



SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Informing national school feeding and nutrition policies and strategies in Bhutan

Nutrition situation

Bhutanese children and the wider public are experiencing the triple burden of malnutrition - undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. All three conditions are linked to sub-optimal diets including inadequate dietary diversity, especially underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, lean animal-based products and plant proteins, and overconsumption of processed foods and beverages that are high in sugar, salt, and fat.

Building human capital

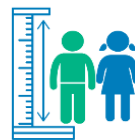
In Bhutan, WFP partners with the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL) to create an enabling environment for healthier school nutrition and improved nutritional status for Bhutanese schoolchildren.

WFP, together with MoH and UNICEF, revised the National Health Policy (2020-30) and developed the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020-25). WFP has also supported MoESD in drafting the National School Feeding and Nutrition Strategy (2019-2030) and a social behaviour change (SBC) strategy. These policies aim to strengthen national goals and multi-sectoral collaboration for effective national health and nutrition programmes and services.

School nutrition

WFP assists the MoESD in improving the health and nutritional status of Bhutanese schoolchildren through the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme (NSFNP) by:

Malnutrition: In numbers



1 in 5 children stunted



1 in 3 adolescent girls anemic



Overweight

8% children
11% adolescents
34 adults



86% of Bhutanese do not eat enough vegetables & fruits



27% of households cannot afford a diet that meets their nutrient needs



- Collaborating with MoAL to connect schools with 9,000 farmers in five districts to provide diverse, locally available, and nutritious foods for school meals. This also assures incomes for almost 3,000 smallholder farmers, 60 percent of whom are women.
- Partnering with MoESD to develop national standards for school kitchens, storage, and kitchen equipment. WFP has also supported the construction and refurbishment of new school kitchens and food storage units, creating an enabling environment for the provision of healthy and nutritious school meals.
- Supporting the replacement of wood-fed cooking stoves with fuel-efficient and environment-friendly electric cookers in selected schools where new or refurbished kitchen and food storage units were completed. The use of electric cookers provides a cleaner kitchen environment, improving the health of the school cooks as well as health and hygiene in the preparation of school meals. This initiative also helps reduce fuel wood.
- Collaborating with MoESD on the use of the WFP School Menu Planner (SMP) PLUS tool, a digital platform that optimizes school menus to be nutritious, and cost-efficient using locally sourced food. The use of SMP PLUS increases the dietary diversity of over 55,000 schoolchildren in 276 schools in 12 districts.

Healthy diets

In 2022, WFP partnered with the MoESD and MoH to undertake formative research on dietary behaviour in schoolchildren, adolescents, and their influencers. Based on the findings, a national SBC strategy and an action plan were developed by WFP and MoESD, and SBC activities to promote nutritious diets among schoolchildren were implemented in 15 schools in Thimphu and Chhukha.

An advocacy campaign on healthy diets called *Eat Kheta, Be Seta* (Eat Smart, Be Smart) was launched on a joint advocacy social media page *School Health and Nutrition Bhutan*. The SBC campaign promotes nutritious diets and includes the integration of nutrition and health education into the school curriculum, a children's TV show, and media advocacy campaigns.

To further improve nutritional outcomes for schoolchildren, WFP has supported the MoESD in strengthening the capacities of kitchen staff and mess members through training on food preparation and hygiene, nutrition, and kitchen and storage unit management.

For nutrition advocacy for rural and vulnerable communities, WFP partnered with a civil society organization, the Tarayana Foundation. Through this partnership, WFP supports nutrition advocacy and outreach activities in 16 grassroots communities in the four districts of Lhuntse, Trongsa, Tsirang, and Zhemgang.

Food fortification

To ensure food safety and quality, WFP supports the development of Bhutan's regulatory framework and compliance mechanisms for food fortification through technical assistance and capacity strengthening.

Using the NSFNP as a platform, WFP and the Government have successfully introduced fortified rice as a public health strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies among schoolchildren.

WFP will continue supporting the Government to scale up the use of fortified rice to reach other vulnerable populations, including monastic institutions, and to gradually introduce fortified rice to the wider public through the open market.

