sub-national or local level. It is consistent with WFP's school feeding policy, which is based on partnerships to address health, nutrition and education issues. This aspect has been integrated through partnerships with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED).

15. Nevertheless, implementation would have benefited from the expansion of partnerships, in particular with the Projet d'appui au secteur de l'éducation (PRAASED), to achieve the objectives of improving the quality of education.

Effectiveness

16. **Improved quality of education.** Distribution of school materials and training of school administrators should meet or exceed targets. The key activities of curriculum revision, textbook production and teacher training were not carried out as planned. The project benefited from the implementation of these activities by PRAASED.

17. **Improved school attendance and attention.** The target set in terms of the number of meals served should be reached. However, the quantities of food distributed are lower than forecast, although they have increased from 30 percent of planned deliveries in 2018 to 80 percent in 2022. The school canteens function well, with local actors mastering their management and monitoring system. The rations distributed are not very diversified, which runs counter to the objectives of raising awareness of diversified diets. Enrolment in McGovern Dole schools increased by 71 percent.⁴ Qualitative interviews showed that school meals clearly had a positive effect on motivating children to go to school. Some poor families are unable to pay school fees on a regular basis, which prevents enrolment. The presence of indigenous children is affected by the families' displacements to gather wild plants. School meals have no effect on

⁴ SAPR September 2022.

hunger in the short term as school meals are served towards the end or after the school day, but they do have a positive effect on pupils' attention in class.

18. **Improved knowledge of good health and hygiene practices, food preparation and storage, and nutrition.** The targets for training in hygiene, sanitation and food preparation and storage have been reached. Hygiene and sanitation topics were already part of the school curriculum before the project and are well assimilated. Food preparation and storage topics were not part of the curriculum but are also well assimilated. On the other hand, activities designed to improve knowledge of nutrition did not have the expected impact. This component lacked technical leadership. A nutrition guide, which had been planned, was not produced. Documentation of training and awareness-raising activities is imprecise. According to interviews in schools, these themes are poorly assimilated by all stakeholders.

19. **Infrastructure.** The project has built or rehabilitated 86 percent of the target. According to a WFP inventory of 268 schools, 78 percent have latrines, but only 34 percent have a water point. Qualitative interviews confirmed that access to water is a serious problem that limits the adoption of good hygiene practices.

20. **Foundational results.** Several activities have been implemented to develop the capacities of the Direction de l'Alimentation Scolaire (DAS), but its role remains limited and WFP still directly manages certain key functions. At decentralized level, actions have focused on the monitoring system and have enabled the achievement of adequate capacities.

21. The government has made limited contributions to project funding. Greater ownership of the program is needed. Apart from the MEPSA, the other relevant government institutions, such as the Ministry of Health and Populations, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action and the Ministry of women promotion did not participate in the project.

22. The involvement of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Educational Program for Sustainable Development (PEDD in French) dans la Sangha seems to have played a positive role in mobilizing communities. In general, their contribution is essential to the operation of school canteens.

23. **Gender.** The project has contributed to equitable access to elementary school for girls and boys. Women have formal access to management committees, although this does not necessarily mean that they have taken on real leadership roles. Cooks make an indispensable contribution to the running of canteens. Their expectations of compensation are not met, and in some schools the workload has a negative impact on their economic opportunities.

Efficiency

24. The project's targeting was aimed at the areas most affected by food insecurity estimated by the 2014 "Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis" survey. This survey shows that the project should have covered the Cuvette Ouest department, or even the Kouilou and Niari departments. Similarly, several resource persons consider that certain particularly affected areas are not covered by the project within the beneficiary departments. According to WFP, the selection of areas covered by the project was done in collaboration with the government.⁵

25. The evaluation was unable to carry out a cost analysis of the project due to lack of available data. However, administrative costs appear to be excessive. Infrastructure improvement activities were underbudgeted in relation to needs.

26. Communication and coordination with all stakeholders is lacking. The establishment of the National Interministerial Committee for School Food (CNMAS) and the Interministerial Technical Committee (CIT) will be essential to promote the participation of all stakeholders in the FY21 project.

Impact

⁵ This information was provided by the WFP CO and was not triangulated.

27. The proportion of pupils achieving sufficient literacy skills increased significantly over the course of the project. The results of the skills test show a significant positive difference in the schools supported by the project. However, overall, two-thirds of pupils still fail to reach the "sufficient" skills threshold. The results of ORA schools are well below those of official schools.⁶

28. The project had no impact on reducing absences due to illness. School meals have a positive short-term effect on dietary diversity, but the project has not contributed to a longer-term impact on diet outside school meals.

29. In some schools, the project has helped foster integration between indigenous and Bantu children around the school canteen. In others, the reproduction of certain prejudices has excluded indigenous people from management committees and groups of cooks.

Sustainability

30. There has been significant progress since 2015 on the five pillars that define a sustainable school feeding program according to the System Approach to Better Education Results (SABER).⁷ The country has adopted a school feeding policy and is making a contribution to funding the program, the DAS has been created, a monitoring system has been set up, and communities are making a key contributions, such as their participation to food management, food preparation, provision of firewood and water. Nevertheless, much remains to be done if the program is to be sustainable. WFP directly manages key functions, inter-ministerial coordination structures have not been created, and the government's financial contribution is very limited.

31. Continued efforts to improve the quality of teaching are essential to sustain the results achieved in child literacy.

32. More generally, the sustainability of the benefits generated by the project should be based on greater participation and ownership of the actions by the sectoral institutions concerned.

Conclusion

33. The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the McGovern-Dole project. Some improvements can be made to the FY21 project design to promote gender equality, integrate indigenous people, improve access to water and integrate food import and local purchasing arrangements.

34. Significant progress has been made towards the ultimate goal of improving primary school children's literacy skills, but still a long way from the desired level of 80 percent of children above the "sufficient" proficiency threshold. This result is due to a combination of variable effectiveness and largely favorable external factors. Certain aspects of implementation need to be improved within the FY21 project, such as results monitoring, the approach to fostering changes in nutrition behavior, and stakeholder participation and coordination.

35. Much remains to be done to ensure the sustainability of the feeding program. This calls for a more strategic and consistent approach to capacity building during the FY21 project.

Lessons learned

36. The strategy limited to promoting the formal participation of women in school canteen management committees does not necessarily contribute to the objectives of equality and empowerment of women.

37. The absence of a nutritionist on a continuous basis during the project either in WFP or UNICEF led to a lack of technical leadership on strategic outcome two of the project, and particularly on activities promoting adequate nutrition, which affected project performance.

⁶ 92 percent of pupils in ORA schools are below the "sufficient" skills threshold, compared to 62 percent in non-ORA supported schools and 68 percent in non-supported schools.

⁷ The SABER approach enables a diagnosis of the five pillars that define the sustainability of school feeding programs.

38. The scope of nutrition awareness campaigns has been insufficient to bring about a change in behavior towards greater dietary diversity. School canteens have also not contributed to this objective due to the limited diversity in rations served. School food could play an important role in promoting behavioral change, through the promotion of a community dynamic around canteens.

39. The mobilization of parents and communities for the operation of school canteens is realized, but contributions to diversify the ration provided by the project are limited. The evaluation was unable to determine the precise reasons for this. Greater attention should be paid to this issue in the FY21 project.

Recommendations

1. **Clarify and document the project's PMP to ensure its full use**, addressing inconsistencies and reviewing and documenting targets.
2. **Reinforce the objectives of combating gender inequality and promoting women's autonomy**: address the issue of gender-based violence, develop a more in-depth approach to the role of women in the operation of school canteens, and systematize the disaggregation of monitoring data by gender.
3. **Develop a communication program for change, particularly on dietary diversity**: ensure sufficient technical leadership in nutrition, make better use of school canteens as a vector for change, and ensure greater outreach of awareness-raising activities.
4. **Increase budgeted resources and planning for the construction/rehabilitation of water points.**
5. **Strengthen the involvement and coordination of all relevant government institutions.**
6. **Strengthen the integration of indigenous populations**: carry out an impact study on the closure of ORA schools in Likouala and include the issue of prejudice against indigenous people in awareness-raising activities.
7. **Consider implementing together and in complementarity the modalities of imported food commodities and local purchase.**
8. **Strengthen capacity development of national players and transfer program functions still managed by WFP to DAS**: Consider ongoing technical assistance and draw up a capacity development and skills transfer plan.
9. **Reinforce the project's usefulness in improving the quality of education**: liaise and coordinate with PRAASED and other institutions involved in the education sector to jointly plan the continuation of curriculum revisions.

1 Introduction

1. This evaluation report covers the final evaluation of the World Food Programme's (WFP) McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Project in the Republic of Congo (hereinafter referred to as the McGovern-Dole Project). This project is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Foreign Assistance Service (FAS) under the contract number FFE-679-2017/020-00. This evaluation represents the final phase of a three-phase process implemented over the duration of the project, which included a baseline study, a mid-term evaluation, and this final evaluation.

1.1. EVALUATION FEATURES

2. The McGovern-Dole project began as part of WFP's 2006 country program and was subsequently integrated into the 2019-2024 Country Strategic Plan (CSP) within Strategic Outcome 2 on social protection. The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Congo country office and covers the period from project start-up in September 2017 to evaluation data collection in March 2023. The evaluation is part of three interconnected exercises comprising a baseline study carried out in 2018, a mid-term evaluation carried out in 2021 and this final evaluation.

3. The main objectives of the assessment are:⁸

- **Accountability for project actions and outcomes.** The aim is to assess the achievement of results and the long-term effects of the project (intended, unintended, negative or positive) on girls, boys, men and women, communities and targeted institutions.
- **Learning and adapting based on lessons learned.** The final evaluation draws lessons on what worked and what hindered achievement of positive long-term effects, and what factors may have led to negative effects. The baseline study made recommendations on the most effective approach to monitoring the project, based on the indicators in the Project Monitoring Plan (PMP). The mid-term evaluation made recommendations for strengthening and improving the project's implementation over the last two years. The final evaluation generates recommendations to support the design and implementation of the successor McGovern-Dole project (2022-2026), while also assessing the extent to which the recommendations made at mid-term have been implemented and with what effect. It should be noted that the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation indicate that most of the recommendations made in the mid-term evaluation will only be fully realized during the implementation of the FY21 project, due to the short period between this evaluation and the end of the project.

4. The evaluation also sought to determine the extent to which the McGovern-Dole project addresses gender equality and equitable access for all vulnerable groups.

5. The expected users of the evaluation are WFP (country office, regional bureau, headquarters, evaluation office), the ministries associated with the McGovern-Dole project,⁹ the sub-recipient partners United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ACTED¹⁰ and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the implementing partners, and the FAS. These stakeholders will use the evaluation to support the implementation of the McGovern-Dole FY21 project, and to replicate identified good practices in other countries in the region, where appropriate.

⁸ As stated in the Terms of Reference (see Annex 1 for the Summary Terms of Reference).

⁹ Ministry of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy (MEPPSA in French), Ministry of Health and Population (MSP in French), Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MAEP in French), Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action (MASAH in French).

¹⁰ French non-governmental organization working in the field of international solidarity. ACTED was not consulted during the final evaluation, as it no longer has a presence in the country.

6. The evaluation was carried out by The Konterra Group, supported by a team of independent evaluators. It covers all activities and processes related to the McGovern-Dole project from September 2017 to March 2023, and the seven departments of Congo where the project is being implemented.¹¹

1.2. CONTEXT

7. The Republic of Congo is in Central Africa and extends over 342,000 km.² It has an estimated population of almost six million (50.1 percent female)¹² and a life expectancy of 64 years (women=65, men=62).¹³ The Human Development Report 2021/2022¹⁴ ranks Congo among the countries with average human development, with a human development index of 0.571 (rank 153 out of 191). More than half of the Congolese territory (60 percent) is covered by tropical forest, the remainder by tropical savannah. The country is divided into 12 departments (admin level 1). More than half the population lives in the two main cities: the capital Brazzaville and Pointe Noire.

8. **Political and economic context.** Since its independence in 1960, the political history of the Congo has been turbulent. The country experienced a three-phase civil war from 1993 to 1999, which left it economically, financially and socially exhausted. Over the past 15 years, the country's political situation has been relatively stable.

9. Congo is a lower-middle-income country whose gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen considerably, from US\$ 18,000 million in 2014 to US\$ 10,300 million in 2016.¹⁵ Negative annual GDP growth continued, with a sharp contraction in 2020 (-6.2 percent)¹⁶ mainly due to COVID-19 and the collapse in world oil prices. Efforts to consolidate public finances and the signing of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in 2021 helped stem the financial crisis from 2021 (GDP growth was 6.2 percent in 2021 and 8.5 percent in 2022).¹⁷

10. **Poverty and food security.** The proportion of the population living below the poverty line fell sharply between 2005 and 2011 (51 percent and 41 percent respectively), but rose again from 2016, particularly in rural areas¹⁸ to reach 52 percent of the population in 2021.¹⁹ The Gini coefficient of 48.9 is indicative of high inequality.²⁰ In addition, the country ranked 105th out of 121 on the 2022 Global Hunger Index.²¹ The indigenous population (hunter-gatherers) is the poorest and most vulnerable segment of the national population. They live mainly in the Likouala and Sangha departments, representing 8 percent of the population (see map in Annex 2).²²

11. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), around 1.7 million people were undernourished between 2019 and 2021,²³ an increase of 200,000 on the previous period (2017-2019). Congo has vast uncultivated arable land, which accounts for around a third of its total surface area.²⁴ The country imports 70 percent of its food, making the population largely dependent on food imports. Food

¹¹ Pool, Bouenza, Lékoumou, Plateaux, Cuvette, Sangha and Likouala.

¹² World Bank, 2021, "Population, total".

¹³ World Bank, 2020, "Life expectancy".

¹⁴ UNDP; <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/COG>

¹⁵ World Bank, <http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/pays/congo-republique-du> (accessed March 22, 2021).

¹⁶ World Bank, 2023, World Economic Outlook Report.

¹⁷ <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CD/l-economie-de-la-rd-congo#:~:text=Le%20PIB%20a%20ainsi%20affich%C3%A9,de%20la%20guerre%20en%20Ukraine> (accessed June 27, 2023).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/congo/overview>, (accessed January 31, 2023).

²⁰ The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure designed to represent the inequality of income or wealth within a nation or any other group of people.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=CG>

²¹ World Hunger Index, <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/congo.html> (accessed January 31, 2023)

²² All annexes are compiled and presented in Volume 2 of this evaluation report

²³ FAO, <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#country/46>, (accessed January 31, 2023).

²⁴ FAO, <http://www.fao.org/congo/notre-bureau/congo-en-un-coup-doeil/en/>, (accessed January 31, 2023)

insecurity stems from limited agricultural productivity, poverty, recurrent social and political conflict and gender inequality.²⁵ The conflict in Ukraine has exacerbated the situation with rising food and fuel prices. For example, the price of a liter of oil rose by 67.8 percent in Brazzaville between January 2021 and February 2022 from US\$ 1.5 in January 2021 to US\$ 2.6 in February 2022.²⁶ According to a document produced by the WFP's country office on the effects of the Ukrainian crisis on food security and provided to the evaluation team, "the recent Ukrainian crisis has exacerbated this situation of food insecurity, notably through the continuing rise in the price of basic products".

12. **Education.** Congo's education system is characterized by poor performance in terms of access, quality, efficiency, and results. Although public education is free for children aged 6 to 19, many families, particularly indigenous populations and smallholder farmers, cannot afford the costs associated with sending a child to school. In 2019, enrolment rates for girls and boys were almost equal at primary level, but significant differences appear after the age of 17, with only 66 percent of girls enrolled compared to 76 percent of boys. Almost all Congolese children start primary school at the normal age of six. However, this success is not reflected in primary school completion, with one in four children dropping out before fifth grade (CM2 in French). Girls' completion rates are lower in the primary cycle. According to UNICEF, only 21 percent of pupils complete primary education with the required reading skills, and 41 percent in mathematics.²⁷

13. The lasting economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the country in general and school attendance in particular. The impact on the national budget led to the suspension of teachers' salaries in 60 schools for indigenous children,²⁸ resulting in the closure of many of these schools. According to the World Bank, rising poverty has prevented many families from meeting the costs associated with schooling. However, since 2021, the school enrolment rate has returned to positive values (up 1 percent from the negative values of 2020) and is approaching pre-pandemic levels.

14. The objective of improving access to basic education is set out in the national development plan (2018-2022 and 2022-2026) and in the national strategy for reviewing the education sector. These include increasing national investment in basic education through the construction of modern school infrastructure and the provision of equipment enabling the population to acquire basic knowledge, and reducing inequalities in access to educational services, particularly for indigenous populations²⁹ who are considered the most vulnerable in the Republic of Congo. Poverty and the lifestyle of indigenous families represent additional barriers to children's access to education. According to an assessment carried out by the Ministry of Forest Economy and Rural Development in 2015,³⁰ schooling for indigenous children is constrained by several factors:

- The priority given to traditional education and children's participation in gathering activities, which involve extended stays in the forest during the school year.
- Parents' lack of interest in education and the means to take charge of their children's education.
- Discrimination against indigenous children in schools, leading them to drop out.
- Distance between homes and schools.

15. Law 05-2011 of February 2011 on the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples states that the State guarantees "the right of access, without discrimination, of indigenous children to all

²⁵ WFP, Congo Country Strategic Plan (2019-2023), February 2019.

²⁶ Food security analysis provided by WFP.

²⁷ WFP, Congo Country Strategic Plan (2019-2023), February 2019.

²⁸ Écoles Observer, Réfléchir, Agir (ORA) were set up by the Spiritan Fathers to cater for indigenous children in the Sangha and Likouala departments.

²⁹ WFP, Republic of Congo, McGovern-Dole project SAPR FY17 (April 2022-September 2022).

³⁰ Évaluation environnementale et sociale stratégique du processus REDD+ en République du Congo, Ministry of Forest Economy and Sustainable Development, August 2015.

levels and forms of education within the national education system. The State shall take special measures to facilitate the enjoyment of these rights".

16. **School feeding.** School feeding in the Congo has a long history, dating back to the colonial period, though it was limited to boarding schools in the secondary cycle for a long time. It was extended in the early 2000s with the support of the WFP and the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) International Partnership for Human Development (IPHD) to encourage children to attend school.

17. Government involvement in the feeding program has since been growing, notably with the creation of the School Feeding Department (DAS in French) within the Ministry of Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy (MEPPSA in French) in 2017 and the contribution to program funding since 2018.³¹ The role of DAS is to coordinate and monitor activities related to all school meal programs in the country. WFP provides both technical and material support to strengthen organizational capacities of DAS, department level stakeholders and at school level.

18. The importance of introducing local agricultural products has been emphasized in the action plan recently drawn up for the implementation of the national school feeding policy, in collaboration with the DAS, the WFP and its partners to continue to promote school feeding based on local production (Home Grown School Feeding - HGSF),

19. In 2019, WFP launched an HGSF program through a campaign funded by Share the Meal and a German private donor. It involves providing vouchers to school committees to buy local produce from markets, targeted stores and local producers. At the same time, the WFP supports women groups to produce a traditional snack made from casava and peanut paste ("Mbala Pinda") and small-scale farmers through value-chain development.

20. **Health and nutrition.** According to the latest SMART survey³² published in December 2022, stunting affects 19.6 percent of children under five in Congo, a slight improvement from UNICEF data (2014/2015) (21.2 percent of children under five).³³ However, there are significant regional differences among the seven McGovern-Dole project intervention departments, as shown in

³¹ For the 2018/2019 school year, the government of the Republic of Congo contributed 48 tons of salt and 5 million CFA francs (US\$ 8,600) in operating costs to WFP's school canteen support activities. In October 2020, the government contributed 72 tons of salt and 11 million CFA francs (US\$ 20,000) in operating costs. In 2021, the contribution was 70 tons of salt.

³² UNICEF SMART: National nutrition survey using SMART methodology, December 2022

³³ UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/congo/survie-et-d%C3%A9veloppement-de-lenfant/nutrition> (accessed January 10, 2023).

21. Table 1. In particular, the stunting prevalence rate in Lékoumou rose from 34.2 percent (2014/2015) to an alarming 46.1 percent. Importantly, stunting is likely to have an impact on the results of affected pupils, who will never reach their full physical and cognitive potential. Wasting (or acute malnutrition) is estimated at 5.2 percent for children under 5, an improvement on Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data (

22. Table 1). Surprisingly, rates of acute malnutrition in Lékoumou are lower than the national average, in contrast to stunting rates.³⁴ If we consider the rates of overweight among small children, an improvement seems to be emerging.

³⁴ Cuvette: 4.2 percent, Lékoumou 5.2 percent, Pool 6.1 percent, Bouenza 6.6 percent and Plateaux 8.1 percent; the latter is closest to the national average of 8.2 percent.

Table 1: Nutritional data for children under five by department³⁵

Department	Weight/Height <-2SD (%) "waste"		Height/Age<-2SD (%) "stunting"		Weight/Age<-SD (%) "underweight"		Weight/Height>+2SD (%) "overweight"	
	2022	2014/2015	2022	2014/2015	2022	2014/2015	2022	2014/2015
Lékoumou	3.4	5.2	46.1	34.2	23.1	18.5	1.4	2.3
Bouenza	4.2	6.6	25.0	23.3	13.3	15.9	2.9	1.0
Pool	6.7	6.1	21.6	23.0	13.5	11.8	1.6	2.0
Plateaux	4.2	8.1	29.2	28.8	15.3	18.1	1.0	5.9
Bowl	5.6	4.6	24.0	21.5	12.5	12.5	1.0	3.8
Sangha	5.9	3.7	35.2	36.9	16.6	18.0	1.4	5.1
Likouala	5.9	4.7	31.1	31.4	15.1	13.1	2.6	2.1
National	5.2	8.2	19.6	21.2	13.0	12.3	1.8	5.9

Source: 2014/2015 data: MICS5 Congo Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014-2015. Data 2022: National nutrition survey using SMART methodology; UNICEF, WFP, December 2022.

23. According to the Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la malnutrition au Congo,³⁶ micronutrient deficiency remains a major problem in the country. Two-thirds (66.7 percent) of children under five suffer from iron-deficiency anemia. The prevalence of anemia is 55 percent, 58 percent and 52 percent respectively for women of childbearing age, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

24. To address nutritional deficiencies, the Government, through the Ministry of Industrial Development and Private Sector Promotion, created the National Food Fortification Commission³⁷ in May 2012. In 2013, Congo joined the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement. In 2015, the government put in place the Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la malnutrition au Congo-Horizon 2025.³⁸ Its objective is to reduce the prevalence of all forms of malnutrition concerning vulnerable populations by at least 50 percent by 2025, in particular for children aged 0-59 months, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

The Congolese also face many other health challenges. In 2012, approximately 62 percent of deaths were due to communicable, maternal, or prenatal diseases, as well as nutritional conditions.³⁹ Improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions are key areas for controlling the occurrence of communicable diseases. The MICS survey (2014/2015) showed very different results on access to drinking water for the departments covered by the McGovern-Dole project. Data for the 2022 National Nutrition Survey shows large variations from the last survey round, both positive and negative (see

³⁵ Figures in red show an increase between 2014/2015 and 2022.

³⁶ Republic of Congo. 2015. Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la malnutrition au Congo-Horizon 2025.

³⁷ National Commission for Food Fortification (CNFA).

³⁸ Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la malnutrition au Congo-Horizon 2025.

³⁹ SABER country report 2015, République du Congo-School food, p. 2.

25. Table 2). These differences can be explained by different definitions of drinking water quality in the two surveys. In general, access to drinking water has deteriorated, while the prevalence of diarrhea has increased between 2014/2015 and 2022.

Table 2: Access to drinking water and diarrhea prevalence rates by department⁴⁰

Department	Access to drinking water (%)		Prevalence of diarrhea in children aged less than 5 years	
	2022	2014/ 2015	2022	2014/ 2015
Lékoumou	30.7	40.9	17.2	16.7
Bouenza	59.5	72.0	12.0	13.9
Pool	59.3	44.9	20.3	19.4
Plateaux	62.7	54.2	19.1	15.6
Cuvette	49.8	76.6	23.0	18.0
Sangha	87.3	63.2	25.0	23.2
Likouala	55.6	70.3	22.4	21.6
National	72.9	84.4	18.4	17.4

Source: 2014/2015 data: MICS5 Congo Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014-2015. Data 2022: National nutrition survey using SMART methodology; UNICEF, WFP, December 2022.

26. **Gender.** Congo ranks 144th out of 166 in the 2020 gender inequality index⁴¹ with little improvement since 2000. In the field of education, the gender parity index for school enrolment drops significantly between primary (1.07) and secondary (0.67) levels, due to lower access to secondary education for girls, particularly in rural areas. Among the main factors explaining low educational attainment for girls are teenage pregnancy and household economic constraints.⁴²

27. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical issue, with high rates and widespread social acceptance. There are indications that GBV may be one of the issues preventing women from accessing education safely. Notably, according to data from the 2012 Demographic and Health Survey, a higher percentage of women (73.1 percent) than men (59.8 percent) believe that men have the right to beat them. Women reported eight reasons for beating in the report, including leaving the house without telling the husband, refusing sex, neglecting childcare and spending money without notification. The percentage of men who believe they have the right to beat their wives is higher among younger men (50.3 percent for men aged 45-49, versus 75.8 percent for boys aged 15-19). This finding shows that gender equality topics need to be included in school curricula to start addressing them at an early age. The baseline study for the McGovern-Dole project found that the Ministry for the Advancement of Women has a curriculum to integrate this issue into the primary school curriculum but lacks the resources to implement it. According to a WFP information note (2020), lockdowns have increased cases of gender-based violence, particularly in urban areas.

28. **National policies and strategic frameworks.** The national development plan (PDN 2022-2026 in French) provides a strategic, multi-sectoral framework for building a strong, diversified and resilient economy. It relies on growth-generating activities such as agriculture in the broad sense, industry, special economic zones, tourism, the digital economy and real estate to achieve this.

29. In 2017, the government approved the National Food Security and Nutrition Policy to improve food security and reduce malnutrition in all its forms using a multi-sectoral and integrated approach. This policy was supplemented in 2022 by the National Food Crisis Resilience Plan 2022-2023, which aims to address the risks of food crises that emerged with the conflict in Ukraine. According to the terms of reference (ToR) of this final evaluation, WFP contributes to two of the plan's six areas of work: "supporting smallholder farmers" and "protecting vulnerable people".

30. In 2016, Congo adopted a national school feeding policy; WFP supported the formulation process. The aim of this policy is to guarantee all children enrolled in elementary school eat a healthy, balanced,

⁴⁰ Figures in red show a decrease in access to drinking water and an increase of prevalence of diarrhea between 2014/2015 and 2022.

⁴¹ UNDP. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index> (accessed April 27, 2021)

⁴² World Bank Report: Country Partnership Framework for the Republic of Congo 2020-2024.

high-quality and sustainable diet based on local produce. It comprises six strategic axes: 1) Education, 2) Health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, 3) Social development, 4) Local production, 5) Trade and industry and 6) Poverty reduction.

31. Congo's 2016 National Gender Policy stipulates the guiding principles of gender equality, the inclusion of gender issues in all development sectors and the fulfillment of commitments made to the African and international community on the importance attached to promoting gender equality and reducing inequalities between men and women. In May 2018, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Integration of Women in Development published a National Action Plan. Strategic axis three considers the protection of women and girls against GBV through education and community awareness. Strategic axis four of the same action plan stresses the importance of women participating in committees and occupying decision-making positions.

32. The Republic of Congo successively signed up to the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With the technical and financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the country adopted the Agenda 2030 goals in December 2016.⁴³ WFP contributes to the interventions and planned results of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2020-2024 through its Country Strategic Plan (CSP), in particular to SDG 2 on zero hunger and SDG 17 on partnerships.⁴⁴

33. **Humanitarian issues and major external events.** The main external events during the implementation of the McGovern-Dole project were the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. In March 2020, as the pandemic reached the Republic of Congo, the government took decisions to limit the impact, including closing all schools and confining the population to their homes (which lasted from March to May 2020). These measures had an impact on WFP operations and the implementation of the McGovern-Dole project. In particular, the closure of schools meant the suspension of school canteens, necessitating a reorientation of WFP activities to introduce take-home rations. As the situation improved, all measures put in place to prevent COVID-19 transmission were lifted.

34. The conflict in Ukraine is likely to have a negative impact on the living conditions of the population, notably due to the very high dependence on food imports, and in particular wheat imports from Russia. The conflict could also have negative effects on national budget allocations to the social protection system, worsening the situation of vulnerable populations.⁴⁵

35. Interventions of interest to the McGovern-Dole project include the Education Sector Support Project (PRAASED in french) implemented by MEPPSA with support from the World Bank, UNICEF interventions in the field of water and sanitation, and the joint WFP, UNICEF and World Health Organization (WHO) project financed by the MDG Achievement Fund. PRAASED shares with the McGovern-Dole project the objective of improving the quality of education and has revised the French and mathematics curricula in CP1, CP2, 6th and 5th of secondary school, trained teachers and produced new textbooks. The new programs were implemented for the start of the 2022-2023 school year. UNICEF generally supports schools in terms of improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene. UNICEF uses its concept of gender-separated latrines, hand-washing stations and schoolyard water points. As part of the response to COVID-19, UNICEF has developed a manual on water, sanitation and hygiene, which fits in very well with the overall concept of raising schools' awareness of water, sanitation and hygiene that the McGovern-Dole project aims to develop. The MDG Achievement Fund project was implemented from January 2020 to June 2022 and aimed to improve the living conditions of indigenous populations in the Lékoumou department through improved access to social protection programs.

⁴³ The Agenda 2030 is an action plan for people, planet and prosperity. It recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable condition for sustainable development. The linkages and integrated nature of the SDGs are of crucial importance in ensuring that the Agenda 2030 goal is achieved.

⁴⁴ This framework describes how UN Country Teams will contribute to the achievement of development results, based on a common country analysis and the UN's comparative advantage.

⁴⁵ Socio-economic effects of the war in Ukraine on the Congolese economy: Perspectives on the SDGs and policy implications.

1.3. SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

36. The main aim of the McGovern-Dole programme is to improve literacy among primary school children. To achieve this, it seeks to contribute to improving the quality of teaching, distributing school meals as an incentive for children to attend and stay in school, and intervening in hygiene, health and nutrition practices to reduce absences from school due to illness. The project covers 410 schools in seven departments selected on the basis of their prevalence of food insecurity. It is implemented by WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ACTED and MEPPSA.

37. The project financing agreement between FAS and WFP was signed on September 29, 2017. It initially provided for a budget of US\$ 30,022,053 for the supply of food products and the financing of shipping over a five-year period (2017-2022). All food products were imported from the United States. The Government of Japan contributed 446 tons of canned fish to supplement the ration provided by the USDA from 2018 to 2021. The official start of the project took place in Brazzaville on March 01, 2018, with an agreement signed between the Minister of Primary, Secondary and Literacy Education, the Ambassador of the United States of America and the WFP Country Director. Project activities started a year late, in September 2018, as part of WFP's country programme 2015-2018, number 200648. As a result, the implementation period has been extended by a further year (2023).

38. The project was the subject of two amendments, signed in November 2020 (A) and September 2022 (B). The first amendment (A) included a slight adjustment to project costs,⁴⁶ the extension of the project to a seventh department (Sangha)⁴⁷ and modifications to the objectives set for a selection of project results. Amendment B extended the implementation period by one year, to September 30, 2023.⁴⁸

39. The McGovern-Dole project is now managed under the WFP CSP through Strategic Outcome 2: "Equitable national social protection interventions effectively target vulnerable populations, including school-aged children, with sustainable access to safe and nutritious food."⁴⁹ Two main activities are embedded in this strategic outcome: (a) provide safe, adequate and nutritious school meals to targeted school children and (b) provide technical support to the government to improve the implementation of shock-sensitive social protection interventions. As part of its strategic objective 3, the CSP provides support to smallholder farmers to encourage local purchases for the school feeding program. However, this activity was not integrated into the McGovern-Dole project, for which all foodstuffs were imported.

40. **Objectives and activities.** The McGovern-Dole project has two strategic objectives: "improved literacy among school-age children" (SO1) and "increased use of improved health, nutrition and dietary practices" (SO2). As stated in the project agreement between FAS and WFP, the McGovern-Dole project has five main objectives:⁵⁰

- Improve literacy among school-age children.
- Increase the use of health and dietary practices.
- Build the capacity of government institutions.
- Improve the policy and regulatory framework.

⁴⁶ Reduction in administrative costs from US\$ 9,695,243.84 to US\$ 9,008,242.57 (-US\$ 687,001.27). Increase in activity costs from US\$ 3,293,774.11 to US\$ 4,910,762.33 (+US\$ 1,616,988.22). Decrease in internal transport costs, from storage and handling costs from US\$ 4,841,968.50 to US\$ 3,970,507.70 (-US\$ 871,460.80). Reduction in indirect costs from US\$ 1,794,816.55 to US\$ 1,671,806.82 (US\$ 123,009.73).

⁴⁷ The departments concerned are Bouenza, Cuvette, Lékoumou, Likouala, Plateaux, Pool and Sangha.

⁴⁸ The U.S. Department of Agriculture uses U.S. fiscal years, so the project is officially underway from October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2023.

⁴⁹ WFP, CSP 2019-2023, page 11.

⁵⁰ Project Agreement between the Foreign Agricultural Service and the World Food Program for the donation of agricultural products and related assistance under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, Sept 2017.

- Increase government support and commitment to local organizations and community groups.

41. To achieve these objectives, a total of eight activities have been planned (see Annex 3 and Annex 9 for details of each activity):

- **Activity 1:** Build capacity by supporting the implementation of the Systems Approach to Better Education Results (SABER) action plan⁵¹ and the government's National School Feeding Policy (NSFP).
- **Activity 2:** Improve school attendance by raising awareness of the importance of education.
- **Activity 3:** Establish/strengthen local agriculture and school communities to support their development through the implementation of the national school food program based on local products.
- **Activity 4:** Distribute food to provide school meals for children
- **Activity 5:** Promote improved health by building/rehabilitating latrines, water stations and hand-washing kits, and administering deworming tablets.
- **Activity 6:** Support literacy improvement by distributing school supplies, supporting the revision of the national curriculum, distributing and training on the revised curriculum, encouraging teacher attendance, training teachers and training school administrators and managers.
- **Activity 7:** Promote better nutrition by training and raising awareness of good health and hygiene practices, and by training and raising awareness on the importance of better nutrition and health and dietary practices.
- **Activity 8:** Support the improvement of safe food preparation and storage by building and rehabilitating kitchens and warehouses and supplying energy-efficient stoves and cooking utensils.

42. FAS has developed two Results Frameworks (RF) corresponding to the two strategic objectives (SOs) of the McGovern-Dole school feeding projects. These frameworks describe a theory of change that relates the different levels of results to the proposed activities.

- **Results Framework for Literacy (RF1).** The SO of this framework is "improved literacy for school-age children". Achieving this goal depends on the realization of three "result streams" linked to improving school attendance, the quality of literacy and attentiveness. Each activity is directly linked to SO1 (see Annex 4).
- **Health, nutrition and dietary practices outcomes framework (RF2).** The SO of this framework is "Increased use of improved health, nutrition and dietary practices", primarily by school-age children but also by those who influence the health and well-being of school-age children, such as parents, communities and school staff. The implementation of the SO is intended to support the intermediate result "Reduction of absences for health reasons" in RF1. RF2 is complementary to RF1. Each activity concerning nutrition and food practices is directly linked to RF2 (see Annex 5).

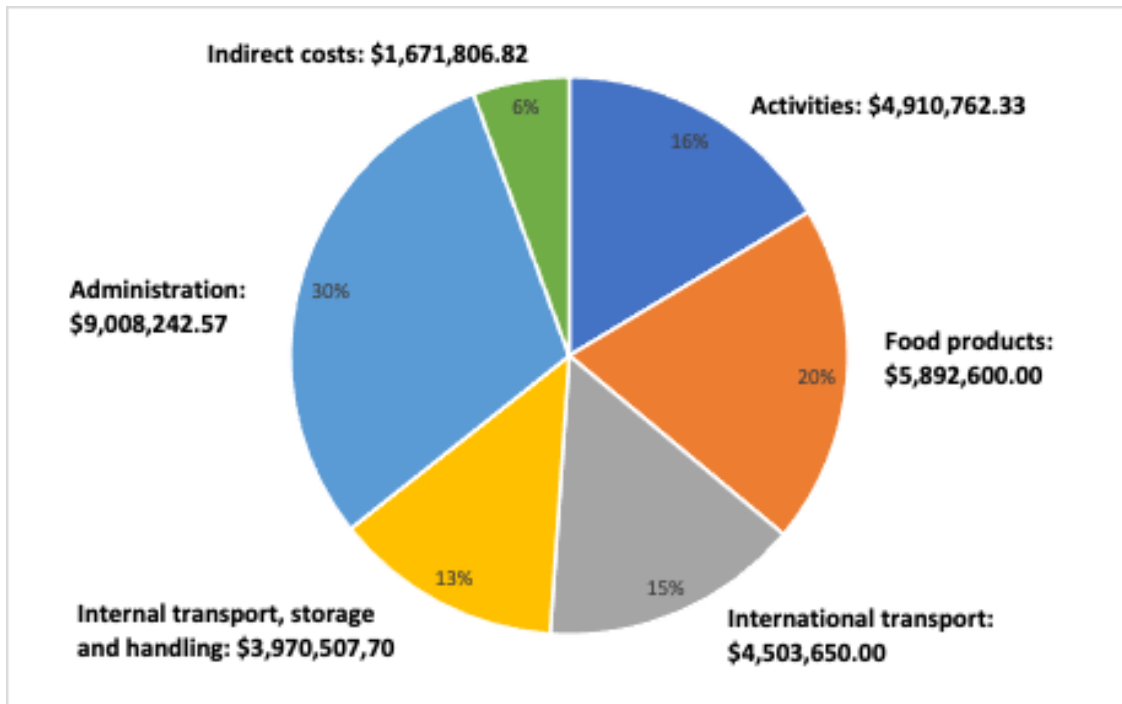
43. To increase the likelihood of achieving the SOs and the sustainability of results once the project is completed, the USDA has identified a set of standardized foundational results common to both RFs. Related outcomes are: a) increased capacity of government institutions, b) improved policy and regulatory framework, c) increased government support, and d) increased engagement of local organizations and community groups. A diagram of the foundational results is available in Annex 6.

⁵¹ The SABER approach enables a diagnosis of the five pillars that define the sustainability of school feeding programs. The SABER study was carried out in Congo in 2014 with the support of WFP.

44. **Stakeholders.** As described in the agreement between WFP and USDA, the main national stakeholders are the four key ministries associated with the relevant sectors of the McGovern-Dole project: education, health, agriculture and social affairs. Sub-recipient implementing partners are UNICEF, ACTED and UNESCO.⁵²

45. **Resource requirements and funding situation.** The budget of US\$ 29,957,569.42 provided by the USDA through the FAS is broken down as shown in Figure 1. Cost breakdowns by activity are provided in Figure 2.

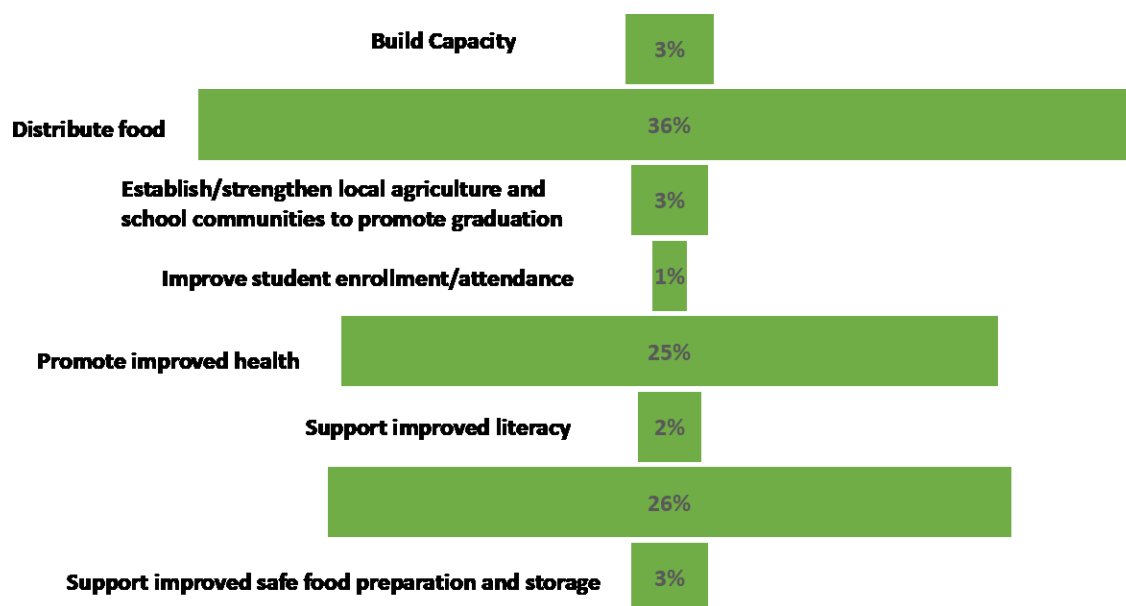
Figure 1: Project cost breakdown (planned)



Source: Memorandum of Understanding between McGovern-Dole and WFP, Amendment B

⁵² UNICEF was to work in all departments except Bouenza, raising awareness of the importance of education, improving health, distributing school kits, training school administrators, and improving nutrition. ACTED was to work in the Bouenza department on raising awareness of the importance of education, improving health and nutrition. UNESCO was to work on revising education programs and training teachers. See details of the activities planned for each agency in Annex 3.

Figure 2: Cost breakdown by activity (planned)



Source: Memorandum of Understanding between McGovern-Dole and WFP, Amendment B

46. **Gender dimensions of intervention.** The McGovern-Dole project recognizes that the gap in access to education and/or health can be directly linked to gender issues depending on the context, and that equal access to health and education must be provided for boys and girls. Although the global approach takes the gender dimension into account, there is a need for transformative gender interventions that could address the issues presented in paragraphs 26 and 27.

47. The gender and age marker, which is systematically applied to all WFP interventions,⁵³ has been calculated by the country office and stands at 1 (2022), meaning that the project makes a limited contribution to gender equality. Project documents reflect the differences between girls/women and boys/men, and the response strategy and targeting consider the gender dimension. It should be noted that the gender marker has been introduced in the Annual Country Reports (ACRs) and the CSP activity "Provide safe, adequate and nutritious school meals donated in kind and purchased locally to targeted schoolchildren" has been rated at 3 (2019), 1 (2020) and 3 (2021) in annual ACRs. However, this rating applies to all WFP school feeding activities in the country and is not specific to the McGovern-Dole project.

48. **Planned and achieved outputs.** The information provided in this report on the level of achievement of planned outputs and certain desired outcomes is based on the semi-annual performance reports produced by WFP on the one hand, and on the ACR reports on the other. Information from the semi-annual performance reports (SAPR) covers the period from project start-up to September 2022. The report for October 2022 to March 2023 had not yet been produced by WFP at the time of data collection and writing of this evaluation report. As indicated in chapter 1.5 of the report, there are inconsistencies in the data from the PMP subsequent updates in the Indicator Tracking Table (ITT), particularly concerning annual targets and the achievement of certain activities, while other sources of information (agreements with partners, partner activity reports) sometimes present contradictory information. The PMP includes 17 output indicators and eight outcome indicators, which are standard indicators for all McGovern-Dole projects. In addition, 11 custom indicators have been added to the monitoring plan based on proposals made during the baseline study. However, the WFP country office has indicated that these indicators have not been regularly measured and are therefore not included in this report. Full information on the ITT included in the SAPRs up to September 2022 is presented in Annex 7.

⁵³ The WFP gender and age marker is a corporate tool that codes, on a scale from 0 to 4, the extent to which gender and age considerations are integrated into the design and implementation of a WFP CSP.

49. **Beneficiaries of school meals.** The PMP incorporates three indicators corresponding to the number of children enrolled in schools supported by the project and receiving school meals.⁵⁴ These three indicators have the same annual targets for the entire project (114,051), and the same figures are reported in ITT of the SAPRs submitted to the USDA for all three indicators. A maximum of 91,417 children (47 percent of them girls) were enrolled in the supported schools and received school meals during the 2022-2023 school year, i.e., 81 percent of the target for the entire project (see

50. Table 3). This target represented 212 percent of pupils enrolled in schools at the start of the project and measured in the baseline study, which was probably too ambitious. It should be noted that there were no beneficiaries during the 2017-2018 school year, as activities started in 2018.

Table 3: Projected and actual beneficiaries

Standard PMP indicators 8, 16, 17								
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	Project target	% reached
Girls	0	Not available	Not available	37 098	41 414	43 294	Not available ⁵⁵	
Boys	0	Not available	Not available	41 458	46 700	48 706	Not available	
Total	0	73 584	84 058	78 556	88 114	91 417	114 051	81%

Source: Annual reports April-September 2022 and October 2022-September 2023.

51. **Food distributed.** The quantity of food distributed to schools is not a standard indicator for the PMP and is not reported in WFP's SAPRs to the USDA. The information is available in the Standard Project Reports (SPR) and ACR (see Table 4). Activities only started in 2018, so no food was distributed in 2017. The achievement from 2018 to 2022 is 57 percent of the target, which is 24 percent less than the 81 percent of achievement of planned beneficiaries in the same period. One of the reasons identified for this discrepancy is the fact that food quantities are calculated based on 180 school days per year, whereas the number of days during which school canteens operate is lower. WFP only delivers food to schools when school staff are on site, which is not always the case at the start of the school year due to the unavailability of teachers. In addition, delays in deliveries, especially in 2022, have reduced the number of days the canteens are operational. The project supported 75,080 children with take-home rations during the three months of school closure due to COVID-19 in 2020 to prevent deterioration in children's nutritional status. Eight-hundred and six tons of food were distributed as part of this activity.

Table 4: Food planned and distributed, by year

Food distributed (tons)						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Planned	0	3.744	3.349	3.133	2.915	2.701
Reached	0	1.110	1.948	2.000	1.836	2.156
% reached		30%	58%	64%	63%	80%

Sources: Standard Project Report (SPR) 2018 and ACR 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

⁵⁴ Standard Indicator 8: Number of students enrolled in schools receiving USDA assistance. Indicator 16: Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals. Indicator 17: Number of social assistance recipients participating in productive social safety net as a result of USDA assistance.

⁵⁵ According to WFP, the gender disaggregation of targets was not a requirement in the project agreement between WFP and USDA.

52. **Meals served.** According to the SAPRs prepared by WFP, by September 2022, 76 percent of the planned school meals had been distributed between the start of the project and September 2022 (Table 5). The most plausible reason for distributing a higher percentage of meals than quantity of food against plans is that rations distributed were lower than what was planned. However, the evaluation team did not collect evidence that confirm this assumption.

Table 5: Meals planned and distributed, by year

Standard indicator 15: Number of daily school meals distributed to school-age children thanks to USDA support							
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Project target	% reached
0	8 133 994	13 228 954	11 503 800	12 041 103	44 907 851	58 767 554	76%

Source: SAPR April-September 2022

53. **Construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructure.** According to WFP's SAPRs, 79 infrastructure projects including storage facilities and latrines have been built or rehabilitated, representing 86 percent of the 92 infrastructure projects planned (see Table 6). Data for standard indicators 22 (*Number of schools using an improved water source*) and 23 (*Number of schools with sanitation facilities*) do not provide a clear picture. For these two indicators, both the targets and the reported figures were intended to be cumulative from one year to the next, even taking into account the number of infrastructures existing at the time of the baseline study. This was not the case, making it difficult to establish a clear picture of the situation. In addition, the SAPRs state that 74 additional schools are using an improved water source at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, whereas no WFP partners reported the construction/rehabilitation of any water points during this period.

Table 6: Planned and completed infrastructure construction/rehabilitation

Standard indicator 7: Number of education infrastructures rehabilitated/constructed thanks to USDA support							
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Project target	% reached
25	20	2	16	16	79	92	86%

Source: SAPR April-September 2022

54. **Distribution of school supplies.** The distribution of school supplies far exceeded targets, with 166 percent of planned supplies delivered (Table 7). Notably, the annual targets given in the SAPRs are inconsistent. The sum of them should correspond to the target for the entire project, which is not the case. They are therefore not taken into account in this report.

Table 7: School materials planned and distributed

Standard indicator 2: Number of textbooks and other teaching materials distributed thanks to USDA assistance							
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Project target	% reached
0	12 342	9 600	18 733	23 082	63 757	38 484	166%

Source: SAPR April-September 2022

55. **Training.** Data from SAPRs show that training for school administrators has reached its target (standard indicator 4). The sum of the annual targets should be equal to the target for the project as a whole. This is not the case, and the annual targets are therefore not considered in this report. The same applies to indicators 18 and 20. Regarding teacher training on the new curricula (indicator 5), the SAPRs indicate that 1,248 teachers have been trained. However, this activity was not actually carried out, and the WFP country office confirmed that no teachers had been trained. Table 8 shows data from the ITT in SAPRs for indicators 6, 18 and 20.

Table 8: Planned and completed training courses

Standard indicator 4: Number of school administrators trained or certified with USDA assistance							
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	Project target	% reached
276	153	164	214	282	1 089	1 612	68%
Standard indicator 6: Number of teachers/educators/assistants trained or certified with USDA assistance							
0	0	0	0	0	0	263	0%
Standard indicator 18: Number of individuals trained in child health and nutrition with USDA assistance							
0	0	60	5 000	5 100	10 160	5 822	174%
Standard indicator 20: Number of individuals trained in food preparation and storage with USDA assistance							
0	338	1 203	1 800	1 390	4 731	4 942	96%

Source: SAPR April-September 2022

56. **Gender-related products.** Only Standard indicators 16, 17, 18, 20, 27 PMP indicators are disaggregated by gender starting on the fourth school year of the project (2020-2021). The other indicators are not disaggregated. The evaluation is therefore unable to report a clear picture of gender-related outputs achieved. Nevertheless, primary data on the effects of the project on gender issues have been collected and is presented in chapter 2.

57. **Expected and achieved impacts.** The information presented in this section on the effects generated by the project based on the PMP indicators is taken from the SAPRs prepared by WFP. Chapter 2 presents additional information derived from the primary data collection carried out during the evaluation. Full information on PMP impact indicators in the SAPRs up to September 2022 is presented in Annex 8.

58. **Children's attendance at school.** Standard indicator 1 is categorized as an output indicator in the PMP, but it is an effect generated by project activities. The evaluation team has not found a clear explanation of how the annual targets were set, and therefore they are not considered in this report. The SAPRs do not provide information for years two and three of the project. The level of achievement of the expected result is calculated based on the highest level of attendance achieved during the project, which took place in year four (school year 2020-2021, see Table 9).

Table 9: Number of pupils who attended project schools at least 80 percent of the time, by year.

Standard indicator 1: Number of pupils attending USDA-supported schools regularly (at least 80% of the time)						
Year 1 (2017-2018)	Year 2 (2018-2019)	Year 3 (2019-2020)	Year 4 (2020-2021)	Year 5 (2021-2022)	Project target	% reached
0	-	-	78 556	62 561	105 627	74%

Source: SAPR April-September 2022

59. **Effects generated by training and awareness-raising activities.** The PMP incorporates four standard indicators for measuring the direct effects generated by training and awareness-raising

activities.⁵⁶ These four indicators have not been measured during the project by WFP nor by the evaluation team during mid-term and final evaluations. Nevertheless, a standard percentage of 65 percent of participants to the training having adopted new practice is reported for the last year of the project. The baseline value of those indicators was zero as they refer to the number of individuals adopting new practices as a result of USDA assistance.

60. **Resource mobilization through the project.** The PMP includes an indicator that measures the project's contribution to the mobilization of public and private resources for the school feeding program, beyond the project's funding by the USDA (standard indicator 11). According to the SAPRs, a total of US\$ 7,520,673 has been mobilized since 2017, or 367 percent of the target set. These funds come from the Share the Meal campaign, the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives, Mastercard, the Global Partnership for Education and the Sodexo-Stop Hunger Foundation. They correspond to resources mobilized by the WFP to fund other activities included in Activity 2 of the 2019-2023 CSP than the McGovern-Dole project activities. According to the country office, however, the contribution of the McGovern-Dole project to mobilizing these funds is not clearly established. The only additional contribution to school feeding that has clearly been mobilized thanks to the project is the donation of 446 tons of canned sardine from Japan.

61. **Contribution to the formulation and implementation of sectoral policies.** The PMP includes two indicators that reflect the project's contribution to policies in the education (indicator 12) and child health and nutrition (indicator 25) sectors. The SAPRs indicate that a policy for each of these sectors was supported during the course of the project. According to the WFP country office, these are the national school feeding policy and the national food security and nutrition policy. They were adopted before the project started, in 2016 and 2017 respectively, and the values reported in the SAPRs reflect the project's contribution to the implementation of these policies.

62. **Improved student reading skills.** This is the ultimate goal of the project according to the results framework. The indicator that provides information on the level of achievement of this objective⁵⁷ was measured as part of the evaluation's primary data collection and is presented in chapter 2.4 Impact.

63. As indicated in paragraph 1, this evaluation is the final exercise in a plan of three studies carried out over the course of the project. Both the baseline study and the mid-term evaluation gave rise to recommendations, which are detailed in Annex 26, together with the extent to which they have been implemented. The level of implementation of the recommendations is relatively low, given that, of six recommendations from the baseline study, three were partially implemented and three were not implemented; of five recommendations from the mid-term evaluation applicable to the FY17 project, one recommendation was implemented, one recommendation was partially implemented, and three recommendations were not implemented.

1.4. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.4.1 Evaluation Questions

64. The evaluation covers all processes and activities related to the McGovern-Dole project from its start in 2018 to the time of data collection in March 2023 within all seven departments covered by the project. Data collection took place from February 25th to March 24th, 2023. The evaluation sought to answer the evaluation questions presented in Table 10 defined in the ToR for the evaluation and reviewed during the inception phase. The evaluation questions are organized according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The coherence criterion was adopted during the

⁵⁶ Indicator 3: Number of administrators and other officials in target schools who demonstrate use of new techniques and tools through USDA assistance. Indicator 5: Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants in target schools who demonstrate use of new techniques and tools through USDA assistance. Indicator 19: Number of individuals demonstrating the use of new child health and nutrition practices thanks to USDA assistance. Indicator 21: Number of individuals demonstrating the use of new food preparation and storage practices thanks to USDA assistance.

⁵⁷ Indicator 26: Percentage of pupils who, at the end of two levels of primary education, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of a text corresponding to the second level.

inception phase at the suggestion of the evaluation team. The ToR also include three general questions which are addressed in the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

Table 10: Evaluation Questions

Relevance
1. Has the project strategy design continued to allow reaching the right people and other groups such as women, girls, men, boys and indigenous people with the right type of assistance?
2. Did the project's implementation lead to meeting the intended beneficiaries' needs with the right mix of assistance, including women, girls, men, boys and indigenous people?
3. Has the project strategy evolved to adapt to changes in government's education and school meals policies and strategies?
4. Has the project continued to complement other donor funded and government initiatives?
Effectiveness
5. To what degree have the interventions resulted (or not) in the expected results (outputs and outcomes as per the PMP), for girls, boys, men women and indigenous people?
6. What internal and external factors affect the project's achievement of intended results?
Efficiency
7. How efficient is the targeting?
8. Did assistance reach the right beneficiaries in the right quantity and quality at the right time?
9. Is the project efficient in terms of costs and costs per beneficiary?
Impact
10. What are the long-term effects of the interventions on targeted beneficiaries' lives, including women, girls, men, boys and indigenous people, households, communities, and institutions?
11. Were there unintended outcomes (positive, negative)?
12. What internal and external factors affected the project's results from leading to intended impact on targeted beneficiaries?
Sustainability
13. To what extent is it likely that the benefits of the project will continue after the end of the project for each category of beneficiaries?
14. What are the key factors that affect the likelihood of sustainability of the results of the project?
Coherence
15. To what extent is the McGovern-Dole programme aligned with WFP's corporate policies?
16. To what extent is the McGovern-Dole programme is coherent with WFP's other activities in the country?
General
17. What are lessons noted from the project up to this point?
18. How can WFP improve future programming, in the context of these lessons noted?
19. How can USDA improve future McGovern-Dole funding in the context of these lessons noted?

1.4.2 Methodology

65. This multi-year evaluation has been designed to systematically establish benchmarks for measuring the project's progress and long-term effects, from its launch in September 2018 to its conclusion in June 2023. The final evaluation approach has therefore been defined to enable comparison with the results of the baseline study and mid-term evaluation. The evaluation team followed a mixed-methods approach including the collection of complementary qualitative and quantitative data. During the inception phase, the evaluation team developed two matrices designed to identify, for each output and outcome recorded in the PMP on the one hand (Annex 7), and for each evaluation question on the other, the proposed data collection and analysis methods, together with the sources of information. The matrices are presented in Annexes 10 and 11. They represent essential tools that guided the entire data collection and analysis process. To answer the general questions on learning and improving future programming, in addition to the analysis of the other evaluation questions that naturally follow on from the identification of lessons learned and the formulation of recommendations, the evaluation team systematically asked the stakeholders met to indicate the elements that could be improved for the FY21 project.

66. The different methods used during the assessment are presented in Table 11. They enabled systematic triangulation of the information available, with the aim of producing the most reliable results and conclusions possible.

Table 11: Data collection methods

Method	Objective
Documentary review	Understand and analyze the context. Access data on activities implemented and results obtained.
Quantitative survey of school principals, teachers, students and school canteen management committee	Measure the effects generated by the project. The quantitative survey is similar to the surveys carried out during the baseline study and mid-term evaluation and makes it possible to identify changes over time. It includes both project beneficiary and non-beneficiary schools. The analysis of results therefore incorporates a dimension of evolution over time and a comparison between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. To enable comparison with previous surveys, the same questionnaires were applied to the same respondents in the same schools.
Reading skills test	Measure the project's final objective. This standard test applied to second-year primary and secondary school pupils also includes a group of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and enables analysis along the two dimensions described for the quantitative survey.
Qualitative data collection: key informant interviews, focus groups, observation	Qualitative data collection complements quantitative data collection, enabling analysis and explanation of the trends shown by quantitative data, and to identify any unforeseen effects.

67. The list of documents consulted as part of the literature review is presented in Annex 12.

68. The quantitative school survey was carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (INS in French), as was the case for the baseline study and the mid-term evaluation. Data was collected from school principals, students and management committees (see questionnaires in Annexes 13, 14, 15, 16) on a representative sample of 102 schools (64 project beneficiary schools and 38 non-beneficiary schools). After training the interviewers in Brazzaville, fieldwork took place from February 25 to March 7, 2023. A total of 2,486 people took part in the survey (see details of the sample and the survey process in the report produced by INS in Annex 17). Selected data that compare results between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and between the three surveys conducted during the project, are presented in Chapter 2. The complete survey data are available in Annex 23.

69. The literacy skills test was carried out by Confemen's Educational Systems Analysis Program (PASEC in French), like for the baseline study and mid-term evaluation. The test was conducted in 80 schools (45 beneficiary schools and 35 non-beneficiary schools) with 1,025 second grade students. Data were collected from March 13 to 17, 2023 (see details of the sample and the conduct of the test in the report produced by PASEC in Annex 18).

70. For both the quantitative surveys and the skills test, students were selected via a two-stage cluster random selection, with schools as the primary sampling unit. Schools were stratified by district in proportion to the number of supported schools. The selection of supported and unsupported schools was conducted for the baseline survey and then replicated for subsequent surveys.

71. Qualitative data collection was carried out from March 6 to 24, 2023 in Congo by a five-member evaluation team comprising the team leader, the nutrition expert, Konterra's evaluation manager and two national experts. The education expert participated in remote data collection. Data were collected from all relevant stakeholders in Brazzaville and in six of the seven departments covered by the project. Due to time limitation, it was not possible to cover the department of Likouala. In each department, the team conducted interviews with stakeholders in the main towns and visited a total of 20 schools, randomly selected among a reduced list of schools easily accessible for the evaluation team. At school level, focus group discussions were conducted with directors, teachers, cooks, girls, boys and school canteens' committees. The list of people interviewed and the mission schedule are available in Annexes 19 and 20. The mission ended with a presentation of the preliminary results to the WFP country office on March 24, followed by a presentation to external stakeholders at a distance on March 27. In total, the team conducted 85 focus group interviews and met with 63 resource persons.

72. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) guidelines on gender were used to define the evaluation approach. The evaluation integrated a gender-responsive approach at all stages. Gender-specific elements were explicitly integrated into the evaluation questions during the inception phase. The data presented in this report are disaggregated by gender wherever possible. The specific views and opinions of women, men, girls and boys were collected through sampling from the quantitative survey and the reading skills test, and through conducting separate focus group discussions in all schools. A total of 1,295 women and 1,475 men were consulted during the evaluation.

73. The evaluation also sought to understand the elements that differentiate the indigenous populations who are considered the most vulnerable. The school survey and test samples included Observe, Reflect, Act (ORA) schools, and the qualitative data collection mission covered the Sangha department, where indigenous populations are highly represented, and visited two ORA schools.

74. Data analysis was based on the evaluation analytical framework established during the baseline study for the three project evaluation exercises (see Annex 21). The quantitative approach adopted for estimating program effects in terms of literacy and improved nutrition and health practices (measured by key indicators) relies on the difference-in-differences method to compare changes in these key indicators over time between pupils in schools supported by McGovern-Dole and those not supported. This is a quasi-experimental approach that explored the extent to which the McGovern-Dole project contributed to these changes, and whether this contribution was differential by student gender (see Annex 24).⁵⁸

75. **Systematic triangulation** of data was achieved using multiple sources and collection methods, and through triangulation between several team members involved in data collection on each identified item. The evaluation team applied a simple ranking based on four levels of performance to each evaluation question. Each level corresponds to a color (green, yellow, orange and red) and a specific definition of the colours is provided for each evaluation question in Annex 27. The performance ranking is provided at the beginning of the chapter presenting the evaluation results for each question.

76. All evaluation products, including inception reports, were subjected to a quality control process which included four elements: 1) Internal quality control by a Konterra Quality Assurance Specialist prior to

⁵⁸ The evaluation did not adopt an experimental approach, as this would have assumed that the schools benefiting from the project would have been selected at random, whereas they were selected on the basis of vulnerability criteria.

submission of products to WFP. 2) Review and comments by WFP evaluation managers. 3) Review and comments by WFP's external quality control department. 4) Review and comments by the evaluation reference group.

1.5. LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

77. WFP decentralized evaluations must comply with WFP and UNEG ethical standards and norms. Providers carrying out evaluations are responsible for preserving and ensuring ethical considerations at all stages of the evaluation cycle. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring sensitivity to cultural realities, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring equitable recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups) and ensuring that the evaluation does not cause harm to participants or their communities. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. School visits took place during the week of periodic examinations, and the evaluation team took care not to disturb the teachers and pupils involved in these examinations. Interviews were conducted with teachers that were not involved in examinations, and interviews with students took place once they had completed their exams. In accordance with the provisions laid down in the evaluation's ToR, participants, particularly children, were informed of the evaluation's objectives and the nature of their participation, as well as their right not to take part in the interviews and to withdraw during them. All participants gave oral consent prior to their participation.

78. The main limitation of the evaluation is the lack of documentation on the activities carried out under the project. Despite extensive use of SAPRs (including measurements of PMP indicators and a narrative report) and reports produced by implementing partners, as well as interviews with WFP staff and partners involved in activity implementation, the evaluation team was unable to trace all activities with sufficient accuracy. This particularly affects Strategic Outcome 2 of the project. The descriptions obtained are often insufficiently precise, and the monitoring indicators sometimes lack reliability. In some cases, the evaluation team was unable to reach a definitive conclusion. The evaluation team carried out a review of all PMP indicators with the WFP country office to identify possible inconsistencies and limitations in their use. This review is presented in Annex 22.

79. It is also worth noting the limited usefulness of the final evaluation, which takes place when the new McGovern-Dole project (FY21) has been formulated and approved for two years, and when some activities are already being implemented. This significantly limits the opportunity for the evaluation to draw lessons and make recommendations that can be considered in this new phase of the project. The evaluation team has focused on making recommendations on the implementation of the FY21 project to maximize their usefulness.

80. Finally, the Likouala department was not covered by primary data collection, which limits the validity of the findings in this department. Quantitative data collection was intended to enable comparability with the school surveys and literacy test of the baseline study and mid-term evaluation. The samples for these studies in Likouala covered only ORA schools, but most of the ORA schools are now closed in this department and the few that remain open don't have school feeding activities. Consequently, the endline survey sample did not include this department. In terms of qualitative data collection, the Likouala department is the furthest from the capital, and communication routes are particularly difficult. As a result, and given the time available for the field mission, it was not possible to cover this department. The evaluation team sought to compensate for this by interviewing stakeholders in the capital and reviewing documents.

2 Evaluation Findings

2.1. RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE OF THE MCGOVERN-DOLE PROJECT

Key findings on relevance

- The evaluation confirms the relevance of the project's objectives and strategy to the needs identified in the fields of education, health, food security and nutrition.
- The project reaches the populations most affected by difficulties of access to education, in particular poor households, girls and indigenous children.
- The activities proposed to reduce school absenteeism due to illness do not address malaria and respiratory diseases, which appear to be the main illnesses causing school absenteeism.
- The project is clearly aligned with the objectives and strategic axes of the main national policies to which it intends to contribute and represents the main contribution to the operationalization of the national school feeding policy. It is, however, at odds with this policy's key objective of developing school feeding based on local products, given that all the foodstuffs supplied by the project are imported.
- This aspect also contradicts the WFP nutrition policy's objective of promoting nutrition-sensitive sustainable food systems. The project is consistent with other relevant WFP policies.
- WFP implements school feeding activities based on local purchases separately from the McGovern-Dole project, even though they could be complementary to imported foodstuffs, diversifying the food intake and strengthening the project's contribution to supporting sustainable food systems.
- The project did not address some important issues of gender inequality within schools that could be included in the curriculum, including GBV, despite baseline study and mid-term evaluation recommendations.
- The project's objectives are clearly complementary with other key initiatives, such as PRAASED, the MDG Fund project in Lékoumou and UNICEF's activities to promote access to water, hygiene and sanitation in schools. Nevertheless, some of these opportunities to make a more decisive contribution to improving the quality of education have not been clearly seized, particularly those offered by PRAASED.

2.1.1 **Has the project design continued to reach the right people and groups such as women, girls, men, boys and indigenous populations with the right kind of assistance?**

Has the implementation of the project met the needs of the intended beneficiaries by providing them with appropriate assistance, particularly women, girls, men, boys and indigenous populations?

The project strategy continued to ensure that the right people and other groups, such as indigenous populations, were reached with the right kind of assistance.⁵⁹

Project implementation has partially met the needs of the intended beneficiaries with the right mix of assistance.

⁵⁹ As described in paragraph 73, a performance rating based on a colour code is presented for each evaluation question. The definition of each colour for each evaluation question is provided in Annex 27.

81. The evaluation showed that the program's design is relevant to the Congolese context. As elaborated in chapter 1.2, education, food security, health, nutrition, water and sanitation are major issues for the country.

82. **Education.** As indicated in paragraph 12, a quarter of children do not complete primary school, and a fifth of children finish primary school without having acquired the required reading skills. Girls are particularly affected. The project's overall objective of helping to improve primary school literacy is entirely relevant in the light of this observation.

83. The project's strategy for achieving this objective, articulated around the results framework, responds to relevant factors affecting the performance of the primary education system: French-language curricula are obsolete. The education staff includes a very large proportion of non-tenured teachers and volunteers paid by parents. Interviews in schools and with beneficiaries showed that some of these teachers have received full training and are awaiting tenure. However, many have not undergone specific training and lack the skills to teach. The objectives of revising curricula and training teachers and school administrators are justified in the light of these factors.

84. The results presented in chapter 2.2 confirm that school food is a relevant incentive factor in getting pupils to school and helping them to study in good conditions as quantitative data shows that many children spend the day without eating. The possibility of having a meal at school is a powerful incentive.

85. **Food security.** As noted in paragraphs 10 and 11, poverty and food insecurity have been on the rise for several years. This situation is exacerbated by shocks in recent years, including COVID-19 and the crisis in Ukraine. The data collected on dietary diversity presented in chapter 2.4 give cause for concern. Qualitative interviews in schools confirmed that many households face difficulties in meeting their children's school fees and accessing sufficient, diversified food. By providing a meal to children in primary school, the project allows them to access a full meal and relieves the poorest households. In this context, school feeding plays its full role as a social safety net. The adaptation of the project during the period when schools were closed due to COVID-19 by providing take-home rations is a good illustration.

86. **Health and nutrition.** Nutrition and health needs in the Congo are significant, which is why school feeding and the other nutrition and health components of the McGovern-Dole project are highly relevant. As indicated in paragraphs 20 and 23, stunting and micronutrient deficiencies remain major concerns despite the reduction in the stunted population between 2014 and 2022 at national level. The data in

87. Table 1 show that all of the project's target departments had stunting rates above the national average in 2014 and 2022. The project's good nutrition education objectives are highly relevant given this prevalence of stunting, although the negative effects of stunting in children under five in terms of physical and cognitive development are no longer reversible at the age when children start to benefit from school meals.

88. Communicable diseases, particularly those related to water, sanitation and hygiene, are widespread, and the project's objective of limiting the incidence of these diseases among the school-age population is thus relevant. However, according to qualitative interviews with principals and teachers, the main illnesses leading to school absenteeism are malaria and respiratory diseases. The project does not include objectives and activities that could contribute to reducing the incidence of these illnesses, which could affect its effectiveness in reducing student absences due to illness.

89. **Gender.** The objective of promoting access to education for girls by providing an incentive with school meals is relevant to the specific constraints girls face in accessing education. As mentioned in paragraph 12, the primary school completion rate is lower for girls than for boys. This is due to parents' more limited interest in girls' education than in boys', early marriages or pregnancies, etc. Beyond this dimension, the McGovern-Dole project addresses gender inequalities only to a limited extent, with the promotion of women's participation in management committees, but without any follow-up, and in particular the extent to which women reach leadership positions within the committees. Gender-based violence is a critical issue, with high rates and widespread social acceptance. There is also evidence that gender-based violence can be an obstacle to women's safe access to education. The baseline study and mid-term evaluation recommended that WFP approach the Ministry for the Promotion of Women to explore the possibility of supporting the implementation of a curriculum developed by this Ministry in schools to address this issue. At the time of the final evaluation mission, this has not taken place. According to the WFP country office, meetings are planned in the near future.

90. The inclusion of indigenous children as project beneficiaries, and in particular of ORA schools in the McGovern-Dole project in the Sangha and Likouala departments, is relevant in view of the constraints identified for the education of indigenous children (see paragraph 14). These schools were introduced in the north of the country by the Congo Spiritan Fathers' Association (ASCP in French) and the Educational Program for Sustainable Development (PEDD in French) and seek to overcome these constraints by implementing a specific approach adapted to the situation of indigenous peoples.

2.1.2 **Has the project strategy evolved to adapt to changes in government policies and strategies on education and school meals?**

The project strategy has partly evolved to adapt to changes in government policies and strategies regarding education and school meals.

91. The National School Food Policy was developed in 2016, prior to the project start. The McGovern-Dole project represents the main contribution to its implementation. However, the project is at odds with one of the key elements of the policy, which is school food based on local products.

92. The main change in the national policy and strategy framework that occurred during project implementation was the adoption of the Food Crisis Resilience Plan 2022-2023 to address the effects of the crisis in Ukraine. The McGovern-Dole project contributes only partially to the objectives of this plan. The aim of the plan is to mitigate the effects of crises on food availability and prices at international level, which particularly affect the Congo due to its high dependence on imports. The plan defines six strategic areas of intervention and seeks to strengthen national production to reduce dependence on imported foodstuffs. The McGovern-Dole program, like the National School Feeding Policy, does not contribute to this general objective of the plan, as it relies entirely on food imports, unlike other school feeding activities based on local purchases by the WFP's CSP. It should be noted, however, that the sixth strategic axis of the plan aims to protect vulnerable people, particularly semi-nomadic indigenous populations. The McGovern-Dole project contributes to this axis by providing food to indigenous families in school canteens.

93. Apart from that, the main external contextual element that emerged and represented a significant element to consider was the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of schools interrupted the operation of

school canteens. The project was able to adapt to this situation to continue providing food assistance, even more necessary as livelihoods were affected, by distributing take-home rations (see paragraph 51).

94. The baseline study and mid-term evaluation had recommended closer ties with the Ministry for the Advancement of Women to explore the possibility of supporting the introduction of a gender equality curriculum at primary level. This would have strengthened the project's relevance to national gender policy by addressing GBV issues, but this was not achieved (see paragraph 31).

2.1.3 Has the project continued to complement other donor- and government-funded initiatives?

The project continued to complement other donor- and government-funded initiatives only to a limited extent.

95. The baseline study emphasized that the fundamental activities linked to improving the quality of literacy⁶⁰ were not carried out by the McGovern-Dole project's sub-recipients, but rather by PRAASED. Under PRAASED, a common framework to reinforce the projects' complementarities, avoid overlap and enable the McGovern-Dole project's monitoring system to establish the necessary connections with PRAASED for effective monitoring of the McGovern-Dole project were developed. As mentioned in chapter 2.2.1.1, the actions implemented as part of the McGovern-Dole project were not directly concerned with improving the quality of teaching. What's more, the coordination with PRAASED as recommended in the baseline study has not taken place, even though PRAASED has revised the French and mathematics curricula, produced new textbooks and trained teachers in the new programs, which were implemented at the start of the 2022-2023 school year. This was a missed opportunity for the project, which would have enabled it to achieve its objective of improving the quality of teaching to a greater extent.

96. Regarding UNICEF's action in the field of water and sanitation, the evaluation team was unable to access clear information on the approach implemented and the tools used within the framework of the project to contribute to the objective of improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Therefore, the evaluation team is unable to conclude on the extent to which the project's implementation is consistent with the approach implemented by UNICEF in other schools to promote access to water, hygiene and sanitation.

97. The McGovern-Dole and MDG fund projects mutually supported each other's objectives. One of the specific objectives of the MDG fund project was to keep indigenous children in school. According to the final review of the MDG fund project,⁶¹ convincing results were achieved in terms of an increase in the number of children and a decrease in drop-outs.⁶²

2.1.4 To what extent is the McGovern-Dole project aligned with WFP's general policies?

The McGovern-Dole project is fairly well aligned with WFP's corporate policies

98. **School feeding strategy.** The strategic objectives of the McGovern-Dole Program implemented by WFP in the Republic of Congo are in line with the ambition of the new WFP school feeding strategy adopted in 2020 for the period 2020-2030⁶³: "Responding to the call for a decade of action (2020-2030), WFP will

⁶⁰ These activities include the development/revision of a curriculum focusing on literacy and numeracy, the distribution to schoolchildren of new textbooks aligned with the new curriculum, and teacher training.

⁶¹ Final review of the joint program "Améliorer la qualité de vie des populations autochtones du département de la Lekoumou par un meilleur accès aux programmes de protection sociale en République du Congo" from January 2020 to June 2022.

⁶² According to the final review of the MDG Fund project, school feeding and the provision of school kits have contributed to the enrolment of 2,152 indigenous children and to reducing drop-out rate by 14% in the target area.

⁶³ Giving all schoolchildren a chance: Working in partnership to improve school health and nutrition for human capital development, WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020 - 2030, January 2020.

work with governments and partners to jointly ensure that all elementary school children benefit from good quality meals as well as a broader integrated package of health and nutrition services".

99. Building partnerships to achieve the strategic objectives of the McGovern-Dole program is fully in line with WFP's strategy, which states that "WFP can only provide part of the integrated school health and nutrition package and must work with partners to ensure that the focus is on high quality education. In these countries, it will strive to forge closer multi-sectoral partnerships with key partners to reduce the funding gap, lay the foundations for moving to national programs where possible, and ensure the coherence of the various services". The establishment of partnerships with UNESCO, UNICEF and ACTED was in line with this provision, with UNICEF and UNESCO providing expertise in education, and UNICEF and ACTED in hygiene, water and sanitation.

100. **Nutrition policy.** The McGovern-Dole project contributes to the 2017-2021 Nutrition Policy by promoting immediate access to nutritious food but does not promote nutrition-sensitive sustainable food systems. The policy has a clear focus on how WFP proposes to support governments to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 and target 2.2 to end all forms of malnutrition. One of the fundamental aspects put forward to achieve this is "the promotion of adequate and healthy diets that meet nutrient requirements, using a range of tools that ensure immediate access, for all, to nutritious food while strengthening nutrition-sensitive food value chains, from agricultural production through processing and retailing to consumption."

101. **Gender policy.** The McGovern-Dole project is consistent with the 2015-2020 and 2022-2026 gender policies, as it addresses the needs of boys and girls in the same way. Certain elements stipulated in the policies could nevertheless be strengthened. Gender aspects should be systematically included in the school curriculum. Interviews with boys and girls in schools showed that there is still unequal treatment of boys and girls in school. To quote interviewees, "boys go to play soccer, girls have to help clean the dishes" after school lunch. Also, in the qualitative interviews, some girls reported problems of gender-based violence in the school and in the communities. In addition, the operation of the school canteens is based on the contribution of the communities in several aspects. Among these, the contribution of mothers to cook represents the most important contribution without compensation. This may run counter to the objective of empowering women as advocated by the WFP gender policy.

2.1.5 To what extent is the McGovern-Dole program consistent with other WFP activities in the country?

The McGovern-Dole project is partially consistent with other WFP activities in the country

102. The McGovern-Dole project has been integrated into WFP's Country Strategic Plan since 2019. The overall aim of this plan is to foster ownership and transfer of WFP activities to the government by 2030, through a strategic approach to capacity development. The McGovern-Dole project, and in particular the foundational results framework, is consistent with this overall objective.

103. During the project implementation period, as part of CSP Activity 2, WFP developed school feeding activities based on cash transfers to schools for local food purchases. The McGovern-Dole project is totally separate from these activities, which target other schools. WFP is therefore implementing two antagonistic approaches in parallel, which could be complementary if implemented in the same schools. Local purchases could help to diversify a ration made up of imported foodstuffs deemed to lack diversity (see chapter 2.2.1.1), and the McGovern-Dole project could be more in line with the national school feeding policy and WFP's nutrition policy, which advocate support for sustainable food systems.

104. According to the WFP country office, WFP employed a nutrition consultant with non-USDA funds to support the industrial fortification of *foufou* flour (made from cassava) and *mbala pinda* (a nutritious snack made from cassava and peanuts) for the duration of the project. These concrete actions help to reduce poverty by stimulating the local economy, building producers' capacities and enhancing the value of local products. Implementing this pilot project in all McGovern-Dole schools would be of great value to beneficiaries and communities alike. In particular, *mbala pinda* would be a much-needed option to solve the short-term hunger problem of all schoolchildren who start the day on an empty stomach. Table 12 summarizes children's responses to whether they ate something before going to school in the endline survey.

Table 12: Students who say they always eat before going to school or bring a snack

School types	Always eat before school			Bring a snack to school		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Unsupported official schools	11.7%	16.6%	14.2%	42.8%	34.8%	38.7%
Official schools supported	23.3%	20.0%	21.5%	52.8%	47.1%	49.8%
ORA schools	14.4%	22%	17.8%	42.3%	45.1%	43.6%

Source: Endline school survey

105. The proportion of pupils who eat before school or bring a snack are not cumulative, as some children may have answered yes to both questions. These data show that a significant proportion, at least 30 percent of children, eat nothing in the morning apart from the school meal.

2.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Key effectiveness findings

- Some of the activities aimed at improving the quality of teaching have been carried out, while those that could have the most direct effect (curriculum revision, teacher training) have not.
- A significant proportion of children go to school on an empty stomach; the project has no impact on student hunger in the classroom. Nevertheless, school food, even if served at the end of the school day, contributes to a higher level of attention among pupils.
- School meal distribution activities have worked well overall, with the exception of some delays in food delivery, especially in 2022-2023. School feeding has a strong appeal to pupils and has significantly increased enrolment in the schools covered, as well as pupil attendance.
- Training and awareness-raising activities on good hygiene and sanitation practices seem to have reached the targets set, even if their documentation is lacking. The messages are well assimilated. Messages had already been integrated into the school curriculum prior to the project's intervention but the project seems to have helped reinforce them.
- Activities promoting good food preparation and storage practices show similar results.
- The results of activities aimed at improving nutrition knowledge are more mixed. This component lacked technical leadership from WFP and UNICEF. The technical guide was not produced as planned. Training and awareness-raising have not been well documented, and their scope is difficult to estimate. Training content is not aligned with the Ministry of Health's provisions in terms of the number of food groups. Overall, the messages on healthy eating were not well understood or assimilated.
- The targets set for the construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure were achieved. However, they were underestimated in relation to needs, especially for water points. Access to water remains a serious problem, which may limit the application of certain hygiene messages. Coverage of gender-segregated latrines is also limited.
- The closure of ORA schools in Likouala may have resulted in additional constraints for accessing schools for indigenous children. However, the evaluation could not verify it.
- WFP has worked to develop the capacity of the Ministry of Basic Education. This has produced good results at the decentralized level, with actors at the school and inspectorate levels who are well versed in school canteen management and monitoring tools.
- The involvement of national institutions in several components of the school feeding program remains limited and government support remains modest, particularly in terms of funding. Besides

MEPPSA, other key sectoral institutions have had virtually no involvement in the McGovern-Dole project.

- Community mobilization and contribution plays a key role in the smooth running of canteens. It could be extended to the provision of complementary foodstuffs to diversify the rations served in the schools.
- The available data show equitable access for girls and boys in the schools supported by the project. Women do participate in school canteen management committees, but this does not always translate into actual leadership positions. Women make a key contribution to the operation of the canteens with the cooks, but their expectations of compensation are not met.
- Other key elements relating to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment at school level have not yet been addressed by the project.
- Several factors have contributed to the project's success, including the availability of resources, community mobilization, the involvement of PRAASED and the positive role played by the NGO PEDD in the Sangha ORA schools.
- On the other hand, results were affected by the poverty of some households unable to pay school fees, the inadequate training of many community teachers, limited state resources and insufficient budgeting for infrastructure construction and rehabilitation activities. The visibility of results is also affected by insufficient project monitoring, particularly in terms of gender-disaggregated data.

2.2.1 To what extent have the interventions achieved (or failed to achieve) the desired results for girls, boys, men, women and indigenous populations?

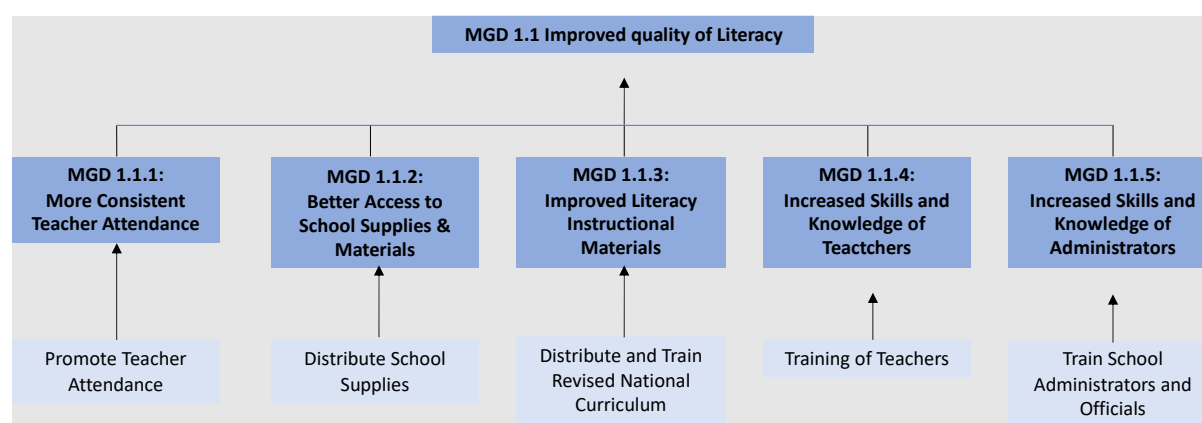
The interventions partially achieved the expected results for girls, boys, men and women, and indigenous children

2.2.1.1 Strategic outcome 1: Improved literacy among school-age children

Strategic outcome 1.1: Improved quality of literacy training

106. The results chain for the project's Strategic Outcome 1 includes three intermediate strategic objectives. The first, "Improved quality of literacy teaching", was to be achieved through five intermediate results, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Results chain for Outcome 1.1: Improved quality of literacy teaching

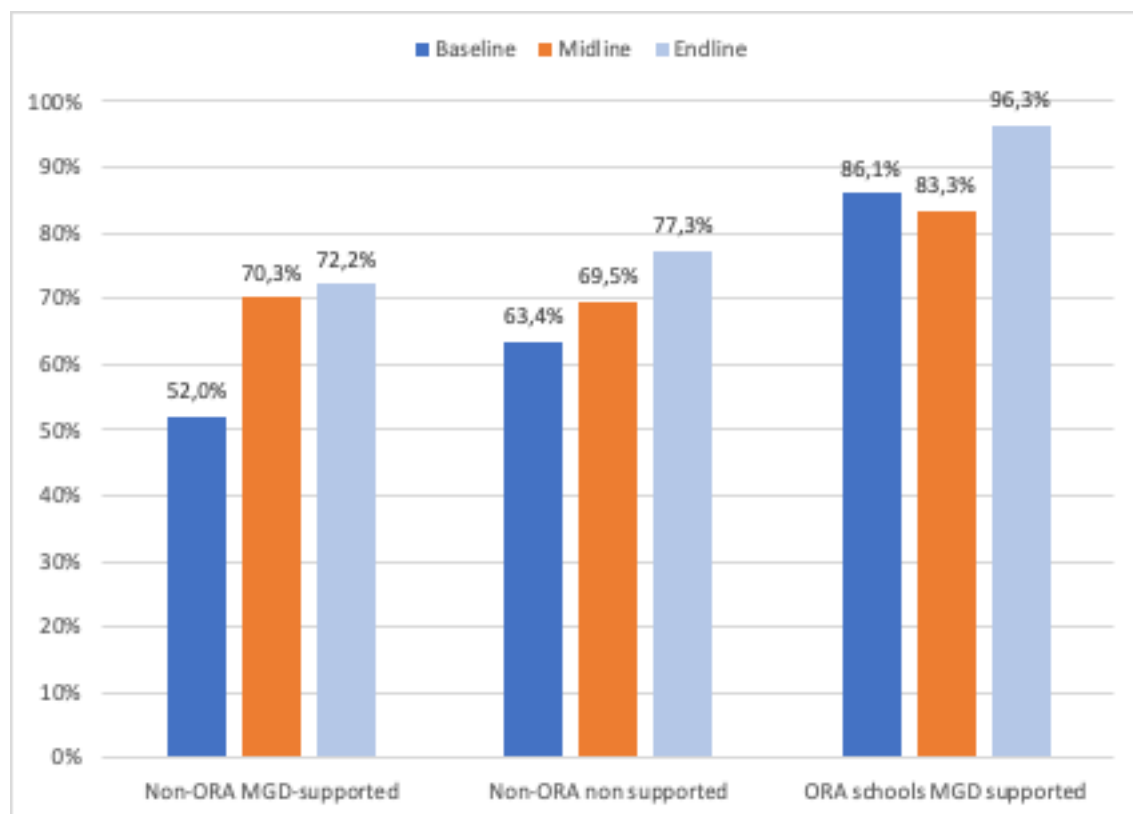


Source: Extracted from project results framework for literacy (Annex 4)

107. **Intermediate outcome MGD 1.1.1: More regular teacher presence.** Numerous research studies have established that teacher qualifications and regular presence in the classroom are key to student

success.⁶⁴ One of the weaknesses of the Congolese education system is the high proportion of contract teachers who have had little or no professional teacher training. The survey of school principals carried out for this evaluation confirmed the presence of a high percentage of contract teachers (over half) in all the schools surveyed. This percentage increased significantly in all school types between the start and end of the program, particularly in schools not supported by the program, and even more so in ORA schools, where it was close to 100 percent (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Evolution of the proportion of volunteer teachers by school type over the course of the project

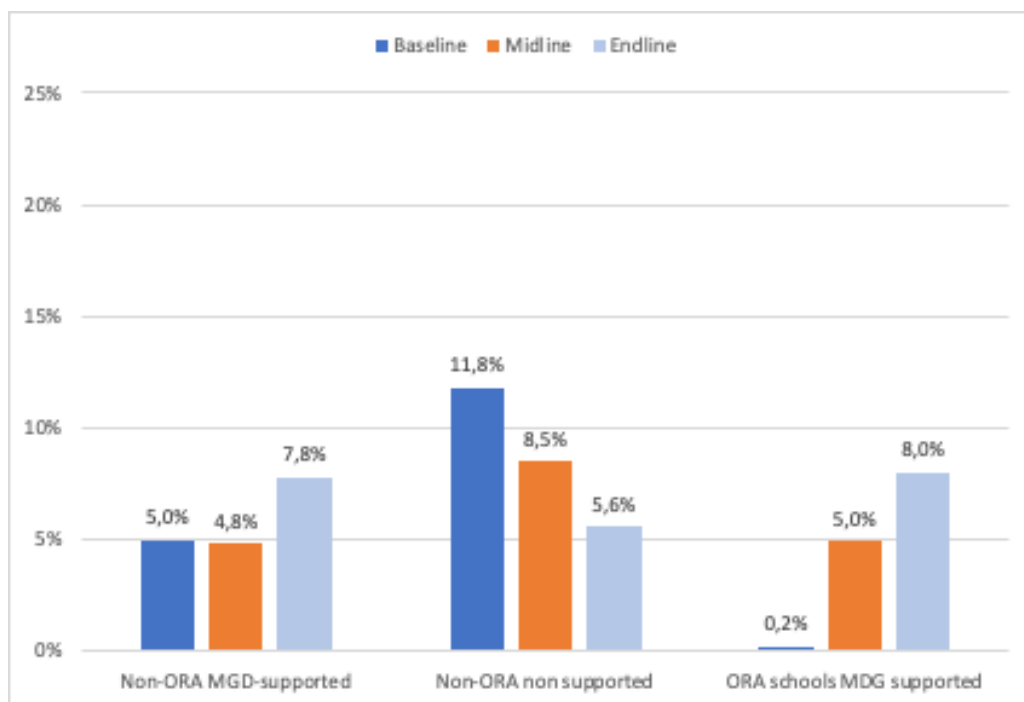


Source: baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

108. The percentage of teacher absence days has increased in both no- ORA and ORA program-supported schools while it has decreased in non-supported schools (Figure 5). According to the project's results chain, the reduction in absenteeism was to be achieved by promoting teacher attendance. However, no activities clearly geared towards this objective were included in the project work plan or implemented. The contradictory trend in teacher attendance between supported and non-supported schools is therefore likely due to factors external to the project, which could not be identified during the evaluation.

⁶⁴ For example, the following studies address the link between teacher qualification and presence and academic achievement: Teacher Quality, edited by Lance T. Izumi and Williamson M. Evers, Stanford University, Hoover Institution Press, 2002. Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood, by Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, and Jonah R. Rockoff, American Economic Review 2014. Moving toward cost-effective delivery models of teacher coaching: Evidence from field experiments in South Africa, by Janeli Kotze, Stephen Taylor and Brahm Fleisch, RISE Conference, 2018. <https://www.iiep.unesco.org/fr/2-quels-sont-les-liens-entre-la-performance-des-eleves-et-les-caracteristiques-des-enseignants>

Figure 5: Evolution of the percentage of schools days that teachers were absent over the course of the project

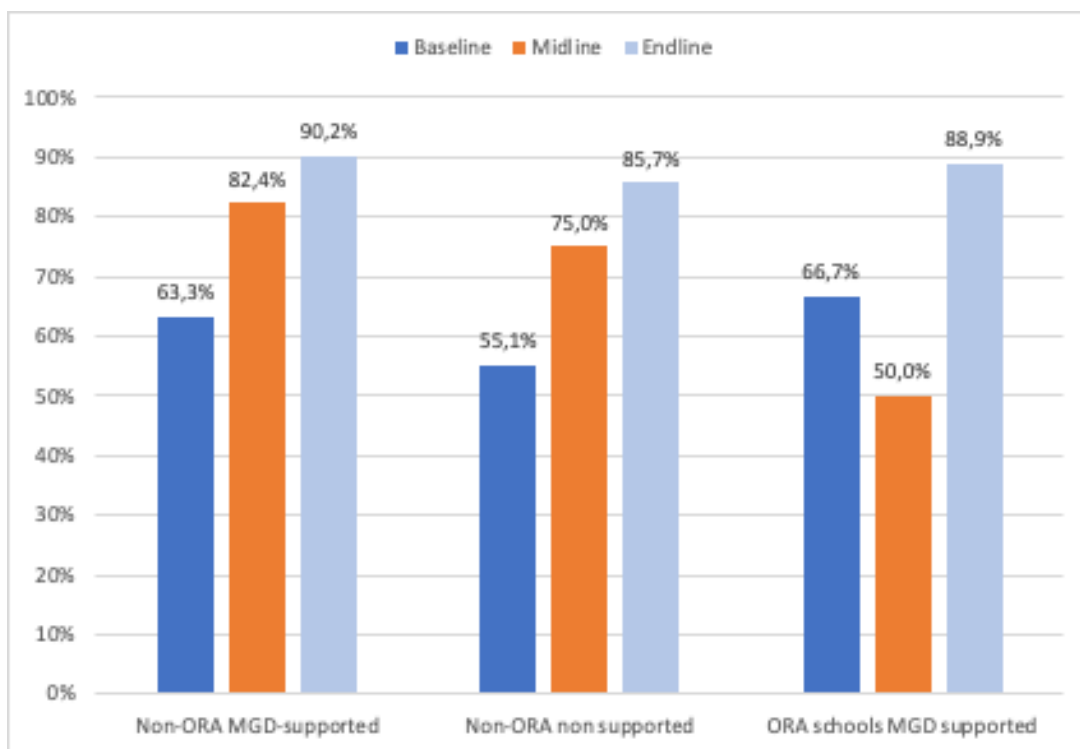


Source: baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

109. **Intermediate outcome MGD 1.1.2: Improved access to school supplies and materials.** UNICEF distributed school supplies and materials in accordance with the agreement with WFP. According to the data available in the SAPRs, by September 2022, 63,757 supplies had been distributed, i.e. 166 percent of the project target (Table 7). According to the information available in the SAPRs, which are very detailed for this activity, there seems to have been confusion on several occasions between the number of supplies distributed and the number of pupils who received them. For example, for the year 2020-2021, 13,580 pupils benefited from binders with USDA, WFP and UNICEF logos, and blackboards and other school supplies in the three target regions (Pool, Plateaux and Cuvette). UNICEF supplied 6,505 textbooks, including 6,133 for French reading and 372 for mathematics, in the Pool, Cuvette and Plateaux regions. The remaining 1,724 textbooks were scheduled for distribution in October 2021. The ITT for this period shows 5,153 school supplies distributed during the first semester (October 1, 2020-March 31, 2021) and 13,580 during the second semester (April-September 2021). It may be noted that the figure (13,580) reported for the quantity of supplies distributed corresponds to the number of pupils benefiting, whereas, according to the narrative report for the period April 2021-September 2021, a total of 8,229 textbooks were distributed by UNICEF. These inconsistencies affect the reliability of the data reported.

110. Data collected from school principals during the quantitative survey carried out for this evaluation show a clear increase in the percentage of schools where the provision of teaching materials is rated as very satisfactory in official schools supported and not supported by the project, as well as in ORA schools supported (Figure 6). This evolution is undoubtedly due to the distribution of school materials by UNICEF as part of its activities in the Congo and is not limited to schools supported by the McGovern-Dole project. In any case, the project has contributed to a significant increase in the availability of school supplies for pupils.

Figure 6: Percentage of schools with sufficient teaching materials, by type of school, over the course of the project.



Source: baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

111. Intermediate outcome MGD 1.1.3: Improved literacy teaching materials. Intermediate output MGD 1.1.4: Increased skills and knowledge of teachers.

112. These two results are closely linked. The project design called for the revision of outdated literacy curricula and the training of teachers on the new curricula. As noted in Chapter 94, the project did not intervene in the revision of the curricula. PRAASED carried out this revision for the CP1, CP2, 6th and 5th levels, and the new curricula were implemented at the start of the 2022-2023 school year, without any contribution from the McGovern Dole project, despite the recommendations made during the baseline study and mid-term evaluation to approach PRAASED to work jointly on curriculum revision. According to the WFP country office, this coordination did not take place because PRAASED was not active due to lack of funding, but this does not correspond to the information transmitted by PRAASED and to the fact that PRAASED did revise the curricula.

113. Regarding teacher training, the mid-term evaluation revealed that teacher training had been carried out by UNESCO during the first year of the project. There were no teacher trainings on literacy after the mid-term evaluation. However, as mentioned in this evaluation report, these trainings tended to focus on food security and nutrition, and targeted adults, mothers and single mothers, rather than literacy for school-age children.

114. Intermediate Outcome MGD 1.1.5: Administrators' skills and knowledge increased. The agreement with USDA called for WFP to train school administrators annually in school management, with priority given to ORA schools. According to the SAPRs (Table 8) 1,089 school administrators have been trained through September 2022, or 68 percent of the target.

115. Table 13 shows that, in the 12 months prior to the endline school survey, a higher percentage of school directors within ORA schools benefitted from some type of training compared to official schools. It can also be seen that training courses were given in schools not supported by the project, and that in both these schools and those supported by the project, several institutions carried out training courses for administrators.

Table 13: Percentage of directors having received training in the last 12 months.

Type of school	Schools that took part in training courses	Type of institution providing training			
		No training	WFP/partner MGD	Government	Other
Unsupported official schools	33%	67%	5%	14%	14%
Official schools supported	41%	57%	8%	16%	20%
ORA schools MGD supported	67%	33%	1%	44%	11%

Source: endline school survey

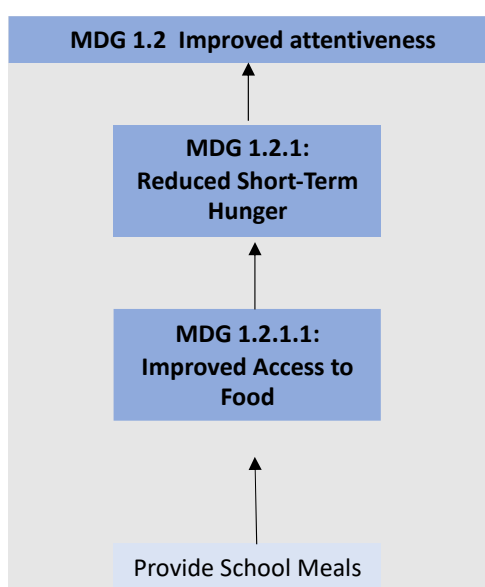
116. As indicated in paragraph 59, the SAPRs do not allow the evaluation team to measure the effects of these training courses in terms of the use of new techniques and tools, as the respective PMP indicator (standard indicator 3) has not been measured, and the figures reported correspond to automatic application by 65 percent of the administrators who took part in the training courses. Nevertheless, all administrators interviewed during the endline school survey reported that they had used the new techniques acquired.

117. Overall, the McGovern-Dole project's performance in improving the quality of literacy teaching is variable. The project has achieved good results in the provision of school materials and the training of school administrators, both of which are likely to contribute to better learning conditions for pupils. Similarly, the presence of teachers has increased in the official schools supported by the project, even if the project's contribution is not clearly established. On the other hand, the key activities of revising obsolete curricula, distributing new teaching materials and training teachers to apply the new curricula were not carried out with project support.

Strategic outcome 1.2: Improved attention

118. The McGovern-Dole program's results framework calls for action to be taken to increase schoolchildren's attention span, because on an empty stomach, children find it hard to study and tend to lose focus (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Result chain for outcome 1.2: Improved attention

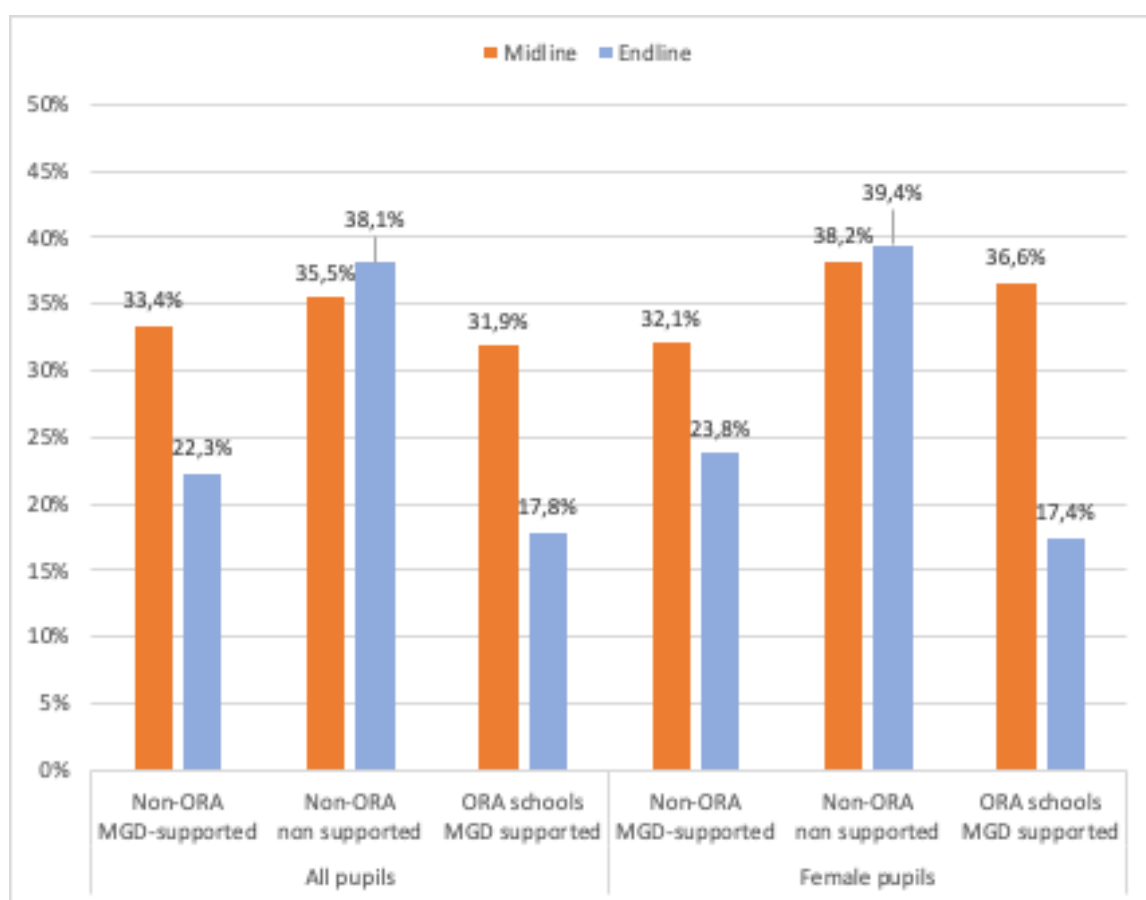


Source: Extracted from project results framework for literacy (Annex 4)

119. **Intermediate outcome 1.2.1: Short-term reduction in hunger.** Interviews in schools during qualitative data collection showed that meals are most often served in schools around 12:00, at the end of school. In schools where school meals are served during the school morning, they are served at the earliest during or after recess, i.e. around 11:00 am. Most of the principals interviewed indicated that they prefer to serve meals after school, so as not to disrupt the classroom. Regardless, the provision of school meals does not prevent children from going to school on an empty stomach.

120. Data from the quantitative survey are consistent with school meal provision at the end of the day. As shown in Figure 8, the percentage of students who are hungry every day as reported by teachers did not change favorably between the mid-term and endline surveys (this question was not asked in the baseline survey). Trends for boys and girls are the same.

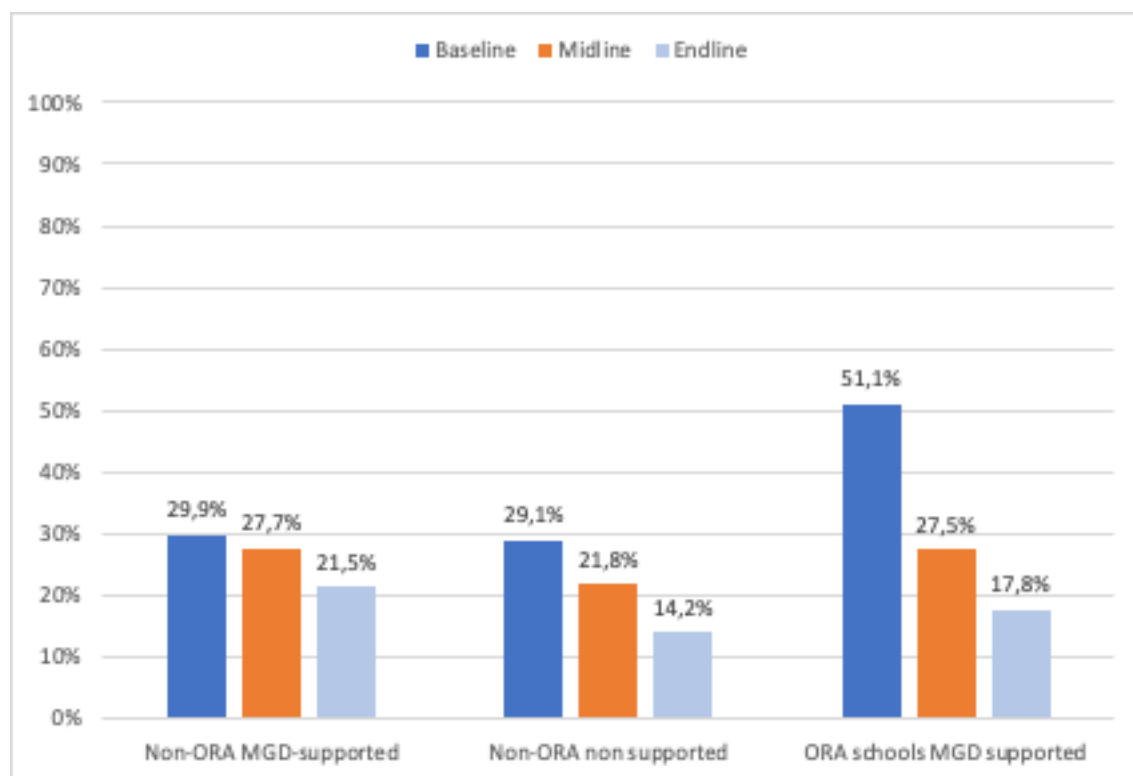
Figure 8: Percentage of students who are hungry every day, as reported by teachers



Source: mid-term and endline surveys

121. Similarly, the proportion of children who always eat before going to school has fallen in both official and ORA schools supported by the project, and in official non-supported schools, as shown in Figure 9. This decline is particularly pronounced in ORA schools and for girls in these schools.

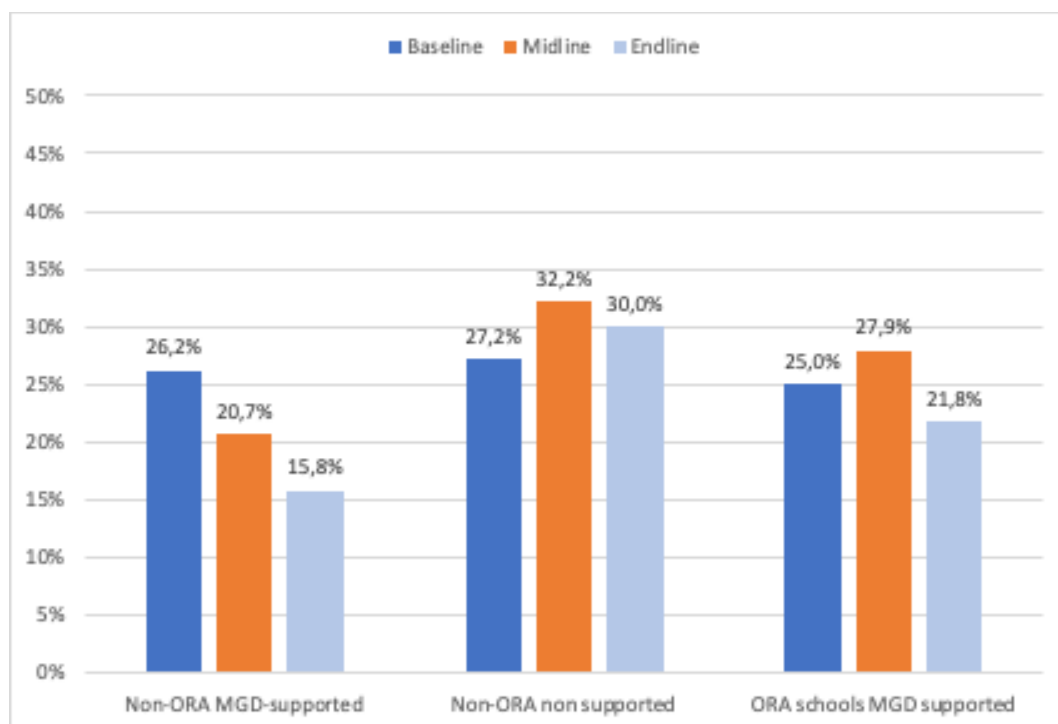
Figure 9: Percentage of children who eat before going to school



Source: Baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

122. On the other hand, school survey data show a significant drop in the number of pupils inattentive from time to time or every day, especially in official schools, whereas this number has increased in schools not supported by the project (Figure 10). Most of the teachers interviewed during the qualitative information gathering indicated that the biggest attention problems mainly concerned the youngest children in the first grades, in CP1 and CP2. For the others, according to the teachers, even if the meals are served in the second half of the morning or after school, they have a positive effect on attention: "When the children see that the cooks are preparing the canteen meals, it gives them courage to work well at school".

Figure 10: Percentage of students considered by teachers to be inattentive sometimes or every day

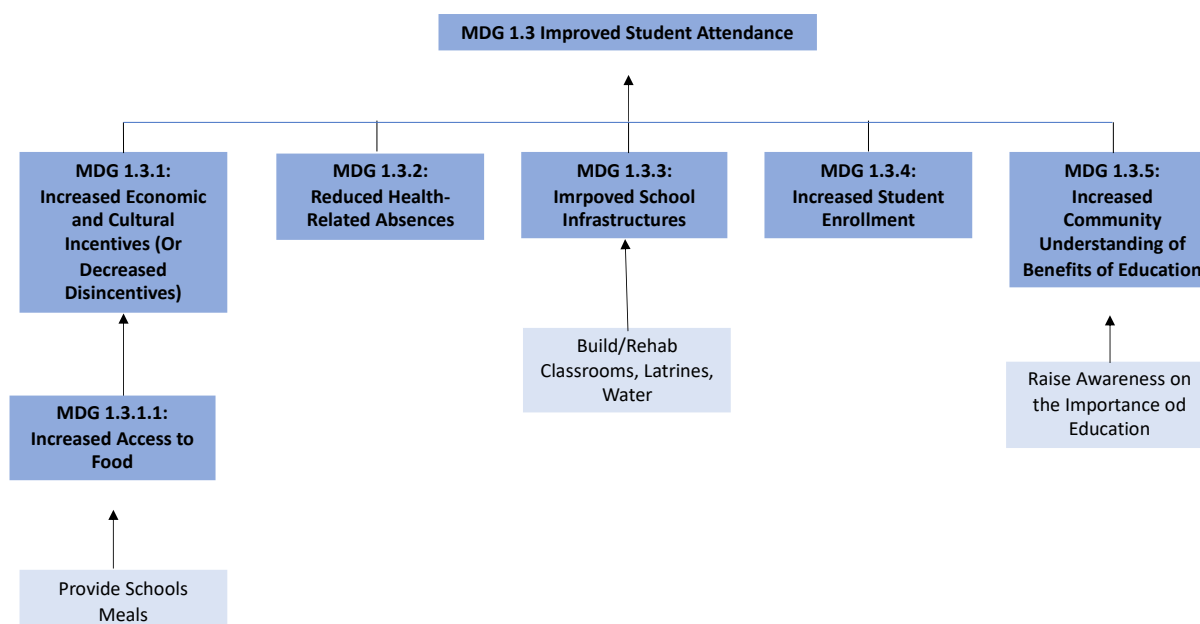


Source: baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

Strategic outcome 1.3: Improved student attendance

123. According to the project's results framework, four intermediate outcomes are expected to contribute to improved student attendance: increased incentive to attend school through the provision of school meals, reduced absence due to ill health, improved school infrastructure, increased school enrolment and increased community understanding of the benefits of education (Figure 11). Reducing absenteeism due to ill-health is the objective of Strategic Objective 2 of the project and is covered in chapter 2.4.1.2. Similarly, improving school infrastructure is also part of this objective, and is dealt with in the next chapter (2.2.1.2). None of the activities in the results framework, drawn up at the start of the project and included in Annex 4, alone is enough to increase school enrolment, but this desired effect is a logical consequence of the incentive provided by school meals and awareness-raising about the benefits of education.

Figure 11: Result chain for outcome 1.3: Improved student attendance



Source: Extracted from project results framework for literacy (Annex 4)

124. **Intermediate outcomes 1.3.1: Increased economic and cultural incentive. 1.3.4: Increased school enrolment. 1.3.5: Increased community understanding of the benefits of education.** As indicated in chapter 1.3, Table 4 and Table 5, the quantity of food distributed by the WFP during the five effective years of project operation (2018 to 2022) was significantly lower than forecast. There are two main reasons for this. First, according to the WFP country office, the number of actual school days and school canteen operating days is lower than the 180 days planned, as teachers often arrive several weeks late after the major school vacations. Secondly, delays in the delivery of food, especially in 2022, have reduced the actual number of canteen operations. This observation supports aligning the project with the priority given to local purchases by the national school food policy, as this would simplify the logistical management of canteen supplies.

125. The number of meals served up to September 2022 represents 76 percent of the target, which suggests that the target will be reached by the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

126. School visits during the qualitative data collection mission showed that the school canteens are functioning well. When food is available, the canteen management committees always ensure the availability of the necessary water and firewood (brought in each morning by the pupils, who usually bring one piece of wood per pupil), and the presence of cooks. However, qualitative interviews with school principals and management committees, and observations of meals served during field visits, show that parents and communities often do not bring foodstuffs to supplement those distributed by the WFP. As a result, meals served every day consist of rice, split peas, oil and salt. The meals contained canned sardines donated by Japan until 2021. This raises the question of the diversity of rations served and the contribution of school canteens to good nutrition education discussed in chapter 2.2.1.2.

127. WFP has implemented several activities to attract and retain children in school within the framework of the partnership agreements with its partners ACTED and UNICEF. According to the SAPRs, awareness-raising work was carried out to increase awareness of the importance of education through various dissemination channels at school, community and department level, in all targeted schools. The importance of education is a subject that has been included in training modules provided to farmers' organizations in

the Bouenza department (ACTED), in leaflets, in training for school committees and members of the Parents-Teachers Association, in awareness-raising sessions and radio programs (UNICEF).⁶⁵

128. The PMP does not contain an indicator to measure the importance parents place on their children's education. The qualitative interviews conducted with parents showed that this varied. When asked about the benefits of school meals, some parents clearly responded by emphasizing their interest in their children's education and its importance for their future. However, many parents cited only access to a meal for their children and made no reference to the importance of education.

129. **Enrolment.** As shown in

130. Table 3, the maximum number of students enrolled in the 410 schools covered by the project is 92,000 in the 2022-2023 school year. This represents a 71 percent increase on the student population in the same schools in 2017-2018, and 81 percent of the established target of 114,051 enrolled students. As indicated in chapter 1.3, this target assumes an increase in enrolment of 112 percent, which is probably too ambitious. These figures suggest that school feeding has played its intended role in encouraging children to attend school. Interviews with school principals, teachers and parents clearly confirmed this. All those interviewed indicated that one of the main effects of school feeding is to increase parents' and children's motivation to go to school.

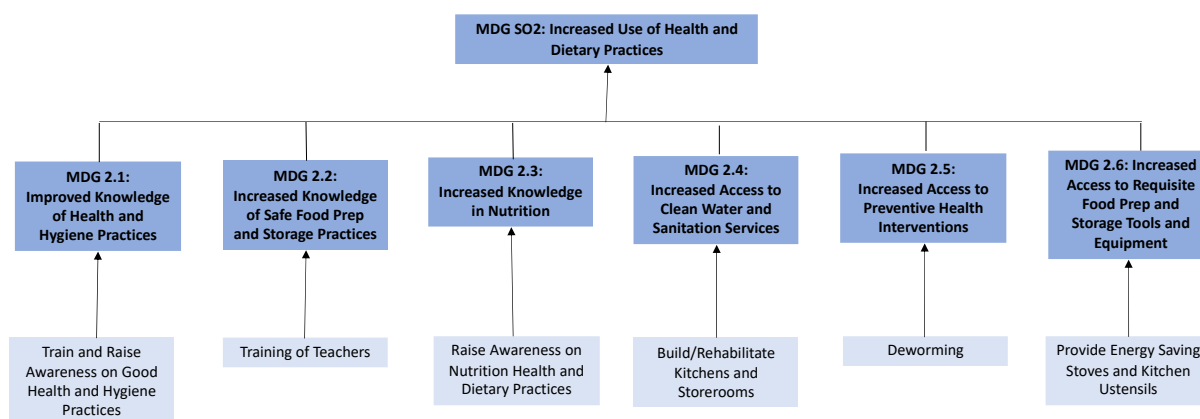
131. **Attendance.** Table 9 in chapter 1.3 shows that the highest number of pupils attending school at least 80 percent of the time was achieved in the 2020-2021 school year, with 78,556 pupils. This represents 74 percent of the also very ambitious target. Notably, the SAPRs do not report data for the first two effective years of the project. These 78,556 pupils represent a 96 percent increase on the number of regularly attending pupils identified in the baseline study. Attendance has, however, fallen in 2021-2022, with 62,561 pupils attending at least 80 percent of class time. The lack of complete data makes it impossible to draw definitive conclusions. However, the qualitative interviews once again showed the importance of school food in getting children into school. Parents of schoolchildren interviewed indicated that most households in the areas visited prepare a full meal once a day, at the end of the day. Household members, including children, do not eat for the rest of the day, or eat only a small snack in the morning. Children are hungry during the day, and the mid-day meal served at school has a great effect in attracting children. Furthermore, according to interviews with principals and teachers, absences increase significantly when canteens are not in operation.

2.2.1.2 Strategic outcome 2: Increased use of good health and nutrition practices

132. Strategic Outcome 2 incorporates six intermediate outcomes as shown in Figure 12. These include improving knowledge of good health, hygiene and nutrition practices, and increasing access to services, infrastructure and equipment. As previously mentioned, this strategic result aims to reduce student absences for health reasons.

⁶⁵ACTED and UNICEF set up a system to raise awareness of the importance of education, with two radio programs broadcast three times a week for three weeks in French and the local language. These programs focused on the importance of education and school, and another on good hygiene and sanitation practices. The objective of these programs is to sensitize the wider community to strengthen the impact of the partners' intervention. In addition to the sessions carried out in schools, 25 sessions were organized on the themes for communities in 22 villages of the Bouenza department. The sessions were organized by ACTED teams. Information was provided in French, and in the local language if necessary, accompanied by pictures and leaflets for a better understanding. On the UNICEF side, a Convention de Financement à Petite Echelle (SSFA) was signed with the Association Congolaise de Santé Publique et Communautaire (CAPCH), which produced communication media and radio broadcasts, and trained 4 journalists and 56 community relays and their supervisors in the Bouenza and Plateaux regions. Community leaders, parent-teacher associations, school and integrated health center directors, local media, religious leaders and mayors were all involved in raising awareness among beneficiaries. Following a training session for journalists, local radio stations broadcast a total of eight awareness-raising programs on good health, nutrition and hygiene.

Figure 12: Results chain for strategic result 2: Increased use of good health and nutrition practices



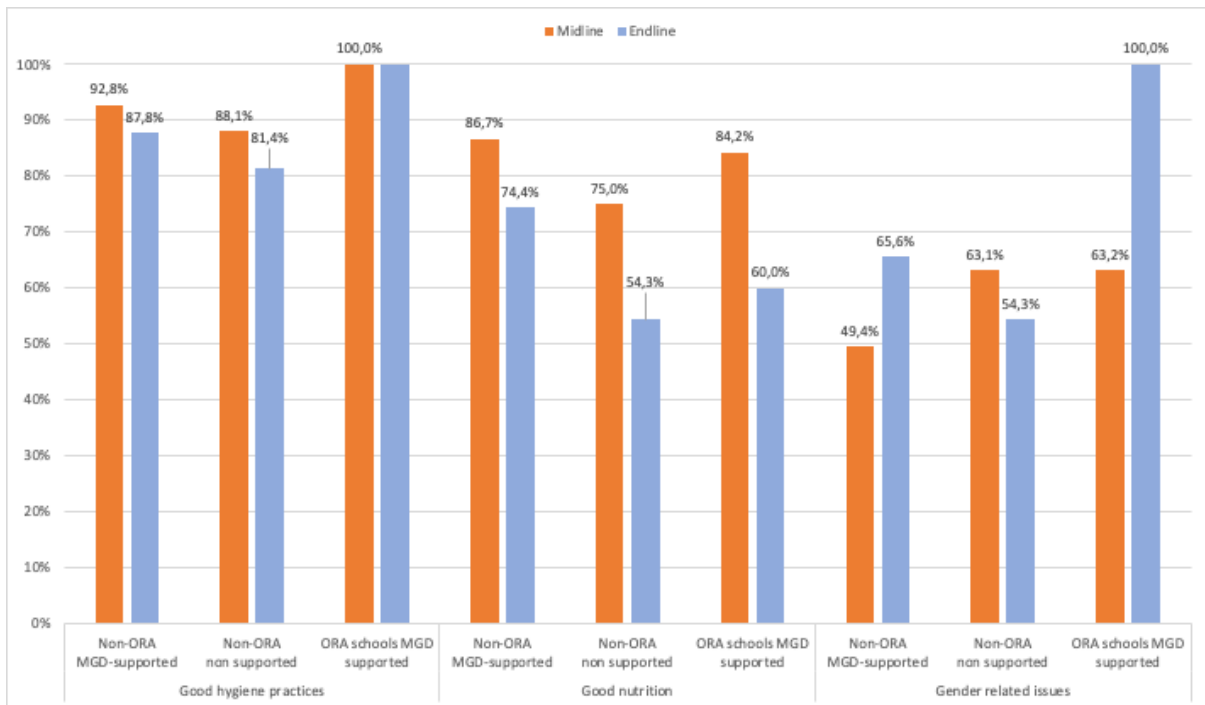
Source: Extracted from project results framework for health, nutrition and dietary practices (Annex 5)

133. **Intermediate result 2.1: Improved knowledge of good health and hygiene practices.** The information provided in the SAPRs and included in chapter 1.3, Table 8 indicates that 10,160 people have participated in awareness-raising and/or training sessions on good child health and nutrition practices up to September 2022, i.e. 174 percent of the project target. This indicator overlaps with intermediate results 2.1 and 2.3. The PMP does not include specific indicators for each of these outcomes. The PMP contains an outcome indicator relating to "the number of people demonstrating the use of new child health and nutrition practices as a result of USDA support". Like the output indicator (number of people trained), this indicator is not adapted to the project's results framework, as it does not separate intermediate results 2.1 and 2.3. Moreover, this indicator has not been measured, and the figures reported in the SAPRs result from the systematic application of 65 percent of training participants.

134. According to the SAPRs, awareness-raising activities and training have been organized at community and school level to promote better health and hygiene practices. At community level, ACTED provided training in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The implementation of the activity was confirmed in interviews conducted during the mid-term evaluation.

135. At the school level, teacher trainings on health and hygiene were expected to increase coverage of these topics among students in McGovern-Dole supported schools. Based on all interviews conducted with school principals and teachers during the qualitative data collection, most of these topics are already part of the school curriculum and are regularly covered in classrooms as part of the regular curriculum. This is consistent with the school survey data. As shown in Figure 13, a large majority of teachers surveyed in the midterm and endline surveys report having addressed the importance of hygiene in the classroom in both official project-supported and non-project-supported schools. The proportion of teachers who discussed these topics is significantly higher in project-supported schools, but the difference with non-supported schools is not significant in terms of the confidence intervals for these two groups (see complete data in Annex 23). It should be noted that 100 percent of teachers in ORA schools stated that they had discussed these subjects in both the mid-term and endline surveys.

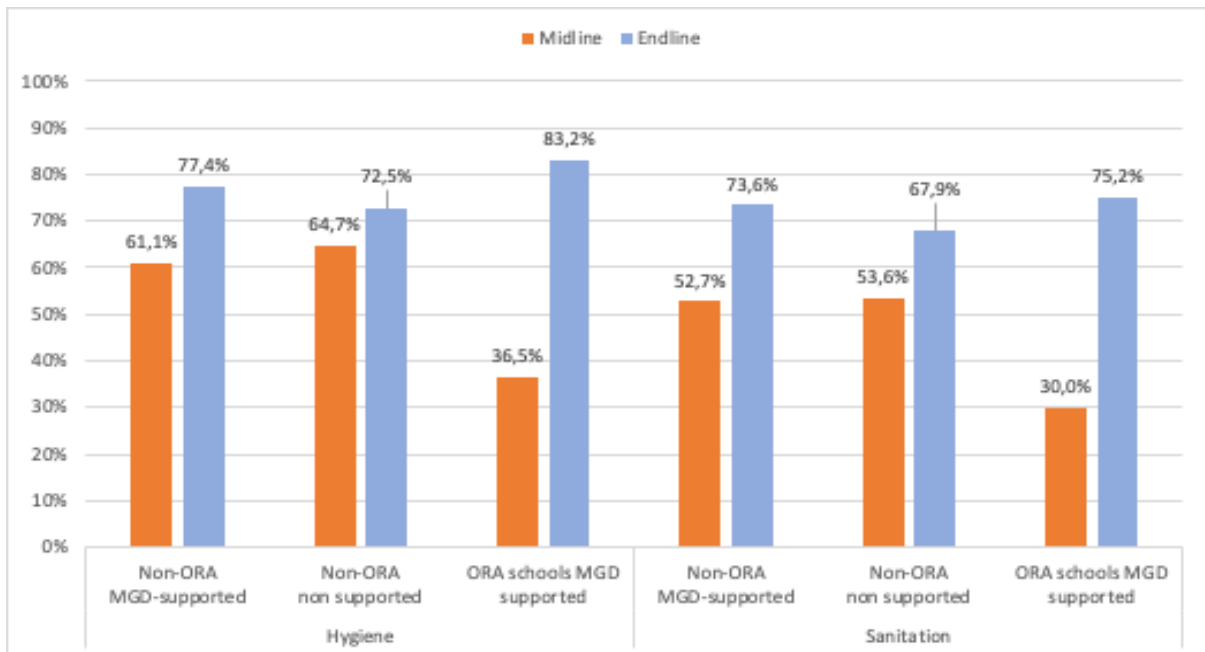
Figure 13: Percentage of teachers who say they discuss the importance of hygiene, nutrition and gender in the classroom



Source: mid-term and endline surveys

136. At the student level, the proportion of students in all schools who report that hygiene and sanitation topics were discussed in class increased between the midterm and endline surveys (Figure 14). This suggests that, even though these topics are integrated into the regular curriculum, the project may have contributed to increasing the importance given to these themes in the classroom.

Figure 14: Percentage of students reporting that hygiene and sanitation topics are discussed in class.



Source: Mid-term and endline surveys

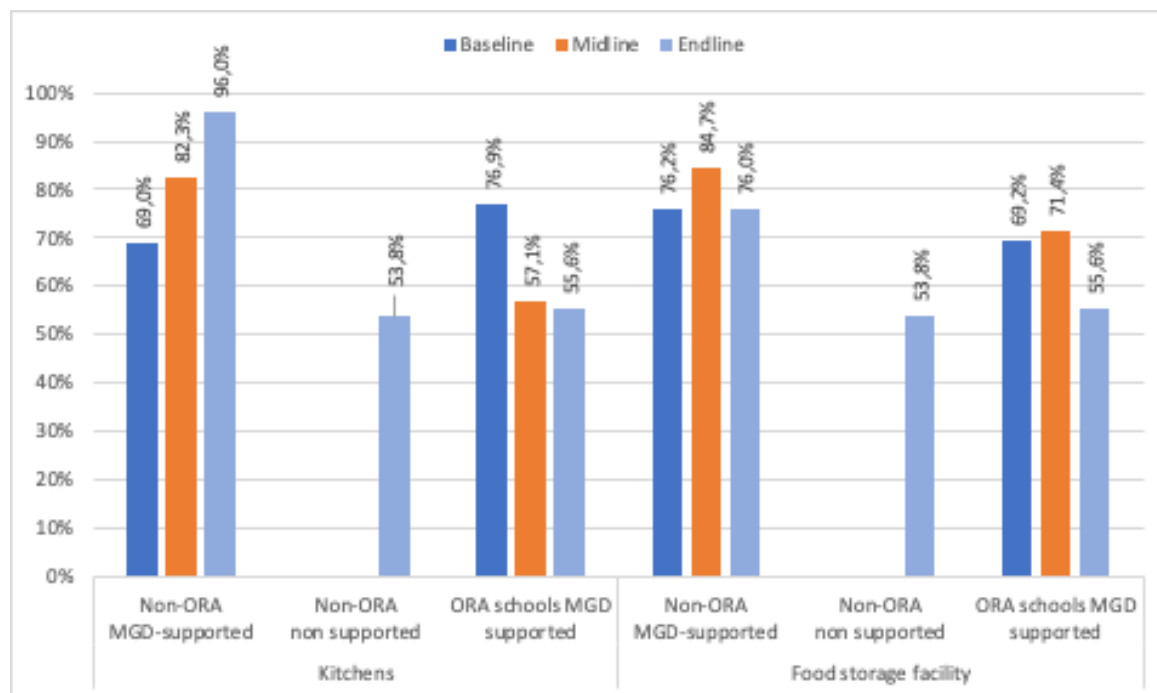
137. Interviews conducted in schools show that, overall, the messages on handwashing and latrine use have been well assimilated. However, implementation of these messages depends on access to water and sanitation infrastructure (see MGD 2.3 in paragraph 141 below).

138. **Intermediate outcome MGD 2.2: Improved knowledge of good food preparation and storage practices.** According to the SAPRs, 4,731 people have been trained in good food preparation and storage practices up to September 2022 (see chapter 1.3, Table 8). This represents 96 percent of the target. This has been achieved through annual training sessions organized by WFP, which have reached all schools. According to interviews conducted in the schools, the principals, deputy principals, one member of the canteen management committees and a cook were invited to attend these training sessions for each school, every year.

139. Interviews with school staff, management committee members and cooks, as well as observations in the schools, show that the messages have been well assimilated. In particular, the evaluation team observed good food storage conditions in all the schools visited.

140. This result was supported by the construction and rehabilitation of storage facilities in schools. Figure 15 shows the evolution of the proportion of schools with a kitchen and storage facilities in schools supported by the project. In official schools, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of schools with kitchens, while there has been no change in the proportion with storage facilities. In ORA schools, surprisingly, the proportion of schools equipped has fallen for both types of infrastructure. This may be due to the fact that the ORA school sample changed considerably in the endline survey. As there were no longer any ORA schools open in Likouala, all the schools in the sample are in Sangha. The school survey data also show that storage conditions are good and have improved over the course of the project. This corroborates the observation made on the good level of assimilation of messages on food storage and preparation. Thus, according to the endline survey, in 97 percent of non-ORA and 100 percent of ORA supported schools the storage rooms are well cleaned. In 84 percent of non-ORA and 80 percent of ORA supported schools the floor is dry. In 89 percent of non-ORA and 60 percent of ORA supported schools the food is not on the floor. The door is well closed in 100 percent of non-ORA supported schools, while it is 60 percent in ORA supported schools. Results of surveys with management committees are less positive, where only 46 percent of kitchens in non-ORA supported schools and 20 percent in ORA supported schools were reported to be in good condition.

Figure 15: Percentage of supported schools equipped with kitchen and storage facilities



Source: Baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

141. **Intermediate result 2.3: Improved knowledge of nutrition.** The agreement between WFP and USDA includes several activities to promote better nutrition, including the development of a nutrition guide, community promotion of good health and hygiene, and support to the Ministry of Health in setting up a nutrition surveillance system, among others. As indicated for intermediate result 2.1 (paragraph 133), the PMP's output and outcome indicators do not differentiate between participants in training on good health and hygiene practices from nutrition training and the outcome indicator has not been tracked.

142. Nutrition work was carried out by WFP in partnership with ACTED and UNICEF. According to several interviews with resource persons, this aspect of the project lacked technical leadership due to the permanent absence of a nutritionist in the WFP/UNICEF country office. As a result, certain activities were not fully implemented, and did not produce the expected results. By way of a nutritional guide, the project appears to have contributed to the funding of the nutrition chapter of UNESCO's *Classes Vertes* manual. However, the content of this chapter focuses on food security in Congo in general and is not adapted to the objectives of the nutrition education project for school-age children. The production of the nutrition guide was to be followed by a training of trainers course involving 500 teachers. Information from the SAPRs is unclear as to the actual number of participants in this cascade training, and the number of teachers finally reached in the schools.

143. As shown in Table 14, the number of teachers reporting participation in nutrition and health training is significantly higher in project-supported schools, both ORA and official, compared with non-supported schools.

Table 14: Percentage of teachers who have attended health and nutrition training courses

	Mid-term survey	Endline survey
Official schools supported	28.9%	30.0%
ORA schools supported	42.10%	40.0%
Unsupported schools	13.1%	5.7%

Source: Mid-term and endline surveys

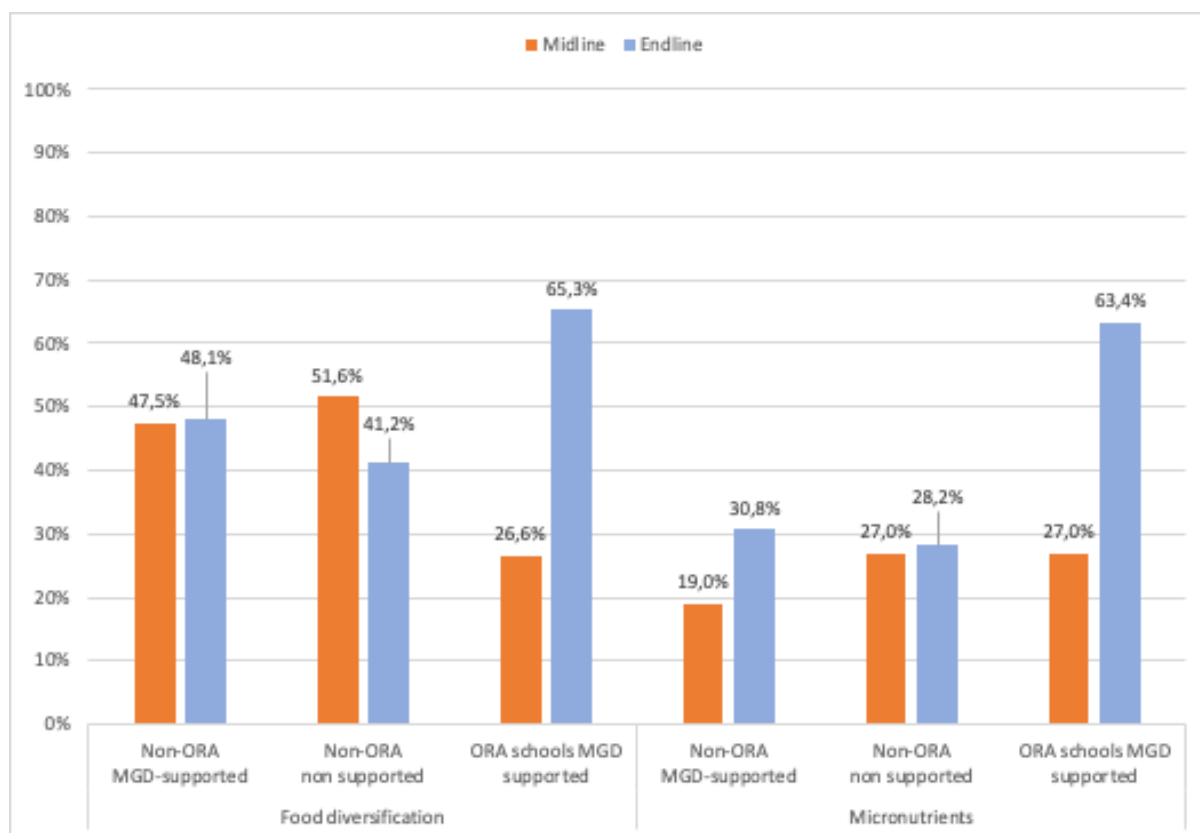
144. These figures may also reflect the participation of teachers in training courses run by WFP, which has included nutrition concepts in the annual training courses described in Intermediate Outcome 2.2. According to the training manual used, the courses cover basic nutritional concepts and the fight against malnutrition. It should be noted that WFP used four food groups in the training courses, while the Ministry of Health used seven groups.

145. Other activities, such as radio broadcasts and community awareness-raising sessions, have been carried out by ACTED and UNICEF, but their documentation is imprecise and their scope difficult to determine. However, according to UNICEF, some awareness-raising activities have been subcontracted to local NGOs. Alternatives could be envisaged, such as relying on the Ministry of Health's community health agents.

146. According to the teachers surveyed, as with hygiene, good nutrition practices are already part of the school curriculum. Figure 13 shows that a large majority of teachers claimed to discuss the importance of good nutrition in class during the mid-term survey. This proportion dropped quite significantly in the endline survey. The evaluation team could not identify the reason for this change. Notably, the proportion of teachers who say they discuss this subject is higher in official schools supported by the project than in non-supported schools. This difference is significant within the confidence intervals and is probably due to the increased importance attached to nutrition due to the training provided (see complete data in Annex 23).

147. The quantitative survey of students asked them if they addressed nutrition issues at school. The responses are summarized in Figure 16. In official schools supported by the project, less than half the pupils had received information on dietary diversification, and even fewer said they had received information on micronutrients. Interestingly, in the ORA schools, a considerably higher percentage of girls reported at mid-term to have received training on these subjects (55 percent) than boys (18 percent). It's possible that these topics were discussed more frequently with girls if teachers deemed them more relevant (gender stereotyping). However, this theory has not been confirmed by direct evaluation data.

Figure 16: Percentage of students indicating that the themes of dietary diversification and micronutrients have been discussed in class



Source: Mid-term and endline surveys

148. Qualitative data collected in schools corroborates these findings. Unlike the messages on hygiene, sanitation and good food preparation and storage practices, the qualitative interviews conducted in schools showed that local stakeholders, including school principals and teachers, had a very general understanding of the nutrition messages. Few of those interviewed were able to give a clear answer to the question of what constitutes a balanced meal.

149. Importantly, the practices implemented in school canteens, where the diet is not very diversified, are contradictory to the messages of dietary diversification, which can affect their reach. Beyond the provision of meals as an incentive for children to attend school, school canteens represent an opportunity to reinforce awareness-raising and training messages for pupils and the community by providing a practical example. This may concern meal quality, hygiene, market gardening and so on.

150. **Intermediate outcome MGD 2.4: Increased access to drinking water and sanitation.** Improved access to sanitation services is directly linked to Strategic Objective 2. To promote better health, WFP and its partners ACTED and UNICEF have implemented safe sanitation in targeted schools by building/rehabilitating latrines, kitchens, storage facilities and water stations, as well as providing hand-washing kits.

151. The PMP includes three indicators relating to school infrastructure: *Number of education infrastructures rehabilitated/constructed thanks to USDA support* (standard indicator 7), *Number of schools using an improved water source* (indicator 22), *Number of schools with improved sanitation facilities* (indicator 23). Indicator 7 does not specify the different types of infrastructure built/rehabilitated. As shown in Table 6, according to this indicator, 79 infrastructures have been built/rehabilitated up to September 2022, i.e. 86 percent of the project target. Indicators 22 and 23, which are more precise, have not been correctly counted and are difficult to use.

152. However, the evaluation team was able to reconstruct some information based on the narrative reports. Based on this information, latrines have been built/rehabilitated in about 30 schools until

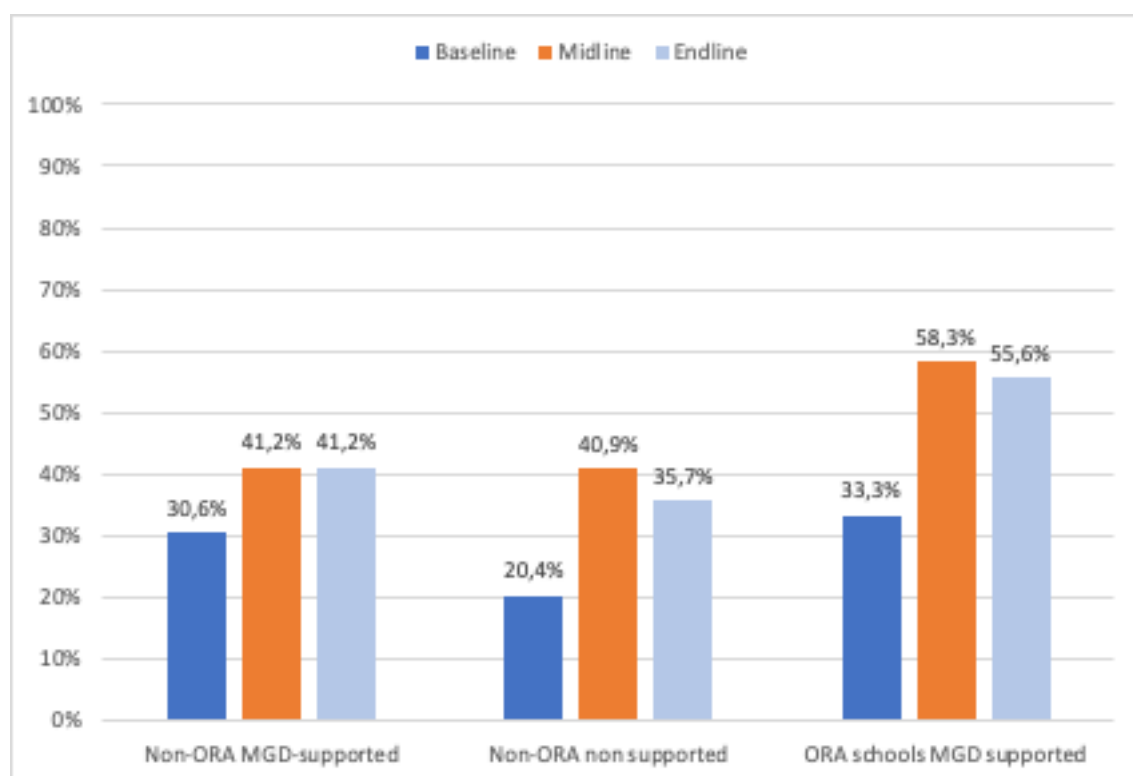
September 2022, ACTED has built 22 kitchens and storage warehouses in the Bouenza department, UNICEF has built 17 water points and distributed 703 hand-washing kits. Importantly, some information is contradictory between the SAPRs (figures provided in Annex 9) and the reports produced by the partners; figures must be taken with caution.

153. WFP has begun to draw up an exhaustive inventory of the infrastructure available in schools based on visits carried out by its staff or by MEPPSA services. This inventory includes 268 schools. Only 90 schools (34 percent) have a water point, 35 schools (13 percent) have a dining hall, while latrine and hand-washing station coverage is much higher, at 209 (78 percent) and 182 schools (68 percent) respectively. School survey figures show the same trends: 80 percent of schools have functional latrines, while 33 percent and 48 percent of official schools supported and not supported by the project respectively have a water point.

154. Qualitative school visits confirmed that the most critical problem is access to drinking water. A very small minority of the schools visited have a water point, and pupils and cooks must travel long distances to draw water from nearby village water points, springs or rivers.

155. Latrine coverage is high overall but gender-segregated latrine coverage is much lower, although it has improved over the course of the project and is higher in project-supported schools than in non-supported schools (Figure 17).⁶⁶ Coverage has fallen slightly in non-supported schools and in ORA schools since the mid-term survey. The evaluation team has not collected any information to explain this trend. In general, there is a need to further improve the situation of girls, especially after puberty, when menstruation becomes an important reason for not attending school. UNICEF's latrines for girls are a little larger and have space for sanitary towels. In addition, the theme of menstrual hygiene is part of their awareness campaigns.

Figure 17: Percentage of schools with functional gender-segregated latrines

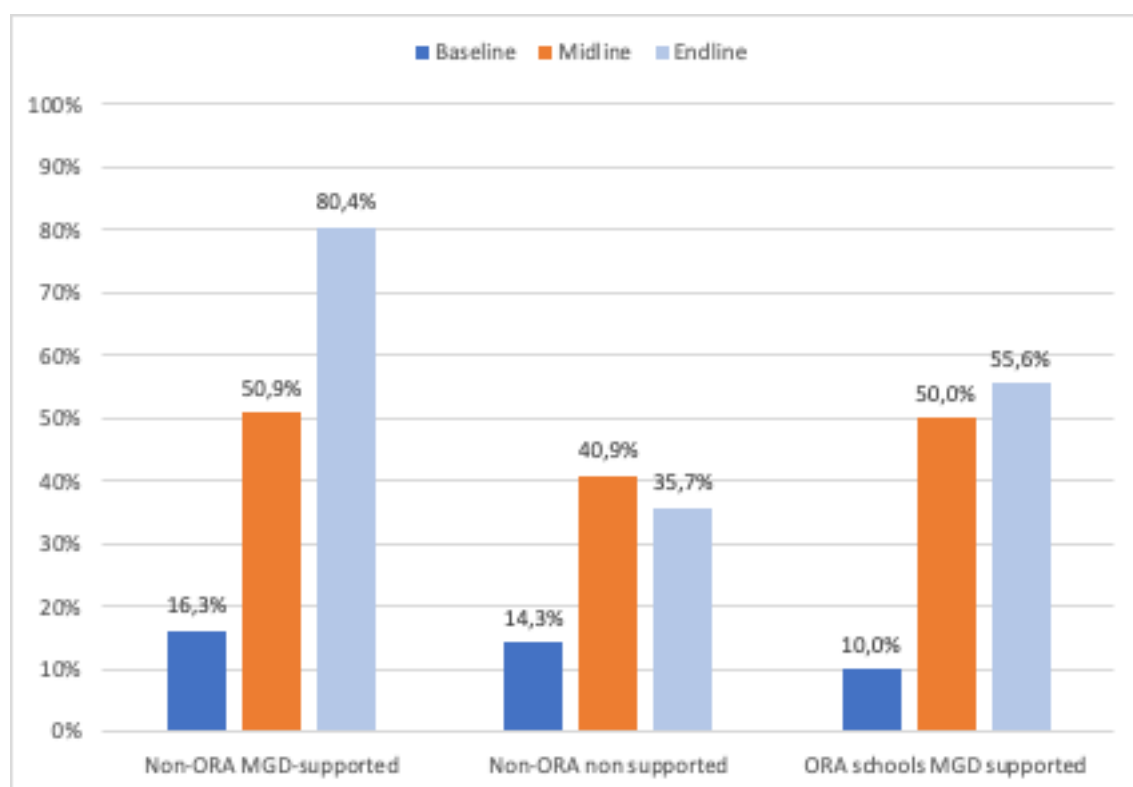


Source: Baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

⁶⁶ However, this difference is not significant in terms of confidence intervals.

156. Figure 18 shows that the proportion of schools with handwashing facilities rose sharply over the course of the project in all schools, but much more significantly in schools supported by the project, both official and ORA. School visits showed that these devices were not only distributed by the McGovern-Dole project. Many devices were distributed to combat the spread of COVID-19. According to interviews with school principals, these devices were distributed by the government. The evaluation team also noted the presence in some schools of locally manufactured devices, ordered and paid for by the school principals confirming messaging from hygiene training has been well received.

Figure 18: Percentage of schools with hand-washing facilities



Source: Baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

157. **Intermediate outcome 2.5: Increased access to preventive health interventions.** In line with the project agreement, WFP is collaborating with UNICEF and WHO to support the logistics and distribution costs of government-supplied deworming tablets. The deworming tablets are administered annually by WHO to all schools in the country, including ORA schools.

158. The number of children in schools assisted by the project was only given in the SAPRs for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, 60,000 and 65,838 respectively. It would appear that this activity has been carried out satisfactorily, since it is an ongoing activity in almost all schools in Congo.

159. **Intermediate result 2.6: Increased access to equipment and tools for food preparation and storage.** According to SAPRs, improved stoves have been distributed to all 60 schools in the Bouenza department. Each school received one large and two small fireplaces. These stoves enable cooks to avoid the health problems associated with smoke inhalation when cooking indoors and reduce firewood consumption. Interviews in schools and observations in the field indicate that the fireplaces supplied are not being used, as they significantly lengthen meal preparation times.

160. In terms of availability of cooking utensils, only 20 percent of management committees in official schools and 11 percent in non-official schools consider that they have enough utensils. In all the schools visited during the qualitative mission, the management committees had kitchen utensils, but these were often very worn or insufficient. In some schools, cooks provide their own utensils.

161. The availability of plates and cutlery for children is often insufficient. In most of the schools visited, the management committees have received an insufficient number of plates and cups which poses a

problem of distribution among the pupils. Children often eat with their hands. Where there are no easily accessible water points, children do not wash their hands before eating, which represents a risk of disease transmission.

2.2.1.3 Foundational results

162. The project includes four intermediate results that should contribute to the creation of a favorable environment for achieving the project's objectives.

163. **Intermediate outcome MGD1.4.1/2.7.1: Improved capacity of government institutions.** The McGovern-Dole project focused its actions on the development of government institutional capacity on the operation and management of the school feeding program. The PMP includes indicators that refer only to one of the four intermediate results ("Improved policy and regulatory framework"), therefore the project design did not include specific targets for most of the actions included in foundational results.

164. At national level, WFP has provided ongoing support to the School Feeding Department. According to the SAPR narrative, support to the DAS has included regular technical and financial support, the carrying out of joint monitoring missions, the provision of technical assistance for the development of the national school feeding policy action plan, training in the use of a digital monitoring system, and support for the DAS's participation in the World Forum on Child Nutrition to be held in Benin in 2022.

165. At decentralized levels, capacity-building activities focused on the school feeding monitoring system. Education inspectorates were provided with tablets and trained to use them to digitize the information compiled in schools in the monthly and quarterly school canteen reports. Inspectorates were also provided with fuel to facilitate their travel to schools. The project also provided motorcycles to the Departmental School Feeding Services (SAS in French). School directors, management committees and cooks take part in annual training courses run by WFP, which include modules on school canteen management in addition to the hygiene, sanitation and nutrition aspects described above.

166. In terms of results achieved, interviews with stakeholders at national, decentralized and school level showed that these actors have a good command of the school canteen operation and monitoring system. The various reports produced, which include information on beneficiaries, food management and educational results (enrolments, absences, dropouts, etc.), are well mastered by school principals, inspectors and the DAS. They are produced regularly, even if sometimes with delays.

167. WFP has transferred the management of school canteens in 20 schools in five departments to the DAS. This is a first step towards transferring the program. However, according to interviews with resource persons, WFP continues to play an important role in the management of these canteens.

168. To date, the role of national stakeholders has been limited to managing school canteens and operating the monitoring system. They are not involved in the management of upstream supplies to schools, nor in the analysis and use of information produced by the monitoring system. As far as the DAS is concerned, there are several constraints on it playing a more effective role in program management. First, both the DAS and the SAS lack resources. As mentioned above, the SAS have been provided with motorcycles but, as indicated by the SAS staff met during the evaluation, they do not have the means to operate these motorcycles (i.e. purchase fuel). Secondly, the DAS should play a key role in coordinating the program, but the inter-sectoral coordination structures provided for in the school feeding policy have not yet been set up.⁶⁷

169. WFP has set up a computerized dashboard that integrates a wide range of data collected in schools on school feeding, reporting, infrastructure, etc. This tool could potentially become key to steering the school feeding program in the future. Importantly, the evaluation team observed during the presentation of the tool that its current functionality is limited by the complexity of its management, and users are currently limited to the WFP country office.

⁶⁷ The school feeding policy provides for the creation of a multi-sectoral National Council for School Feeding (CNMAS) to give strategic direction to the program, and an Interministerial Technical Committee (CTI) whose role is to translate the decisions taken by the CNMAS into concrete action.

170. **Intermediate outcome 1.4.2/2.7.2: Improved policy and regulatory framework.** As indicated in chapter 1.3, the PMP includes two outcome indicators relating to the project's contribution to the implementation of national policies on school feeding and food security and nutrition. These policies were drawn up before the start of the project, which represented a significant step forward in defining the normative framework for these areas.

171. As mentioned for the previous intermediate result, under the McGovern-Dole project WFP provided technical assistance for the preparation of the national school feeding policy action plan.⁶⁸ According to the SAPRs, validation of this plan was underway by 2019. The evaluation team did not receive any information on its actual validation and implementation.

172. **Intermediate outcome MGD 1.4.3/2.7.3: Increased government support.** As mentioned in chapter 1.2, the government's involvement in school feeding materialized through the creation of the DAS in 2017 and the contribution to the program's funding since 2018.⁶⁹ The WFP country office also mentioned that, by 2023, the government had partially repaid to the WFP thanks to improved public finances loan contributions made in the years prior to the McGovern-Dole project.

173. This information shows that the government is becoming increasingly involved in the management and funding of the program. However, key stakeholders also point to a lack of interest and political will on the part of the government to take ownership of the school feeding program. WFP is seeking to increase government ownership. To this end, a high-level visit has been organized to the School Feeding Center of Excellence in Brazil, scheduled for April 2023.

174. Interviews conducted at national and departmental level showed that only the MEPSA is involved in the implementation of both the McGovern-Dole project specifically, and school feeding more generally. Other ministries supposed to be involved in the project, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs, are not involved, although they could play an important role in coordination, setting technical standards,⁷⁰ or caring for the most vulnerable populations.⁷¹ As recommended in the baseline study and mid-term evaluation, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women could also be involved in introducing a gender equality curriculum in schools. Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture should be called upon to play an important role in the FY2021 project, which calls for the introduction of 10 percent local purchasing. The National Multisectoral Council for School Feeding (CNMAS in French) and the Interministerial Technical Committee (CTI in French) are the instruments that can promote the participation of these ministries in the school feeding program, and their rapid implementation is essential.

175. **Intermediate outcome MGD 1.4.4/2.7.4: Increased involvement of local organizations and community groups.** Two local organizations were involved in implementing the project in ORA schools in the Sangha and Likouala departments, respectively the NGO PEDD and ASCP.

176. All ORA schools in Likouala were closed, apparently between 2021 and 2022, and ASCP has not been involved in the project since then. According to the resource persons interviewed at national level, the main reason for the schools' closure was the interruption of UNICEF funding to ASCP, which led to the cessation of teacher salaries and the closure of these schools. According to the WFP country office, the children who attended these ORA schools have been integrated into official schools. As indicated in chapter 1.5, the evaluation mission did not cover the Likouala department and was unable to make any observations on the conditions for integrating indigenous children into official schools. However, it can be assumed that this may have had a negative effect on the enrolment of indigenous children, as the ORA schools are an

⁶⁸ The evaluation team does not have detailed information on the technical assistance provided by WFP.

⁶⁹ For the 2018/2019 school year, the government of the Republic of Congo contributed 48 tons of salt and 5 million CFA francs (US\$ 8,600) in operating costs to WFP's school canteen support activities. In October 2020, the Government contributed 72 tons of salt and 11 million CFA francs (US\$ 20,000) in operating costs. In 2021, the contribution was 70 tons of salt.

⁷⁰ For example, to apply the Ministry of Health's guidelines on food groups.

⁷¹ As mentioned in chapter 2.2.2, the poorest households are not always able to pay school fees, which can lead to the temporary exclusion of their children. In the Pool department, the social affairs department is seeking to mediate with the education department to facilitate the reintegration of these particularly vulnerable children into schools.

appropriate response to the constraints these children face when attending official schools. It would be desirable to carry out a more precise assessment of the effects of the closure of the ORA schools on the schooling of indigenous children, and to define actions within the framework of the FY21 project in the event of a negative impact.

177. In the Sangha department, interviews with PEDD staff and visits to two ORA schools revealed a very strong investment by this organization for the benefit of indigenous children. This investment may have contributed to greater community mobilization around the school canteens. It seems, for example, that the contribution of parents to supplement and diversify the ration provided by the project is greater in schools supported by the PEDD. The involvement of local civil society organizations could therefore be a significant success factor for the project, particularly in areas with a large indigenous population.

178. At school level, school canteen management committees have been set up for all school canteens. Based on visits to 20 schools, these committees are performing their assigned tasks well, even though the actual management of the canteens relies on a limited number of committee members. WFP's annual awareness-raising and training activities, in which all committees participate, have therefore enabled them to acquire appropriate organizational and school canteen management skills.

2.2.1.4 Results in terms of gender

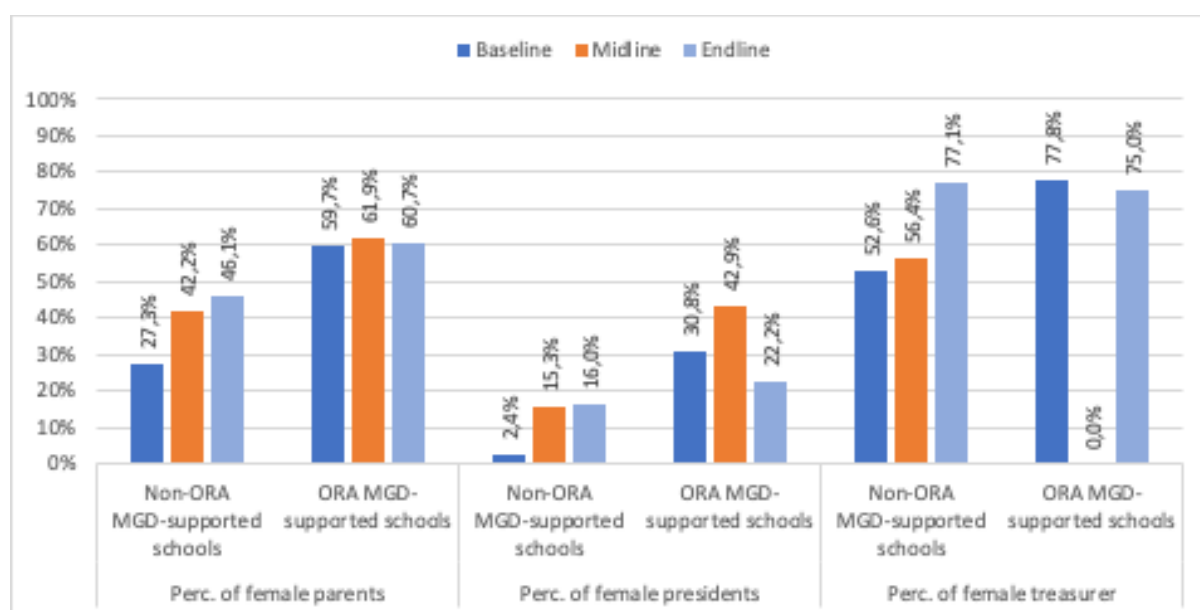
179. The project's approach to promoting equality between girls and boys and women's autonomy is based on equitable access to education on the one hand, and on women's participation in management committees on the other.

180. As indicated in chapter 1.3, some PMP data are only disaggregated by gender from the 2020-2021 school year onwards.

181. Table 3 shows the number of girls and boys enrolled in project-supported schools in 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The percentage of girls for these three school years is 47 percent, 49 percent and 47 percent respectively, showing a relatively stable situation close to parity. Data are not available by grade, and do not allow for more detailed analysis. PMP data on attendance are not disaggregated by gender. School survey data do not show significant differences between girls and boys in terms of classroom attention and dropouts (see Annex 23). Overall, these data show that girls and boys have equitable access to the schools supported by the project.

182. Regarding women's participation in school canteen management committees, the baseline study proposed incorporating a specific indicator into the PMP, but this was not followed up. The interviews conducted in the schools show that women are represented on all committees. However, they are mostly confined to the role of cooks' representatives and rarely reach leadership positions. Nevertheless, the school survey shows that there has been a progression over the course of the project in women's access to the positions of president and treasurer in official schools (Figure 19). However, as indicated in chapter 2.2.1.3, committees formally include at least six members, including a chairman, a treasurer and a secretary, each with their deputy, but in practice only two or three people are involved on a day-to-day basis (apart from the cooks). According to the school visits, they are most often men.

Figure 19: Women's participation in school canteen management committees



Source: Baseline, mid-term and endline surveys

183. Beyond access to formal leadership positions in the committees, women make a very important contribution to the operation of the canteens as cooks. The mid-term evaluation recommended that the remuneration of cooks be considered to fully value their role and contribution. This has not been achieved. According to the WFP country office, this issue was discussed and it was felt that providing compensation to cooks could have negative implications, which were not, however, clearly specified. Interviews with the cooks showed that their investment in the canteens varies according to the type of organization in place. Most often, a rotation system has been set up that limits each woman's involvement to half a day a week, or even less than that. But in some schools, particularly in urban areas where social ties are weaker than in rural areas, many women are unwilling to take part in this activity if they are not paid. As a result, the task falls fully on a limited number of women who can be mobilized in the canteens for up to two or four half-days a week. For these women, the impact of their participation as cooks on their activities is considerable.

184. In all cases, interviews with the cooks showed that this contribution is most often not experienced as a benefit for the women who have a real expectation of compensation. Cooks in the former IPHD school canteens received compensation in foodstuffs which may contribute to influencing the cooks' expectations.

185. There are many other dimensions to promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in schools. One of these is taking into account the specific needs of menstruating girls. UNICEF has begun to include this issue in its own training and has built latrines with separate disposal facilities for sanitary towels. However, consideration of these needs remained limited in the McGovern-Dole project.

186. Interviews with pupils in schools have also revealed that schoolchildren report gender-based violence that they observe and experience in their environment. It is therefore of the utmost importance to start integrating prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and "gender transformation" messages as early as possible in their lives to have a lasting impact on the country as a whole. In addition, girls at one school reported that they had to wash the dishes after the school meal, while boys were allowed to play soccer.

187. In general, the evaluation found that the availability of sex-disaggregated data in the SAPRs and ITT is still insufficient, and that there is a need to improve the monitoring and evaluation system in terms of gender sensitivity. The SAPRs only include disaggregated data from 2021 onwards and for a limited number of indicators.

2.2.2 What internal and external factors affect the achievement of the project's expected results?

Most internal and external factors contributed positively to the achievement of expected results.

188. **Availability of resources.** The USDA is providing all the resources budgeted for the implementation of the McGovern-Dole project. According to the WFP country office, these resources, including food supplies, were made available to the WFP in good time. The availability of resources was therefore a key factor in achieving the project's results.

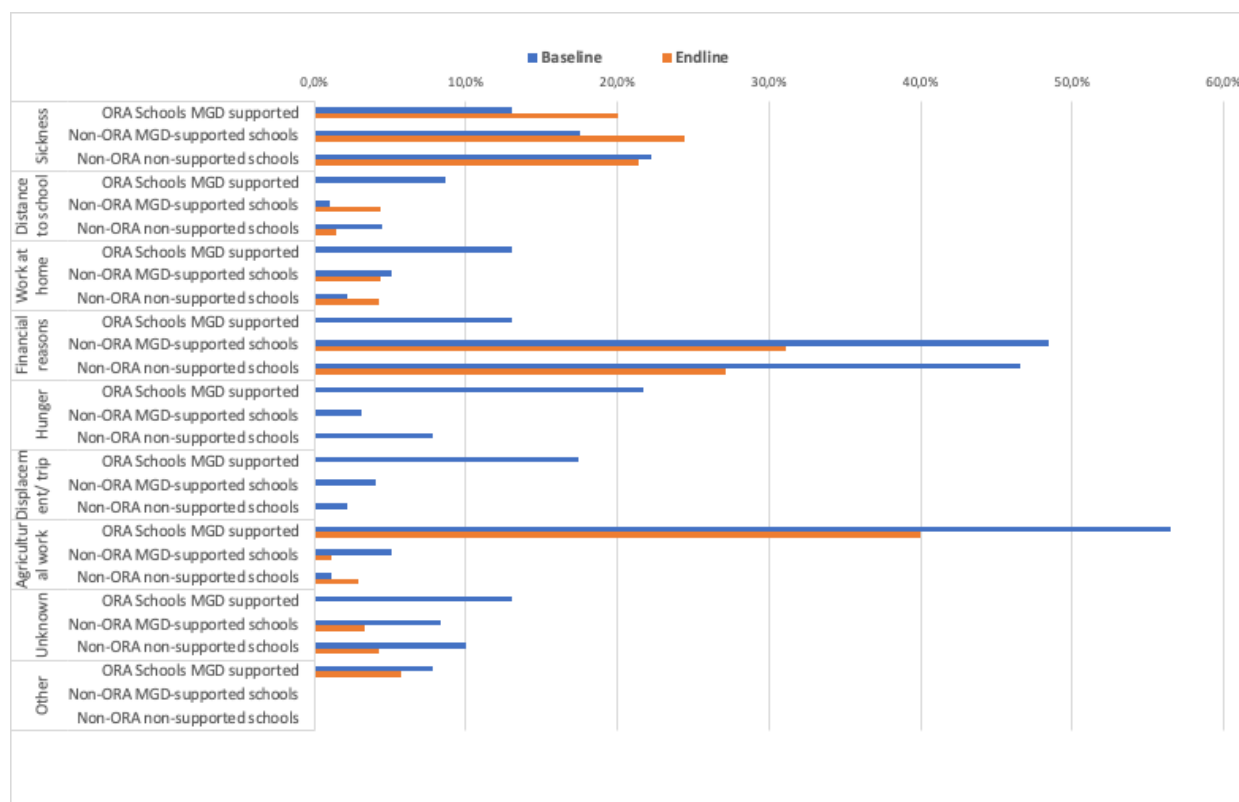
189. **Logistics.** The operation of school canteens is largely dependent on food supplies. According to the WFP country office, some areas, particularly in Likouala but also in other departments, are very difficult to access during the rainy season at the start of the school year.⁷² WFP does not pre-position food supplies during school vacations, as school staff are not on site and the risk of mismanagement is much higher. This may have led to supply delays in some schools but, generally speaking, up to 2021 supply difficulties have not caused very long delays. In 2021, the country office adopted a new approach to contracting private carriers. Based on a system of tariffs,⁷³ the country office switched to contracting a single carrier per route on the basis of the lowest bid. This change has resulted in a loss of transport capacity on certain routes, where the contracted carriers are unable to cope with the volume of work. Visits to schools have shown that this has led to substantial delays in food deliveries to some schools, especially during the 2022-2023 school year. 65 percent of the schools interviewed during the field mission in six departments (Bouenza, Cuvette, Lekoumou, Plateaux, Pool, Sangha) experienced up to two months of supply delays in the first and/or second quarters, resulting in stock shortages and the closure of school canteens. According to interviews with principals and teachers, the closure of school canteens led to a rapid decrease in student attendance. WFP is well aware of these issues and has decided to switch back to the system fare in the near future.

190. **Poverty.** The McGovern-Dole project targets areas particularly affected by poverty and food insecurity (see chapter 2.3.1). As a result, many households in assisted schools have reduced financial capacity and have difficulty meeting school fees. The school survey shows that financial reasons are the main reason for pupils' absence (Figure 20). On the other hand, the survey shows that absences for financial reasons do not affect children in ORA schools, which is logical since school is free for them. However, the main reason for their absence is work in the fields. This is in line with information collected in the schools, which indicates that indigenous children are absent during periods when families go into the forest to collect forest products.

⁷² The main rainy season is from October to December.

⁷³ Single tariff set for each destination, with the possibility of contractualization for all carriers

Figure 20 : Main reasons for student absences according to teachers



Source: Baseline and endline surveys

191. According to interviews conducted at schools, when parents are unable to pay school fees, principals push pupils not to attend school until the situation is regularized. Ultimately, children from poor households are likely to be absent from school periodically, which affects their performance. According to the principals and teachers interviewed, the children concerned clearly achieve lower results than those whose families can afford the school fees and who are more present at school. As mentioned above, the social affairs departments in some departments sometimes intervene with the primary education departments to obtain free schooling for these poor families. However, the social affairs departments do not have the means to operate and cannot intervene in all areas and free schooling for poor families is not an official provision; decisions are taken at the discretion of the basic education departments. In addition, non-payment of school fees frequently leads to non-payment of community teachers' allowances. By way of example, some principals have indicated that community teachers receive their allowances for an average of seven months out of a nine-month school year. According to interviews with principals and teachers, this does not affect their attendance at work.

192. **Training community teachers.** As mentioned in chapter 2.2, most elementary school teachers are community teachers, and many of them have not been trained as teachers. This justifies the project's relevance, but also represents a major constraint to achieving the objective of improving the quality of teaching.

193. **Limited government resources.** As mentioned in chapter 1.2, Congo went through a severe financial crisis from the mid-2010s onwards, which worsened in 2020 under the effects of COVID-19 and falling oil prices, affecting the state budget. According to interviews with government institutions at national and departmental level, appropriations have been greatly reduced since 2016. The resources of the ministries are very limited, and at departmental level they only enable salaries to be paid and offices to be run. This represents a significant limiting factor for the involvement and ownership of project actions by government institutions. It also affects the resources available to education services and schools. According to interviews with school staff in all visited schools as well as with education inspectors, the schools receive

no funding from MEPPSA, and finance their operations entirely from parent contributions. Only the salaries of principals and permanent teachers are paid by the state.

194. **Community mobilization.** The community's contribution to running of the school canteens is noteworthy. In addition to paying contributions for the remuneration of community teachers and financing school operations, parents provide water, firewood and women cook. These essential elements for preparing meals are always present. If food is available, the canteens operate every day. On the other hand, parents rarely bring supplementary food, which contributes to the lack of diversification in school rations.

195. **Program review by PRAASED.** As described in chapter 2.2.1.1, PRAASED reviewed the French and mathematics curricula, produced new textbooks and trained teachers throughout the country on the new programs. The data presented in chapter 2.4.1 show that literacy results measured during this final evaluation have improved significantly. Although the new curricula only came into effect at the start of the 2022-2023 school year, it is likely that it has contributed to the improvement in educational results observed.

196. **Planning the construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure.** Over its entire implementation period, the project planned 92 projects to build or rehabilitate infrastructure in the 410 schools covered. As shown by the percentages of schools with different types of infrastructure calculated on the basis of the inventory carried out by the WFP in 268 schools (paragraph 151), the needs, particularly for water points, far exceed these 92 planned infrastructure projects. A large proportion of schools still do not have a water point, latrines or storage facilities, which affects the results of Strategic Objective 2. Access to water is a particularly limiting factor.

197. **Integrating awareness-raising messages into school curricula.** School curricula were already incorporating hygiene, sanitation and nutrition education sessions prior to the project (see chapter 2.2.1.2). Teachers were already well versed in addressing these issues in the classroom. This undoubtedly contributed to their mastery of certain hygiene and sanitation messages. However, messages on good nutrition were not well understood and need to be reinforced.

198. **Role of the NGO PEDD in the Sangha.** The evaluation team was particularly impressed by PEDD's commitment to indigenous children (see chapter 2.2.1.3). Particularly in the ORA schools visited, the team noted greater community mobilization, with contributions of food to diversify the ration distributed by the project.

2.3 EFFICIENCY

2.3.1 How effective is the targeting? To what extent does it take into account the specific needs of girls, boys, women, men and indigenous populations?

Has the aid reached the right beneficiaries (girls, boys, men and women) in the right quantity, quality and at the right time?

Targeting was inefficient and only reached a small proportion of the vulnerable people identified.

199. According to the WFP country office, the departments and schools covered by the McGovern-Dole project were selected on the basis of the prevalence of food insecurity measured during the "Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis" (CFSVA) survey carried out by the WFP in 2014. This survey had concluded that 14.2 percent of households, or 121,326 people were food insecure throughout the country and were distributed as presented in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Prevalence of food insecurity in 2014

Departments	Moderate food insecurity	Severe food insecurity	Total
Lékoumou	31.6	5.3	36.9
Cuvette Ouest	24.9	5.3	30.2
Kouilou	27.8	1.7	29.5
Niari	28.6	1.8	30.4
Bouenza	17.2	1.1	18.3
Pool	19.3	3.0	22.3
Plateaux	15.5	2.2	17.7
Cuvette	13.2	2.2	15.4
Sangha	15.4	1.0	16.4
Likouala	18.3	1.2	19.5
Brazzaville	7.6	2.1	9.7
Pointe Noire	3.8	0.0	3.8

Source: CFSVA survey report, 2014.

200. The departments of Sangha and Likouala were logically included in the project due to their high proportion of indigenous population, even though they do not have among the highest prevalence of food insecurity. The Lékoumou department is the most affected by food insecurity, and its inclusion in the project is relevant. If we refer only to severe food insecurity, the inclusion of the departments of Pool, Plateaux and Cuvette is also justified, but Cuvette Ouest should have been covered by the project. If we refer to moderate and severe food insecurity, the departments of Cuvette Ouest, Kouilou and Niari should have been covered by the project. These data do not fully confirm the appropriateness of the selection of departments covered by the McGovern-Dole project in considering the criterion of food insecurity. It seems that the application of this criterion should have led to the coverage of Cuvette Ouest, or even Kouilou and Niari.

201. At the level of school districts and schools, according to the WFP country office the selection was based on the continuity of WFP school feeding activities. IPHD was present in the country and supported school canteens until 2017. WFP and IPHD shared constituencies in the departments covered. When IPHD discontinued its activities, WFP preferred to continue intervening in the districts and schools where it was already working to further strengthen the results achieved. This approach is considered relevant and reinforces the results of the McGovern-Dole project. However, resource persons interviewed at departmental level indicated that some areas that were covered by IPHD in the past, and therefore not covered by the McGovern-Dole project, are very isolated and vulnerable, sometimes more so than the areas covered by the project.

202. The closure of ORA schools in the Likouala department, and a fortiori the end of the project's intervention in these schools, is potentially detrimental to the schooling of the indigenous children who attended them.

203. In the selected schools, the project assists all children, girls and boys, indigenous and Bantu, in all the schools covered, in an equitable manner, as there is no selection applied between categories of children at school level and all the children benefits from the same activities.

2.3.2 Is the project cost/beneficiary efficient?

204. At the request of the evaluation team, the WFP country office provided the financial reports produced and submitted to the USDA. However, these reports do not make it possible to identify the expenditure incurred for each budget category, and consequently to carry out a cost analysis of each activity.

205. The evaluation team did not gather any information indicating that the budget structure or available resources represented a limiting factor for the implementation of activities and the achievement of set objectives, with the exception of the project's infrastructure component (see chapter 2.2.2). The planned

infrastructures (92 for the entire project) were insufficient to cover needs, especially regarding water points. It should also be noted that the budget provided for 30 percent administrative costs, which seems excessive (see Figure 1).

206. The project suffered from staff turnover at both WFP and UNICEF. This mainly concerns nutritionists from the two agencies, which has led to a lack of technical leadership on nutrition activities. Technical content is not always aligned with Ministry of Health provisions (number of food groups), and documentation of project actions in this area is particularly lacking.

207. In general, communication and coordination with all project stakeholders was lacking. The key ministries of health, social affairs and women's promotion were not involved in the project at all (see chapter 2.2.1.3). The people from these ministries interviewed at national and departmental level were unaware of the McGovern-Dole project and its actions in their respective sectors. The creation of the CNMAS and the CTI should help to improve communication between government institutions, but an effort must also be made in this direction by the WFP, which centralizes the management of the project.

208. The adoption of a system of contracting a single carrier per axis based on the lowest bids has led to significant delays in food deliveries in some areas, and the interruption of school canteens in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (see chapter 2.2.2). This will be rectified in the near future by WFP.

2.4 IMPACT

2.4.1 What are the long-term effects of interventions on the lives of targeted beneficiaries, including women, girls, men, boys and indigenous populations, households, communities and institutions?

What internal and external factors have prevented the project's results from having the desired impact on the target beneficiaries?

The project has partially contributed to the desired long-term positive effects on the lives of the targeted beneficiaries, households, communities and institutions.

Internal and external factors tended to affect the contribution to generating the expected impact on the targeted beneficiaries

2.4.1.1 Literacy among school-age children

209. Improving students' reading skills depends on the success of many interdependent factors. The logic model developed by the USDA highlights: improving the quality of reading instruction (MGD 1.1), student attention (MGD 1.2) and student attendance (MGD 1.3) as key pathways to improving school-age literacy (SO1).

210. The indicator to assess student performance in reading is defined as "Percentage of students who, at the end of two years of primary education, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade-level text."⁷⁴ This indicator was introduced in 2018 in the WFP Institutional Results Framework (2017-2021) as one of the recommended indicators for school feeding.⁷⁵ This indicator was measured by PASEC during the baseline study (see PASEC report in Annex 18).

211. The PASEC 2019 reference framework includes a competency scale and a "sufficient" competency threshold. The assessment identifies the proportion of students who have a greater likelihood of mastering

⁷⁴ https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2015-05/food_for_progress_and_mcgoverndole_indicators_and_definitions.pdf

⁷⁵ WFP/EB.2/2018/5-B/Rev.1

(above the threshold) or not mastering (below the threshold) the knowledge and skills deemed essential for normal academic pursuit without difficulty.⁷⁶ This approach is in line with USDA indicator measurement requirements.⁷⁷

212. Table 16 shows the results of the reading tests at the baseline, midline and endline of the project. Overall, the table shows that at the end of the study, almost a third (32.98 percent) of students were above the "threshold" level of reading comprehension skills, compared with 11.7 percent at the mid-term assessment and 9.9 percent at the baseline study. This represents a significant improvement. However, 67.02 percent of students (versus 88.3 percent at the mid-term assessment) have still not reached this threshold, of whom 22.93 percent (versus 39.4 percent at the mid-term assessment) are in a critical situation with difficulties in the knowledge and skills required at Level 1. These students are unable to identify the meaning of written words. They have difficulty reading and understanding sentences and texts.

Table 16: Proportion of students in the sample at each reading proficiency level

Total points	Competence levels	Percentage of students			Skills description
		Start	Mid-term	End	
15 to 20	Level 4	3%	5%	16%	Pupils have reached a level of reading comprehension that enables them to independently read words, sentences and texts, in which they have to locate, combine and interpret information. In this way, they are able to develop their knowledge and participate in society.
10 to 14	Level 3	7%	6%	17%	Students are able to identify the meaning of isolated words and understand short sentences, but have difficulty understanding texts of around twenty words.
"Sufficient" skills threshold					
5 to 9	Level 2	17%	15%	16%	Students are able to identify the meaning of isolated words, understand short sentences and have difficulty understanding texts.
2 to 4	Level 1	27%	33%	28%	Students are barely able to identify the meaning of written words. They have great difficulty deciphering and identifying letters and syllables.
0 to 1	Level 0	46%	39%	23%	Students experience significant difficulties in decoding the meaning of words, reading and understanding sentences, and comprehending text in their first contacts with written language.

Source: PASEC reading tests 2018, 2021, 2023

⁷⁶ PASEC2019 Qualité des systèmes éducatifs en Afrique subsaharienne francophone, Performances et Environnement de l'enseignement-apprentissage au primaire, CONFEMEN, 2020.

⁷⁷ Proportion of pupils who reach the threshold at the end of two years of primary school, at the start of the third year of primary school, or at equivalent levels in accelerated training programs.

213. Table 17 compares results between official schools supported by the project, ORA schools supported by the project,⁷⁸ and unsupported schools. The proportion of pupils in very difficult situations at level 0 is twice as high in unsupported schools compared to supported schools, whether official or ORA. Over 38 percent of pupils in official schools supported by the project reach levels 3 and 4, while 31.61 percent of pupils in non-supported schools reach these levels. In contrast, only 7.5 percent of children in ORA schools reached these levels. These results suggest that the project has had a positive effect on the academic performance of beneficiary pupils. According to the regression analysis presented in Annex 24, this effect is significant. However, children in ORA schools perform well below children in official schools supported by the project.

Table 17: Percentage of students by skill level and type of school

Type of school	Percentage of students by skill level				
	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Unsupported official schools	31.35%	21.67%	15.58%	16.03%	15.58%
Official schools supported	16.73%	28.88%	16.14%	18.92%	19.32%
ORA schools MGD supported	16.25%	62.50%	13.75%	7.50%	0.00%
Average percentage per level	22.93%	28.39%	15.71%	16.78%	16.20%

Source: PASEC 2023 reading test

214. A comparison between girls and boys (Table 18) shows a significantly higher percentage of girls with major difficulties for "level 0". On the other hand, a slightly higher percentage of girls reach levels 3 and 4 (34.87 percent) compared to boys (31.37 percent).

Table 18: Percentage of students by skill level and gender

Student gender		Percentage of skills by gender				
		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
	Boys	21.86%	30.42%	16.35%	16.54%	14.83%
	Girls	24.05%	26.25%	15.03%	17.03%	17.64%
Average percentage per level		22.93%	28.39%	15.71%	16.78%	16.20%

Source: PASEC 2023 reading test

215. The project's initial objective was to reach 80 percent of pupils above the "sufficient" competency threshold by the end of the project. This target had been determined based on the results of a test carried out by PASEC in 2014, which showed that 38 percent of pupils were above the "sufficient" threshold in the French language at the start of primary school. This target was revised to 14 percent following the test carried out during the baseline study in 2018, which had shown that only 9.9 percent of pupils were above the threshold. The target has been met and far exceeded in official schools supported by the project, with 38.24 percent of pupils at this level, but it has not been achieved in ORA schools, where only 7.5 percent of pupils show the required skills. The proportion of pupils in official schools not benefiting from the project who reached the "sufficient" threshold is also well above the target of 14 percent, suggesting that external factors likely influenced the results favorably. The curriculum revision work carried out by PRAASED, which affected all elementary schools in the country, may have contributed substantially to the results. The

⁷⁸ The data presented here for ORA schools is only representative of ORA schools supported throughout the project, and therefore only in the Sangha, as ORA schools in the Likouala were closed and not included in the final evaluation's literacy skills test.

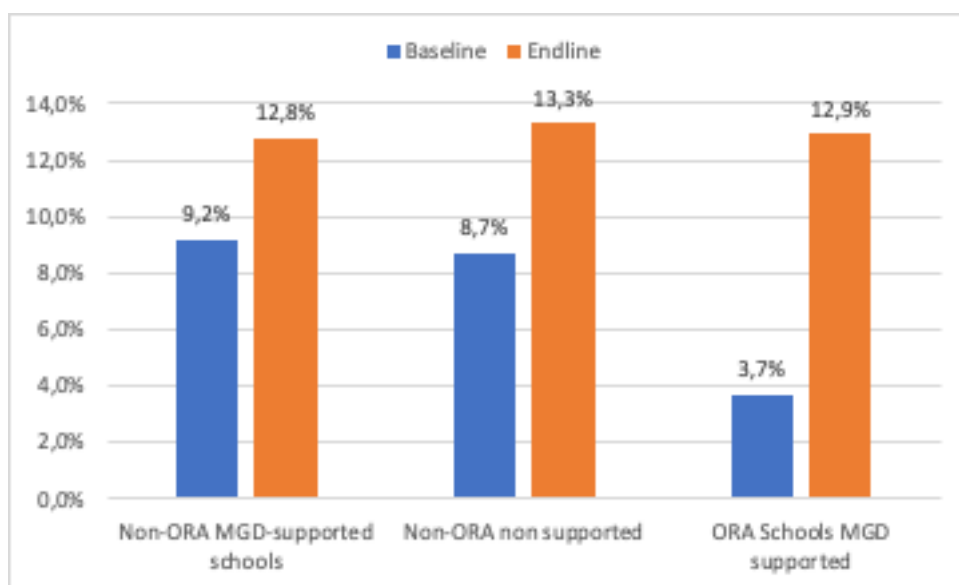
project's contribution was mainly in improving some learning conditions through the distribution of school materials and training of school administrators, and in the benefits of school feeding on student attendance and attention presented in chapter 2.2.1.1.

2.4.1.2 Absenteeism due to illness

216. Strategic Objective 2 of the project aims to reduce absenteeism due to illness, thus contributing to improved school results for beneficiary children. Figure 20 above shows that the project has not contributed to reducing the proportion of pupils absent from school due to illness. On the contrary, the percentage of absences due to illness reported by teachers increased in the endline survey compared to the baseline study, both in official supported schools and in ORA schools, while it remained stable in non-supported schools.⁷⁹ This evolution is not likely due to seasonality as the two surveys have been conducted in the same rainy season. The evaluation team has not collected information that allows explaining this finding.

217. These results are consistent with the evolution of the prevalence of stomachache, vomiting or diarrheal reactions reported as a cause of absence by the pupils surveyed during the four weeks preceding the survey (Figure 21). This prevalence increased across all school types. Furthermore, according to the teacher survey, the main illnesses affecting children's attendance were malaria and respiratory diseases (see chapter 1). The fact that the project did not address these illnesses may have contributed to the project's lack of impact on reducing health-related absences. Similarly, the project's action to improve access to drinking water infrastructure has been insufficient in relation to needs. Access is limited in most schools, and this limits the application of hygiene messages.

Figure 21: Prevalence of stomachache, vomiting or diarrheal reactions reported as a reason for absence in the last four weeks



Source: Baseline and endline survey

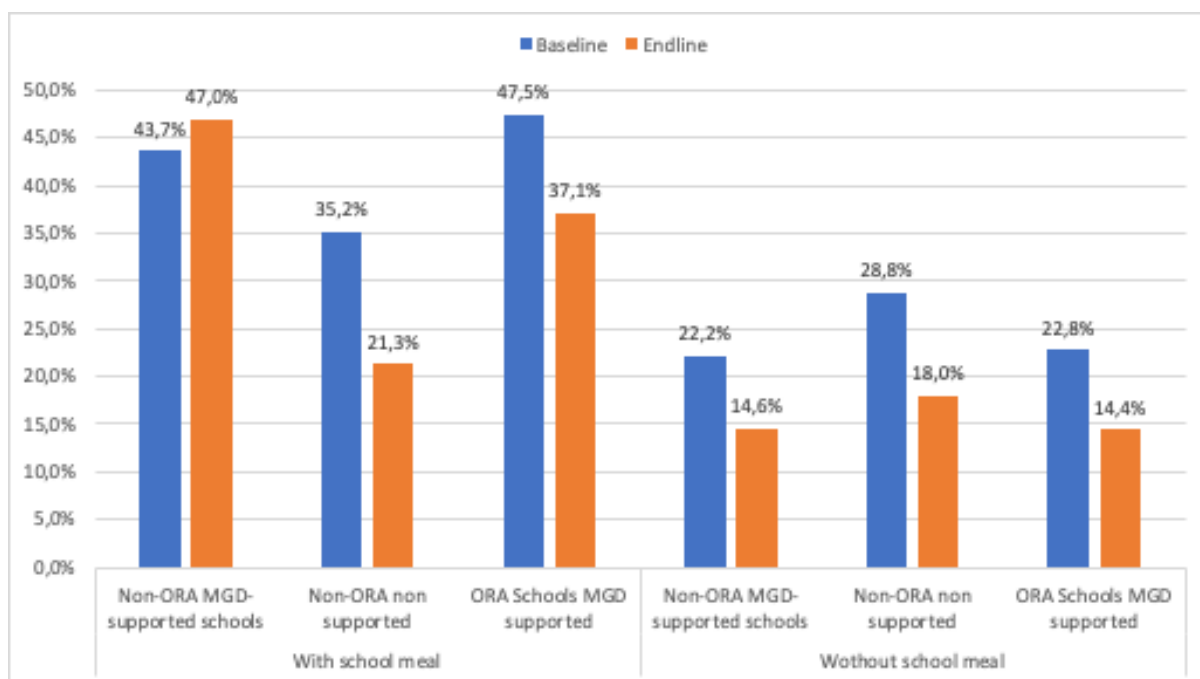
2.4.1.3 Food diversity

218. Figure 22 below shows the change in the percentage of children who consumed at least four out of seven food groups in the 24 hours prior to the survey. Excluding the school meal, the proportion of children consuming at least four food groups has fallen for all school categories and is lower in project-supported schools than in non-supported schools. On the other hand, it is significantly higher in supported schools if

⁷⁹ The proportion of illnesses in the causes of absence in official schools supported by the project rose from 17.5 percent in the baseline study to 24.4 percent in the endline survey. It rose from 13 percent to 20 percent in ORA schools, and from 22.2 percent to 21.4 percent in non-supported schools.

the school meal is considered. These results suggest that school feeding supports dietary diversity in the short term through the school meal, but the project has not produced any long-term effects through changes in eating behaviour in families. However, the fact that even with the school meal less than half the children have sufficient dietary diversity shows the importance of fortified food served in schools. In addition, awareness-raising and the contribution of communities are essential to improving the dietary adequacy of school-age children and, most probably, of society as a whole especially as the contribution made by parents and communities in terms of vegetables and fruit is currently negligible. The scope of the nutritional education and awareness-raising actions described in chapter 2.2.1.2 has likely been insufficient to produce an impact.

Figure 22: Percentage of children with sufficient dietary diversity



Source: Baseline and endline surveys

2.4.2 Were there any unexpected results (positive, negative)?

The project did not produce any significant positive or negative unintended effects

219. Interviews with parents showed that the project did not always succeed in generating a strong interest in their children's education. The evaluation team does not have representative data on this point, but a large proportion of the parents consulted did not mention the importance of education among the main benefits of school feeding. This is a key issue for generating profound long-term change.

220. School visits have shown that the project has fostered integration between Bantu and indigenous children through the meals they eat together at school. This is particularly the case in ORA schools, where a minority of children are Bantu. However, in other schools, the evaluation team noted the reproduction of prejudices against indigenous people in the operation of the school canteens. Bantu adults, including school staff, admit that they do not want to eat meals prepared by indigenous women. As a result, indigenous women are excluded from canteen operations, and indirectly from hygiene training and awareness-raising, even though the Bantu adults consulted criticize them for their lack of hygiene.

221. As already mentioned, cooks are sometimes adversely affected by the project when they must dedicate several half-days to the canteens without compensation. Interviewed cooks mentioned that this compromised their economic opportunities. This effect is multiplied dramatically for women raising children alone.

2.5 SUSTAINABILITY

2.5.1 How likely is it that the benefits of the project will be maintained after the end of the project for each category of beneficiary?

What are the key factors influencing the likelihood of sustainability of project results?

The benefits of the project are unlikely to continue after the end of the project

Key factors are partially conducive to the sustainability of project results.

222. Table 19 shows the evolution of SABER's strategic objectives in Congo, based on the findings of the evaluation carried out in 2015. Since 2015, notable developments have been observed in all pillars, but much remains to be done, particularly in pillars 2. "Financial capacities", 3. "Institutional capacities and coordination" and 4. "Design and implementation".

Table 19: Evolution of SABER strategic objectives

Strategic objectives 2015	Status 2015	Main developments
<p>1. Policy frameworks School food and canteens are part of the strategy to combat poverty, horizon 2025 and the national education development program 2012 -2016. No national policy has been published on school feeding.</p>	Emerging	<p>The SABER 2015 fixed the objective to elaborate a national school food policy. This was achieved and the policy was published in 2016 and validated by the government.</p>
<p>2. Financial capacity School meals are financed by the national budget.</p>	Emerging	<p>The SABER 2015 fixed three objectives: 1) Mobilize additional resources, 2) Carry out a cost benefit analysis of school canteens. 3) Finance a national school feeding programme.</p> <p>Since 2018, the government has provided in-kind contribution (salt) to the programme, but it remains very limited in relation to the overall cost of the programme. If there is a national school feeding policy, the national school feeding programme is yet to be created. The cost-benefit analysis has not been carried out yet.</p>
<p>3. Institutional capacity and coordination There is no multi-sectoral steering committee. There is no unit in charge of school feeding at national level with adequate resources, knowledge and personnel. There are two units in charge of monitoring school feeding at national level, with resources, knowledge and personnel that could be increased.</p>	Latent	<p>The SABER 2015 fixed three objectives: 1) Create a National School Feeding Agency. 2) Create a multisectoral school feeding steering committee. 3) Strengthen the capacity of school canteen committees.</p> <p>There is not a national school feeding agency as such, but the DAS was created in 2018. Its actual role in managing the program remains limited, and the resources made available to it are restricted.</p> <p>The inter-sectoral coordination structures at strategic and technical levels provided for in</p>

Strategic objectives 2015	Status 2015	Main developments
		<p>the school food policy have not yet been set up.</p> <p>As described in chapter 2.2.1.1, school canteen committees have been trained repeatedly and school canteens are well managed at school level.</p>
<p>4. Design and implementation</p> <p>There is no M&E plan in place. The Republic of Congo has not yet established national standards for food management, purchasing and logistics. There are no national standards for the food basket and food modalities.</p>	Latent	<p>The SABER 2015 fixed three objectives: 1) Define school targeting criteria and food basket modalities. 2) Define and create a national monitoring and evaluation system. 3) Create a mechanism for local purchase to small-scale farmers.</p> <p>Objectives 1 and 3 have not registered progress. For objective 2, a monitoring system is in place and functioning. Schools and inspectorates participate, but the system is managed by WFP. WFP has created a dashboard that could become a key steering tool in the future.</p>
<p>5. Community Roles - Supporting Beyond the School</p> <p>There is a committee that involves parents, teachers and the local community in the management and implementation of the school feeding program.</p>	Emerging	<p>The SABER 2015 fixed two objectives: 1) Improve community participation. 2) Make school canteen committees functional and efficient.</p> <p>Committees exist in all school canteens and play an active role in canteen management. The communities contribute water, firewood and stoves but do not provide additional foodstuffs to diversify the ration.</p>

Source: SABER Country Report 2015 and prepared by the evaluation team

223. The project has created a solid basis for the sustainable management of school canteens at local and departmental level. Local actors-- school staff and canteen management committees-- have a good grasp of the tasks involved in managing and monitoring canteens. When food is available, the canteens always function. At the departmental level, the inspectorates have been trained in monitoring tasks and are performing their duties satisfactorily.

224. Several key functions in the operation of the school feeding program are still managed directly by WFP without the involvement of national actors. These include the entire canteen supply chain and the use of the monitoring system that has been put in place. The sustainability of the program can only be envisaged when national actors acquire the necessary capacity to manage all functions.

225. In terms of literacy results, school feeding plays an important role in getting children into school and keeping them there. Consequently, the continuity of these results is closely linked to the sustainability of the school feeding program. It also depends on continued efforts to improve the quality of education. The project's contribution to this result is modest, with the distribution of school supplies and the training of school administrators, but the program review initiated by PRAASED represents an important element on which the FY21 project can build to reinforce these initial results.

226. In terms of Strategic Objective 2, some of the practices promoted by the project seem to have been well assimilated by the population, particularly those relating to hygiene and sanitation and food

preparation and storage. Their sustainable implementation, however, depends on access to services, particularly water, which remains very limited. UNICEF is integrating the management and maintenance of hygiene and sanitation infrastructure into its approach to infrastructure construction and rehabilitation.

227. The assimilation of nutrition messages is more limited and has not led to a lasting increase in the dietary diversity of children beyond the short-term effect of the distribution of school meals. The latter is also hampered by the availability of and access to more diversified foodstuffs at the local level. Vegetable gardening seems to be little practiced in most of the areas visited. Fruit, on the other hand, is available on a seasonal basis. Similarly, the promotion of food diversification could represent an opportunity to capitalize on the traditional knowledge and gathering activities of indigenous peoples.

228. More generally, the sustainability of the benefits generated by the project should be based on greater participation and ownership of the actions by the sectoral institutions concerned. As discussed, with the exception of MEPPSA, the participation of other ministries has been very low or non-existent.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

229. **Relevance and coherence.** The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the McGovern-Dole project to the needs identified. The objective of improving literacy is fully justified by the poor performance of the education system at primary level, reflected in a very low proportion of children completing primary school with the required skills, particularly girls. The project's strategy of aiming to improve the quality of teaching, encouraging children to come to school and stay there, and improving the school environment and knowledge in terms of health and nutrition is adapted to the needs identified and to the project's objective, and remains relevant to the FY21 project. The project has also sought to include indigenous children, who face particular difficulties in accessing schooling.

230. The project relies solely on imported foodstuffs, whereas the national school feeding strategy emphasizes local supplies. This aspect is also not aligned with WFP's nutrition policy, which seeks to support the development of nutrition-sensitive sustainable food systems. Finally, this approach is being implemented in parallel with other WFP school feeding activities based on local production, whereas the two approaches are complementary and could mutually reinforce their relevance. The FY21 project calls for local purchases to account for 10 percent of planned food purchases. This is a modest but prudent target, given that the country imports 70 percent of its food consumption. However, the FY21 project will have to pay much greater attention to developing the potential of local purchases and the complementarity between local and imported purchases.

231. As foreseen in the project's design, its objectives for promoting gender equality are limited to equity in terms of access to school and to women's participation in school canteen management committees. The evaluation notes that other inequalities arise and/or should be addressed from elementary school onwards, notably menstrual hygiene and gender-based violence. The McGovern-Dole project could promote consideration of these inequalities in the future.

232. **Effectiveness.** The evaluation's conclusions regarding the project's effectiveness are mixed. Regarding the objective of improving the quality of teaching, the key activity of revising school curricula was not carried out by the project, though schools did benefit from the work carried out by PRAASED, even if the opportunity for collaboration with this project recommended by the baseline study was not seized. The FY21 project will need to strengthen its collaboration with PRAASED and other institutions involved in the education sector to continue the curriculum review initiated by PRAASED.

233. The school feeding component of the project has worked well, increasing school enrolment, reducing absenteeism, and improving pupil attention, although it has not solved the short-term hunger problem of children coming to school hungry. The project did not, however, have a lasting effect on dietary diversification, which is key given the levels of stunting affecting children. School canteens could potentially represent a very useful platform for conveying messages on dietary diversification and other topics. For this, the FY21 project will need to increase the scope of awareness-raising activities. In addition, the strengthening of technical leadership in nutrition, which has been insufficient, is necessary.

234. Strategic Objective 2 sought to reduce absenteeism due to children's illnesses. The evaluation found that community knowledge of hygiene, sanitation, meal preparation and food storage is good. The ability of beneficiaries to put this knowledge into practice in schools depends on access to water and sanitation infrastructures. In this respect, the project has achieved its objectives, though these were underestimated in relation to needs, particularly regarding access to drinking water. This aspect will require particular attention in the FY21 project,

235. The project has contributed to equitable access for girls and boys in the schools covered. Women have access to formal positions on management committees, but this does not always mean that they reach real leadership positions. Furthermore, women's participation as cooks is not seen as a positive thing,

and sometimes has a negative impact on some women. The FY21 project's approach to promoting women's equality and empowerment should go beyond the numerical participation of women on management committees.

236. **Efficiency.** Targeting based on the prevalence of food insecurity is relevant, but some particularly food insecure departments were not included in the project. Apart from the infrastructure component, which was insufficient, the resources available were adequate to achieve the desired results, but administrative costs, at 30 percent of the budget, seem excessive. In general, communication and coordination with the project's stakeholders was inadequate; a major effort should be made from the start of the FY21 project to improve communication.

237. **Impact.** The impact analysis showed a significant increase in the literacy skills of pupils in the assisted schools. The project undoubtedly had an important contribution to make to this result, but other factors, notably the revision of curricula by PRAASED, likely also had a significant role in this progress. This progress is notable, but most pupils still do not achieve sufficient competency, particularly in ORA schools.

238. The project has had no impact on reducing absenteeism due to illness, or in terms of a deeper, sustainable improvement in dietary diversity. As mentioned above, this aspect will require further attention during the FY21 project.

239. Other positive elements were observed, including examples of contributions to the integration of Bantu and indigenous children around school canteens. But certain prejudices have also been reproduced in other schools; the FY21 project could address this issue in a much more significant way.

240. **Sustainability.** WFP has focused its capacity-building activities on the school feeding component, at national, departmental and local levels. Stakeholders at departmental and local level have a good grasp of canteen management and the monitoring system in place, but national institutions are not yet involved in certain program functions such as canteen procurement and program steering using monitoring data. The prospects for transferring the program to the government are still unclear, and the FY21 project will need to work to accelerate capacity-building actions by setting out a clear roadmap for program transfer. Among other things, the intersectoral coordination mechanisms provided for in the school feeding policy should be put in place as soon as possible and the FY21 project should promote much greater involvement of the relevant institutional players beyond MEPPSA.

3.2 LESSONS LEARNED

241. An approach confined to promoting the formal and numerical participation of women in school canteen management committees does not necessarily contribute to the objectives of equality and empowerment of women. First, this formal participation does not necessarily mean that women will take on real leadership roles. Second, women's most important contribution to school canteens, as cooks, is often not seen as positive. On the contrary, their expectations of remuneration are not met, and their involvement sometimes has a negative impact due to the excessive amount of time some women must devote to school canteens. The objectives of promoting equality and empowering women must be pursued as part of a much broader approach to the role played by women in the running of school canteens.

242. The absence of a nutritionist on a continuous basis during the project has led to a lack of technical leadership on Strategic Outcome 2, and on activities promoting adequate nutrition, which has affected project performance. The achievement of results linked to strategic objective 2 can only be envisaged if WFP and its partners mobilize the necessary expertise and technical leadership, in this case ensuring the permanent presence of a nutrition expert.

243. The involvement of the NGO DEPP meant that the project had a greater presence and proximity in the ORA schools of the Sangha, which likely led to a greater impact of awareness-raising actions. This was notably observed during the final evaluation through the mobilization of parents to supplement the food ration served in the schools. More generally, the scope of nutrition awareness campaigns was insufficient to bring about a change in behavior towards greater dietary diversity, and school canteens did not contribute to this objective due to the limited diversity of rations served. School food could play an important role in promoting behavioral change through the promotion of a community dynamic around canteens. For this to happen, the project needs to be closer to the communities and have a greater presence there. Approaches such as mobilizing local NGOs or community health workers could be envisaged for this purpose.

244. The mobilization of parents and communities for the operation of school canteens is realized, but contributions to diversify the ration provided by the project are limited. According to qualitative interviews, at best cassava leaves are brought in from time to time. The evaluation was unable to determine the precise reasons for this limited contribution, but factors such as poverty or the absence of more diversified products locally were put forward during the qualitative interviews. However, field observations showed that some products, such as fruit, are available on a seasonal basis. Similarly, it seems that indigenous households collect a variety of products in the forest. To promote a greater contribution from parents and communities, and with a view to developing local purchasing in the next project, a study of the availability of local produce by region and season would be very useful.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

245. With regard to the final evaluation of the FY17 project and given that the new project (FY21) has already been approved, the recommendations are aimed at strengthening the relevance and implementation of the FY21 project.

N°	Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other collaborating entities	Priority:	Timeframe
1	<p>Clarify and document the FY21 PMP to ensure its full implementation. The evaluation team noted numerous inconsistencies in the FY17 PMP that could not be clarified by the WFP country office. It is recommended that the categorization of beneficiaries be improved, that the annual and total targets of the FY21 project, and the coherence between them, be meticulously reviewed to detect and amend possible inconsistencies, and to document how targets have been defined for each output and outcome indicator.</p>	Short term	WFP Country Office		High	In the next three months
2	<p>Reinforce the objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment, by addressing the issue of gender-based violence and supporting the integration of an already existing curriculum on this theme in elementary school, and by developing a more in-depth approach to the role of women in the running of school canteens so that this translates into a benefit for them in terms of equality and the promotion of their autonomy. The FY21 project should also systematize the disaggregation of monitoring data by gender.</p>	Medium-term	WFP Country Office	MEPPSA, Ministry for the Promotion of Women, sub-recipients	Medium	Next 12 months
3	<p>Strengthen the approach to awareness-raising activities for behavior change, particularly on the issue of dietary diversity. Ensure the permanent presence of a nutrition expert for the duration of the FY21 project. Develop and implement a genuine communications program for change, with a clear approach defined and documented, content aligned with the official provisions of the relevant ministries, and the production of thematic guides and teaching aids for schools and communities. Use school canteens as a vehicle for change, for example to put into practice all the messages disseminated, and to this end ensure a wider reach of awareness-raising activities by considering</p>	Short term	WFP Country Office	UNICEF, Ministry of Health and Population	High	FY21 project duration

N°	Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other collaborating entities	Priority:	Timeframe
	the increased involvement of well-established local NGOs, community health workers or other available local resources. WFP and project partners should also consider including malaria and respiratory disease prevention in awareness-raising messages.					
4	Increase budgeted resources and planning for the construction/rehabilitation of water points, to better cover needs	Medium-term	WFP	UNICEF, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Energy and Hydraulics	Medium	Next 12 months
5	Strengthen the involvement and coordination of all relevant government institutions, in particular the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women. To this end, support the establishment of the CNMAS and CTI and improve communication with all project stakeholders. Support the DAS in coordinating the CNMAS and the CTI. The CNMAS should act as a steering committee for the McGovern-Dole project, and all technical choices should be discussed at CTI level. Carry out project presentation sessions with all the organizations concerned at national level and in all the departments covered. Set up regular coordination meetings with participants and provide information on project progress.	Short term	WFP	DAS, Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples	High	Next 6 months
6	Strengthen the integration of indigenous populations into the project. Carry out a study of the impact of the closure of ORA schools in Likouala and, if necessary, implement specific actions aimed at the schooling of indigenous pupils in this department. Integrate the issue of prejudice against indigenous people into awareness-raising activities. Promote indigenous participation in all management committees and among cooks.	Short term	WFP	Ministry of Social Affairs, community leaders, school principals	Medium	Next 6 months

N°	Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other collaborating entities	Priority:	Timeframe
7	<p>Strengthen the complementarity of the imported food and local procurement approaches. Consider implementing the two approaches in a complementary manner in the same schools, rather than separately in different schools, to improve the diversity of rations served in schools and reinforce the project's relevance to national school feeding policy.</p>	Medium-term	WFP	DAS, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, FAO, UNICEF	Medium	Next 12 months
8	<p>Accelerate capacity development and transfer of school feeding functions still managed by WFP. To do this, draw up a capacity development and skills transfer plan with clear objectives and deadlines, and a mechanism for monitoring progress. Consider setting up seconded technical assistance housed at DAS.</p>	Medium-term	WFP	DAS	Medium	Next 18 months
9	<p>Reinforce the project's usefulness in improving the quality of education. Establish closer ties and coordination with PRAASED, which did not take place during the FY17 project, and with other actors involved in the education sector, to analyze and jointly plan the continuation of curriculum revision and teacher training.</p>	Short term	WFP	PRAASED, UNESCO	High	Next 6 months

4 Acronyms

ACR	Annual Country Report
ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ASCP	Congo Spiritan Fathers' Association
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CNFA	National Commission for Food Fortification
CNMAS	Multisectoral National Council for School Feeding
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
CTI	Interministerial technical committee
DAS	School Feeding Department
DD	Difference-in-difference
DDS	Dietary Diversity Score
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSA	Foreign Assistance Service
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross domestic product
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
INS	National Institute of Statistics
IPHD	International Partnership for Human Development
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
MAEP	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries
MASAH	Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action
MEPPSA	Ministry of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MSP	Ministry of Health and Population
NGO	Non-governmental Organization

NSFP	National School Feeding Policy
ODK	Open Data Kit
ORA	Observe, Reflect, Act
OS	Strategic objective
PASEC	Confemen's Educational Systems Analysis Program
PDN	National Development Plan
PEDD	Educational Program for Sustainable Development
PMP	Project Monitoring Plan
PRAASED	Education sector support project
RF	Results framework
RoC	Republic of Congo
SABER	Systems Approach to Better Education Results
SAPR	Semi Annual Performance Report
SAS	Departmental School Feeding Services
SBCC	Social Behaviour Change Communication
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPR	Standard Project Report
ToR	Terms of reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

WFP Republic of Congo

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