



WFP EVALUATION



SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Baseline Activity Study of the USDA McGovern-Dole Grant for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia October 2022 to September 2027

CONTEXT

In Cambodia, short-term hunger is a principal factor affecting educational results, such as literacy, attendance, and concentration in schools. The WFP School Feeding Programme (SFP) started in Cambodia in 1999; in 2014, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and WFP piloted a Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) model. The Government's national HGSF programme (NHGSFP) was then developed with the expectation that WFP-supported schools would ultimately be taken over and managed by the Government.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

A major component of the SFP is the support from the McGovern-Dole grant, which is a continuation of previous project rounds. It has a budget of US\$20.9 million provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The project is implemented by WFP with partners World Vision, Plan International and World Education, and aims to improve literacy amongst primary school children, through improvements to the quality of teaching, distribution of daily school meals as an incentive to attend school, and interventions in hygiene, health and nutrition practices to reduce absences due to illness. The project operates in 341 schools in 12 districts of Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom and Siem Reap provinces, and these schools will be progressively handed over to the NHGSFP by 2028. The project targets over 100,000 children, 49 percent of them girls.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The objective of this baseline study was to establish the situation at the beginning of this round of the USDA McGovern-Dole project. Against this baseline, project achievements will then be assessed in a midterm and an endline evaluation planned for 2025 and 2027 respectively. This study also reviewed the relevance and adequacy of project targets.

WFP and USDA will be the principal users of the report, along with the MoEYS, the main partner of WFP in the Royal Government of Cambodia.

KEY FINDINGS

The study addressed four key questions:

Question 1: What is the pre-cycle situation for all evaluation criteria, and in terms of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) mainstreaming in the project?

Relevance: The project is fully oriented to the objectives of achieving full handover to the Government and creating the best possible conditions for the sustainability of the NHGSFP in all its components. WFP will progressively shift from direct implementation to capacity strengthening as schools are handed over. School feeding is well integrated into government priorities within the National Social Protection Policy Framework and the development of the framework and regulations will continue during the project. One concern is that procurement of local food commodities for the meals is a key element of the HGSF model, and schools must be experienced with the processes to be deemed ready for handover, but there will be no longer be any local purchase made within the McGovern-Dole project and WFP is expected to mobilize additional resources, which presents a threat to the handover objectives.

Effectiveness: The review of intermediate and overall project outcomes showed that a few elements deserve particular attention. The analysis of achievements in literacy improvement in the previous project is made difficult due to several factors, and there is a need to maintain the same approach as in the 2022 measurement in the future. The baseline level of 20.4 percent highlights the low levels of early grade literacy in the target schools and the need to continue to improve this critical outcome.

The baseline showed a higher proportion of hungry students during class and a lower attendance than in 2020. The Diet Diversity Score calculated at baseline is already higher than the project life target. Functioning water infrastructure has decreased in the baseline despite the previous project building or rehabilitating a large number of facilities. All these trends need to be further investigated so that appropriate measures can be taken, with targets updated and indicators clarified where needed.

Sustainability: Institutional ownership and participation in the NHGSF programme have been strong for MoEYS and the National Social Protection Council (NSPC), but remain weak for other institutions formally associated with the programme. Clarifications on their roles were provided recently, though inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms are not yet in place. This needs to be prioritised, in order to promote ownership.

Efficiency: WFP's emphasis is on supporting a cost-efficient NHGSFP. The CO currently supports the assessment and piloting of different procurement models for the HGSF programme. Regional purchase included in the project is expected to be more cost-efficient than international imports. The CO's management structure for implementing the project is getting more appropriate to the project needs, with a mindset change and staff increasingly prioritising capacity strengthening and technical assistance to their government counterparts. Internal capacities are considered more appropriate to this project's objectives than in the past.

Question 2: What are the contextual changes that occurred since the baseline of the previous project relevant to the programme and under each evaluation criteria, including GEWE aspects?

The greatest external factor to affect the previous project was clearly the COVID-19 pandemic, but a repetition of such a situation in the future is unpredictable and cannot realistically be factored into the new project design. The high-level government support is a key factor of success to date, although previous project evaluations identified challenges related to limited capacity and understanding of the programme amongst MoEYS and sub-national staff. Government will remain strong and this is expected to continue. Ongoing Decentralization and Deconcentration reforms in Cambodia are planned to be rolled out in 2024 and could potentially modify key structures and processes related to the management of the programme. The potential impact of the reforms on the SFP needs to be assessed and appropriate adjustments made. The macro-economic context is a key factor that could affect the resourcing of the NHGSF programme. The baseline study did not identify contextual changes specific to GEWE.

Question 3: Are the project indicators and targets appropriate to effectively measure and track project results for men, women, girls, boys and vulnerable groups based on the results framework?

The review of the project Performance Monitoring Plan during this study indicates that the plan has improved

since the previous project, but there are still issues to be addressed. The overall set of indicators is found appropriate to measure project outputs and outcomes, and realistic considering the coverage of the project and the achievements of the previous round. There is some overlapping of indicators, and necessary adjustments to be made; and targets are often not documented or justified. Whenever relevant, the PMP disaggregates indicators considering gender, but targets are not disaggregated. National and sub-national capacities for monitoring the NHGSFP were also repeatedly mentioned in the previous project evaluation series, citing difficulties such as lack of connectivity, lack of skills in digitalized systems, and excessive workloads, and these remain challenging. A WFP assessment of the Monitoring and Evaluation System for the NHGSFP in early 2022 proposed clear recommendations and action points.

Question 4: To what extent are the midterm and endline evaluation questions relevant in assessing the success of the programme under each criterion and for all categories of participants including men, women, girls, boys and vulnerable groups?

Overall, the evaluation questions capture well the key focus on success and performance of the project, and on the readiness and sustainability of the NHGSF programme. Some adjustments are recommended, such as simplifying the evaluation questions and providing more clarity, reducing the number and overlap of the questions, and strengthening the integration of GEWE with more explicit references.

CONCLUSIONS

This final McGovern-Dole project aims towards achieving full handover of the school feeding programme to the Government by 2028. The handover was initiated during the previous project, but this new project goes further, intending to determine what will happen after the handover.

School feeding is well integrated into the social protection policy framework, and there is a strong sense of ownership and political will, particularly from the MoEYS and NSPC, though this needs to be replicated in other key government institutions.

Removing local procurement from the project could potentially affect the readiness of schools for handover and the HGSF model chosen by the Government. It will be essential to address this question in the short term.

Overall, the analysis of the baseline situation shows that the project will build on a solid base from past projects, although some elements need to be further investigated and some adjustments need to be made on project targets and indicators. WFP has started this and will continue to progressively improve its own capacities to better support the capacity strengthening objectives of the project.