WFP EVALUATION

Baseline Evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Program in the Republic of Congo from 2021 to 2026

Baseline Report for McGovern Dole Decentralised Evaluation

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Disclaimer

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Glossary

Autochone – refers to indigenous populations

Comparison group - consists of the sampled schools and school-age children that will not benefit from the MGD FY21 project.

Custom Indicators: additional project-specific performance indicators not included in the FAS list of standard indicators

Green schools or Model Schools - WFP will provide school garden inputs to 100 Model schools, or Green Schools. WFP will establish and promote selected school gardens, to be used as learning platforms for nutrition and environmental education for primary school children. To increase parent and student engagement in garden activities.

Half time mode - a system whereby a group of pupils come to school in the morning from 7:30 to 12:30 am and another in the afternoon, from 1:00 to 5:00 pm.

Impact Indicators: Indicators that measure longer-term effects produced by a project's activities or set of activities.

Input Indicators: Indicators that measure or quantify the financial, human, and material resources used to implement project activities or interventions.

Intervention or treatment group – consists of the sampled schools and school-age children that will be beneficiaries of the MGD FY21 project.

Multigrade class: this is a class that combines two or even three sections in the same classroom, for learning activities that must be carried out according to the learner's level and the expected learning objectives, regardless of the number of students in the class.

Outcome Indicators: Indicators that measure the intermediate effects of a project's activity or set of activities and are directly related to the output indicators.

Output Indicators: Indicators that measure or quantify the products, goods, or services which directly result from the implementation of project activities.

Standard Indicators: a common set of required (mandatory) indicators identified by Foreign Agricultural Service, United States Department of Agriculture (FAS) that must be used by all recipients, if applicable to the project. A standard indicator is applicable to a project if it addresses a result in the project's results framework, and if planned activities target that result.

Teaching Methods: A set of principles, rules and procedures enabling teachers to impart a particular subject or a more general training.

Mondial: uses inquiry as an integral part of pupils' real-life learning. Inquiry is the vehicle for study that enables learners to ask questions, discover how to find answers and how to apply their skills and knowledge to the world around them.

Syllabic: a method that allows children to correctly recognize and use phonemes representing each letter of the alphabet and create combinations with them according to the rules of the language being studied.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1 The World Food Program (WFP) Congo Country Office received US$25 million from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS) to fund a five-year project under the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program (hereafter referred to as "McGovern-Dole ") in the Republic of the Congo from 2021–2026. This represents the fifth round of funding for the program and second award to WFP. The McGovern-Dole project seeks to improve pupils' health and dietary practices, reduce pupils' short-term hunger through the provision of school meals, raise pupils' literacy levels, and strengthen government's and schools' administrative capacities to implement and manage a nutrition sensitive and holistic School Feeding Program. Due partly to delays in procurement of the Evaluation Firm, the activities will begin in October 2023 and is expected to finish by June 2026, with a possibility of a no-cost extension.

2 Oversee Advising Group was commissioned to conduct the Baseline Evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Program in Congo.

Evaluation purpose and objectives

3 This baseline purposed to establish situational analysis before the beginning of the McGovern-Dole program FY21 and to develop learnings on the most efficient approach to monitor the program indicators in the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP). Gender and human rights'-based approaches were mainstreamed throughout the study to reflect the specific and current situation of girls, women, autochone (indigenous) populations and other vulnerable groups.

4 The specific evaluation objectives are to strengthen accountability and learning; and to inform WFP's operational and strategic decision-making.

Context

5 The population of Congo is about 5.9 million people with the autochone population estimated at 1.4% to 10%.[1] Over half of the government's revenue and 80% of export earnings come from oil, the largest contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product. Congo holds the 153rd position out of 191 countries in Human Development Index 2021 and the Gender Development Index 2021 is 0.934.[2] Autochthonous children, particularly adolescents and girls, encounter significant barriers to education, with approximately 65% out of school.[3] Overall, preschool enrollment in Congo increased from 27,639 in 2005 to 66,556 in 2018 but the country faces many problems linked to the quality of learning.[4] About 33% of households in the country are currently food insecure compared to 14% in 2014. 40.3% of the population were malnourished by 2020.[5] Boys are more affected (6.4%) than girls (4.1%). [6] The government has taken steps to address these issues including a National Development Plan (2022-2026) for a diversified and resilient economy; and a National School Feeding Policy in 2016. WFP's School Feeding Program will have the greatest impact on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Ending hunger, and SDG 17: Building a global movement for good health, Education, gender equality, and climate action.

Main features of the subject of the evaluation

[1] World Bank, 2020.
[2] GDI is the ratio of female Human Development Index (HDI) to make HDI, therefore, the value 1,000 stands for perfect gender parity.
[3] IWGA. The Indigenous World 2022: Republic of the Congo. Available at: https://www.iwgia.org/en/republic-of-congo/4641-iw-2022-republic-of-the-congo.html
[4] UNICEF. Context in the Republic of Congo. 2020 https://www.unicef.org/congo/media/2096/file/Facts%20sheet%20en%20anglais.pdf
[5] 2020 SDG monitoring report,
[6] Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022

6 Two strategic objectives (SO) are sought by the FY21 project and contribute to the objectives of the National School Feeding Policy: 1) Improve literacy among school-aged children (SO1); and 2) Improve health and dietary practices (SO2). USDA also considers one more: Improve effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement (LRP SO1). The project will benefit 65,000 school-age children in 354 rural primary schools in Bouenza, Cuvette, Lekoumou, Likouala, Plateaux, Pool, and Sangha.

Main users/intended audience

7 The expected users of this evaluation are the WFP Country Office and its decision-making partners, Office of Evaluation (OEV), WFP Headquarters, WFP Executive Board, USDA, Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Health and Population; and Social Affairs; Directorate of School Feeding; key partners [UNICEF, UNESCO, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)]; and other stakeholders.

Methodology

8 The overall evaluation has a quasi-experimental longitudinal panel design which will track a cohort of schools and pupils in the program and in non-intervention areas over the project's life (2023-2026). The design was developed to simulate a 'before and after' approach and a with/without comparison. This baseline has created the 'before' component, consisting of a cross-sectional exploratory study using mixed methods, and a comparison of intervention and non-intervention areas.

9 Quantitative data was collected from 1394 children (48 autochthonous) from 85 schools, 82 headteachers, 157 teachers, 72 parent- teacher associations and 30 cooks. Qualitative data was collected via desk review, 42 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government, WFP, USDA and other stakeholders; and 28 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with schoolgirls and boys; parents/caregivers; farmers, traders, school management committees' members and teachers.

10 Cuvette department was excluded from the survey due to logistical and time constraints caused by heavy rainfall at the time of the survey.

Evaluation Findings

Baseline values, appropriateness and targets of the PMP indicators

11 **Many of the PMP indicators are SMART.** They are understandable, easy to calculate, time-bound, appropriate to measure the program results and are aligned with the results framework. However, some do not match the activity envisaged, and some are redundant.

12 McGovern-Dole FY21 has gender-sensitive indicators that will enable the assessment of the project's impact. **Nonetheless, the project lacks important equity-focused indicators** that consider the diverse target populations especially autochone populations.

13 It is important to review the number of FY21 (27 standard, 6 LRP and 26 custom) indicators downwards considering the reported workload created by monitoring the fewer FY17 indicators.

14 The PMP indicated a baseline of 50% for girls and boys *who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text,* but **the survey sample displayed lower proficiency in reading.** The literacy proficiency baseline values for the project intervention schools is 26.7% for girls; and 21.9% for boys, with girls significantly outperforming the boys (p=0.05)) different from comparison schools (26.1% girls; 28.3% boys).

Alignment of the program theory with the results framework

15 The late start of the FY21 project will affect the achievement of targets and some targets require alteration due to the survey baseline values.

16 Though the FY21 program does not yet have an illustrated theory of change (ToC), **it is aligned with the WFP global ToC for school feeding programs, and the program logic is clearly articulated in the results framework.** The results framework uses evidence-based principles in the design of the project and the critical assumptions of the ToC are clearly outlined. The logic of the ToC illustrated in the results framework is structurally sound and plausible with linkages showing the pathway of

achievement of outcomes. The plausibility is largely supported by evidence from KIIs, and the level of integration of the program other sectors.

17 The results framework has a gender perspective which explicitly targets boys, girls, vulnerable children and women farmers. **However, rural and autochone populations are not specified**.

The M&E system

18 **Several factors were identified as fundamental to the success of the M&E system of the program** including the existence of the program monitoring dashboard; the commitment of Government staff responsible for collecting information such as the education inspectorates, the National Directorate of School Feeding (DAS); school management committees who track activities at micro level; and capacity building of all the actors.

19 **Factors that hinder efficiency of the M&E system** include insufficient capacity of stakeholders (school principals, DAS officials) to understand and play their roles in the implementation of the program; workload created by the number of indicators to be monitored; poor communication and information sharing between different stakeholders; and no feedback provided by WFP to inspectors.

The extent to which the environment is conducive for learning and child development.

20 **Three categories of factors were identified as influencing pupils' learning** - factors relating to the school environment; to the teacher and to the student.

21 **The school environment** factors include the availability of school feeding which when not available was reported to affect school attendance of autochthonous children the most; and poor school infrastructure and amenities. Most schools in the sample did not have a functional drinking water point (11.8% and 8.6% in the intervention and comparison groups, respectively). 53% of the schools surveyed had functional latrines and only 60% had separate latrines for girls and boys.

22 Poor conditions of the school and classroom environments also presented constraints. Nearly 70% of surveyed had multigrade classrooms with an average of 55 and 53 pupils per classroom in the intervention and comparison groups, respectively – higher than the legislated 40 pupils per class. Almost 80% of the surveyed schools operated in half-time mode- a system whereby a group of pupils come to school from 7:30 am to 12:30 pm and another from 1:00 to 5:00 pm.

23 **In relation to the teacher,** poor availability of qualified teachers paid by the government was reported in the KIIs. In the survey, only 10.8% (3.2% women and 7.6% men) of the teachers had a university degree. Only 54% of the teachers had undergone initial teacher training before starting to practice.

24 **In relation to the pupils,** the baseline displayed a high rate of attendance (over 80%), with no significant difference by group or gender. However, the rate of attendance among autochthonous pupils is significantly lower than the overall value (69%). Low participation of parents in the learning process of children due to illiteracy and lack of textbooks for pupils limits their support for learning, especially at home.

Capacity and organization of farmers, women's farmers cooperatives, traders, and other suppliers

25 **WFP set up about twenty farmers' groups whose administrative and financial capacities were strengthened**. However, FGDs with the farmers and traders revealed a plurality of difficulties that could ultimately discourage them. For instance, the women concurred that product prices need to be known in advance and reasonable enough to motivate and retain them. As indicated by some participants, the informal collaborative mechanism puts suppliers in a vulnerable situation. Nevertheless, McGovern-Dole FY21's plans to enhance women's empowerment builds upon previous successful experiences with similar activities such as a WFP pilot project implemented in 2016 that supported small-scale women cassava producers.[7]

[7] https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/renforcer-la-filiere-du-manioc-au-congo-pour-plus-de-securite-alimentaire_en

Capacity of Government and school communities to manage and implement a nutrition-sensitive and holistic NSFP

26 **Government legal and policy frameworks provide an enabling institutional environment** considering agriculture, the food system, procurement, nutrition education and cross-cutting issues. There is evidence of improved capacities especially at the national level to support the implementation of a nutrition-sensitive SFP and the M&E system to support evidence-based analysis for learning and accountability. However, **there are important capacity gaps,** the most critical being the weak political will and the low government financial commitment towards the program**.** Nevertheless, **there is a foundation of structured capacity building** by WFP government stakeholders at different levels but more training gaps are perceived at sub-national levels.

Conclusions

27 This baseline evaluation of the McGovern-Dole FY21 SFP has established situational analysis and has confirmed baseline values for the project's performance monitoring indicators. **Overall, many of the PMP indicators are appropriate** but there is room for adjustments. The high level of school attendance and low literacy rates demonstrated by the sample displays a potential scope and **underscores the pertinence and the critical positioning of the McGovern-Dole FY21 literacy related interventions.** The learning environment is challenging for the pupils but many of the issues are beyond the control of WFP. Nevertheless, there was evidence that school feeding encourages school enrolment and retention of girls and boys, especially autochthone children.

Learnings

28 Overall, there is need to reduce the number of indicators to enable an efficient M&E system for the program.

29 There is evidence of commitment of McGovern-Dole FY21 to enhance women farmers' capacities and promote local women's empowerment. LRP indicators 11 and 12 contribute to women's financial autonomy and position them as active participants in improving school feeding and consequently children's education, demonstrating a transformative potential of positively impacting the local community.

30 It is important to note that McGovern-Dole project only plays a contributory role to learning outcomes, in view of the midline and endline assessments.

1. Introduction

31 The World Food Program (WFP) Congo Country Office has received US$25 million from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS) to fund a five-year project under the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program (hereafter referred to as "McGovern-Dole ") in the Republic of the Congo from 2021–2026. This represents the fifth round of funding for the program and second award to WFP. The McGovern-Dole project seeks to improve pupils' health and dietary practices through infrastructure improvements, reduce pupils' short-term hunger through the provision of school meals, raise pupils' literacy levels, and strengthen schools' administrative capacities. The program will also contribute to the strengthening of the Government and school communities' capacity to manage, as well as implement, a nutrition sensitive and holistic National School Feeding Program (NSFP). In line with the Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024), the WFP McGovern-Dole school feeding program contributes to the objectives of the NSFP via two strategic objectives: improvement of literacy among school-aged children; and improvement of health and dietary practices.

32 Oversee Advising Group was commissioned to conduct the Baseline Evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Program in the Republic of Congo. The baseline evaluation aims to provide program benchmarks for the period of performance from 2021 to 2026. However, the activities will only begin in October 2023 due to several reasons including delays related to contracting and procurement processes of the Evaluation Firm. There is a noted reduced implementation timeframe for the project activities as a result of the delays.

33 The evaluation commenced in January 2023 with a three-day virtual orientation meeting involving the Evaluation Team (ET), Evaluation Managers (EM) and other WFP stakeholders including the School Feeding Activity Manager, Republic of Congo and the Evaluation Officer, WFP HQ School Based Programs. In the progression from the contextually feasible evaluation plan reflected in the approved inception report to field data collection and the development of this- evaluation report, we have maintained flexibility and received comments from WFP that has enabled us improve our methodology, approach and the interpretation of the findings. At the inception phase, the ET also reviewed program and other documents (detailed in Annex 20) shared by WFP in the virtual library and had preliminary discussions were held with Directorate of School Feeding, WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) stakeholders.

34 Data collection took place from 17th May to 5th June 2023. Primary quantitative and qualitative data was collected, analyzed and triangulated with data from other sources. Preliminary findings were presented and discussed with the Evaluation Reference Group on the 13th of June 2023. The evaluation timeline is detailed in Annex 7.

1.1 Evaluation features

35 This baseline is the first of a planned three-phased evaluation 1) a baseline study in 2023 (Jan to Aug); 2) mid-term evaluation in 2024 (Oct-Jan); and 3) final evaluation in 2026 (Oct-Jan).[8] Essentially, the baseline is focused on utility in providing the benchmark indicators, while both mid-term and final evaluations will focus on accountability and learning. The baseline has established situational analysis before the beginning of the program and has developed key findings and lessons learned to identify the most efficient approach to monitor the program based on the indicators in the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP). A gender and a human rights'-based approach was mainstreamed throughout the study to ensure the baseline reflects

[8] The final evaluation needs to be finalized at least 9 months before the end of the project and hence there cannot be any delays to this timeline.

the specific and current situation of girls, women, autochone populations and other vulnerable groups.

36 The evaluation team addressed the baseline study questions using a mixed-methods approach comprising of school surveys of pupils, head teachers, school cooks and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs); key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents and local community groups. The methodology allowed for analysis over time, particularly considering differences in outcomes between treatment and comparison schools as the program activities are implemented. Gender, age, ethnicity, and other social components were observed at the baseline study questions, at collecting disaggregated data and in the analysis.

37 The evaluation covered the project focal areas - the rural areas of seven (7) departments in Congo namely, Bouenza, Cuvette, Lekoumou, Likouala, Plateaux, Sangha and Pool. The program will reach 65,000 pupils - girls and boys - in 354 primary schools across thirty-eight (38) districts. The 354 primary schools were part of the McGovern-Dole 2017-2021 (FY17 project) cycle though 85,000 pupils[9] were targeted for that program. The targeting also takes into account ORA (Observe, Reflect and Act) schools that were set up to improve the schooling of autochthonous children. Table 1 shows details of the project focal areas.

Table 1: Program focal areas

Target Regions FY21	Number of schools	No of pupils
Likouala	16	4,350
Sangha	22	3,299
Cuvette	23	2,186
Plateaux	52	6,655
Pool	107	21,085
Lekoumou	74	11,079
Bouenza	60	16,344
	354	**64, 998 (Approx 65,000) ***

**The programme will reach 65,000 pupils equally distributed between girls and boys in 354 primary schools*.

38 The baseline study focused more on the specific objectives of the program (highlighted in subsequent sections) related to learning and child development; alleviation of short-term hunger; increasing the use of health and dietary practices; strengthening of capacities of governments and school communities; and support to farmer groups.

39 Data collection for this baseline study was carried out by Institut National de la Statistique (INS) and PASEC teams as well as OAG qualitative team comprising of Corine MINE PONDJA, Alice Noël TCHOUMKEU PENDEME and Urbain Serge KENNE.

40 This baseline study has established values for the indicators which WFP will use to account for results achieved and resources utilized in the FY21 (2021 -2026) program cycle. The expected users of this evaluation are the WFP Country Office and its decision-making partners, Office of Evaluation (OEV), WFP Headquarters in Rome, WFP Executive Board, USDA, Ministries of Education, Agriculture, Health and Population; and Social Affairs; Directorate of School Feeding; key partners such as UNICEF, UNESCO, Catholic Relief Services (CRS); and other stakeholders. The government, non-governmental and United Nations (UN) stakeholders will use the study findings to ensure that the McGovern-Dole program and specifically the FY21 project implemented by WFP is effective and harmonized with other partners' strategies and efforts in contributing to the U.S., program, and UN concerted efforts.

[9] 114,051 school children are targeted throughout the project (accounting for turnover between school years)

1.2 Context

41 The Republic of Congo was ruled by President Denis Sassou Nguesso between 1979 and 1992. Since 1997, he has led the country again, winning all elections since 2002 and most recently in March 2021. Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso's 37-member Government prioritizes social and solidarity-based governance in addition to institutional, economic, and financial stewardship.

42 The Republic of Congo has a population of about 5 million people, the majority (86 percent) reside in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, and 56 percent of the country's inhabitants are under the age of 20.[10] The nation has abundant mineral resources including oil. More than half of the government's revenue and more than 80% of export earnings come from oil making it the largest contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The World Bank reported that the economy of this lower middle-income country shrank by 7 percent in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the GDP grew 3.2% in 2022, up from 1.5% in 2021, due to strong performance in both the oil and non-oil sectors, which grew 45.3% and 3.4%, respectively.[11]

43 Congo is a food-deficit country whose local production covers only 30% of national food needs, with only 31% of arable land cultivated.[12] Although 35% of the population works in agriculture, less than 5% of annual GDP comes from this sector.[13]The 2021 National Nutrition and Food Security Surveys[14] highlighted the precarious nutritional situation in Congo and indicated that Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), underweight and chronic malnutrition affect respectively 5.2%, 13%, and 20% of children under 5 years of age. Regarding GAM, boys were more affected (6.4%) than girls (4.1%); and also, for chronic malnutrition (21% against 18% for girls). In the Departments, chronic malnutrition rates varied from 12.4% in Brazzaville to 46.1% in Lékoumou. Also, in terms of underweight, Lékoumou was the most affected with a prevalence of 24%.[15] This is in line to the findings from previous nutrition surveys (MICS 2014-2015).[16] Both sets of surveys also indicated inadequacies in infant and young children feeding practices particularly relating to dietary diversification.

44 According to the 2021 National nutrition and Food Security survey,[17] regarding the nutritional status of women, they were more overweight than undernourished. While 9.7% of breastfeeding women were undernourished, 31.3% were overweight, illustrating a double nutritional burden at the national level. In Brazzaville, 44.6% of breastfeeding women were affected by malnutrition due to excesses, while 21% of breastfeeding women were more affected by malnutrition due to deficiencies in the department of Plateaux. At the national level, 1.5% of pregnant women suffer from malnutrition with the highest prevalence observed in Lekoumou.[18] As for folic acid iron supplementation, there were more breastfeeding women supplemented than pregnant women (respectively 65.8% and 53.6%) despite the recommendation that supplementation is more critical during pregnancy.[19,20]A cross-analysis of the nutritional situation indicated considerable variation between departments, poverty quintiles, place of residence, age groups and level of education of the mother.[21] These disparities indicate that there are likely multiple factors at play that affect nutrition outcomes, including gender and social equity. In terms of policies, pregnant

[10] World Bank, 2020. https://data.worldbank.org/country/congo-rep
[11] Africa Development Bank Group. Congo Economic Outlook. African Economic Outlook (AEO) 2023
[12] Environment Social and Governance (ESG) World Bank Data 2020
[13] Context Security Food and Nutrition WFP
[14] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[15] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[16] Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS5 CONGO 2014-2015
[17] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[18] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[19] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[20] Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS5 CONGO 2014-2015
[21] Cadre Strategique de Lutte Contra la Malnutrition au Congo – Horizon 2025 – April, 2015

and breastfeeding women received special attention at the National Strategic Framework Against Malnutrition in Congo – Horizon 2025[22].

45 Food security has deteriorated as 33% of households are currently food insecure compared to 14% in 2014. Poor food consumption, i.e., households with large food deficits, rose from 1.7% to 18%. The consumption limit increased from 7.6 to 22%, corresponding to 19,395 households in total.[23] In addition, only 58% of households consumed iron-rich foods. Regarding the number of meals eaten daily, 12.2% of households reported that children aged 3-15 years ate 3 times a day, 56% 2 times a day and 28% one time a day or an average of 1.8 meals a day.[24] In 2019, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimated that 1.5 million people were undernourished in Congo between 2017 and 2019, (i.e., approximately 28.0% of the population); by 2020, this rate increased to 40.3%.[25] The majority of the population live below the poverty level (48% of Congolese live on $1.25 a day). In 2014, the Diet Cost Analysis indicated that, on average, 54% of households were unable to afford a nutritious diet, covering both their daily macro and micronutrient needs.[26] Nevertheless, the government of Congo has taken some steps to address these issues including the creation of the National Commission for Fortification of Food (2012), the SUN movement (commitment made in 2013), and the Strategic Framework Against Malnutrition in Congo-Horizon 2025.

46 It is of note that the war between Russia and Ukraine (both key global market players in the agri-food sector) also has implications for Congo because Russia is Congo's main supplier of wheat and its share in cereal imports represented, on average, nearly 60% of global imports over the period 2018-2021.[27]

47 In addition to poor access to food, a large part of the Congolese population also lack the resources to guarantee access to education, health and other basic social services.[28] Regarding health, the diseases that affect children under 5 years of age are, in order of frequency, cough (45%), fever (42%) and diarrhoea (18%).[29] Regarding Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, 72.9% of households have access to safe drinking water sources, 17% of respondents (pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, other women in the reproductive age) knew the five key moments of hand washing, and 41% of households had access to soap and water.[30] The majority of households (68%) shared toilets and 4% practiced open defecation.[31]

48 According to the education sector annual statistical reports, enrollments are on the rise for all levels. Preschool enrollment increased from 27,639 in 2005 to 66,556 in 2018; those of the primary from 617,010 in 2005 to 783,448 in 2018; those in lower and upper secondary increased respectively from 193,238 to 340,163 and from 52,296 to 143,485 between 2005 and 2018 [32],[33]. In 2010, the retention rate in primary school was 85%; the average repetition rate was 23% and the drop-out rate was 5%, Access to schools was better in urban areas (95.6%).[34]The country still faces many problems linked to the quality of learning. PASEC 2019 highlighted that 63.3% and 83% of pupils at the start of schooling are above the minimum threshold in language and mathematics respectively.[35] Nevertheless, few pupils complete primary education with the required skills in both mathematics (41%) and reading (21%).[36] The National Development Plan (PND) 2022-2026 is a pivotal strategic document defining the orientations of the Republic of

[22] Cadre Strategique de Lutte Contre la Malnutrition au Congo – Horizon 2025 – April, 2015. Available at: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/con157341.pdf
[23] National nutrition survey using the SMART methodology- December 2022
[24] Ibid
[25] 2020 SDG monitoring report,
[26] Context Security Food and Nutrition WFP
[27] Rapport final SNU-Ukraine Résumé Exécutif_18052022

[28] World Bank (2021) https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=CG
[29] National Nutrition Survey using SMART methodology - December 2022
[30] National Nutrition Survey using SMART methodology - December 2022
[31] Ibid
[32] Strategy Education Sector
[33] Annuaire Statistique du Congo 2018
[34] Strategy Education Sector
[35] PASEC 2019 report
[36] UNICEF. Context in the Republic of Congo. https://www.unicef.org/congo/media/2096/file/Facts%20sheet%20en%20anglais.pdf

Congo in terms of development; it recognizes that inequalities between women and men are an obstacle to development and sets a goal to improve the inclusion of women.[37] Recently, the National Gender Policy (2017-2021) and its Action Plan (2017-2021) were implemented. Girls are exclusively targeted by the National Girls' Education Strategy[38] that is embedded in the wider Education Sector Strategy (2021-2030). Despite gains in formal equality, gender inequality is rooted within the country and presented in many social, political, and economic indicators. Congo holds the 153rd position out of 191 countries in Human Development Index (HDI) 2021 and the Gender Development Index (GDI) 2021 is 0.934,[39] which means medium equality in HDI achievements between women and men regarding life expectancy at birth, education, and command over economic resources, in accordance with the categories established by UNDP.[40] Women in Republic of Congo have higher life expectancy but less years of schooling and earn less than men. More details on preliminary gender analysis of the context are displayed in Annex 2.

49 The autochone (indigenous) population in the country is estimated at 1.4% to 10% of the total population. Autochthonous children, particularly adolescents, encounter significant barriers to education, with approximately 65% being out of school.[41] For the women, there is risk of contemporary slavery, limited access to healthcare, and challenges in educating and retaining girls in schools. [42]

50 School feeding is defined as the provision of food (meals) to schoolchildren.43 These programs can improve the nutritional and health status of children, increase school enrolment and attendance, especially for girls thereby improving gender parity. When combined with quality education, school feeding programs can increase cognitive ability and academic achievement[44, 45, 46, 47] With properly designed rations, school feeding programs can improve the nutritional status of preschool and primary school children by addressing micronutrient deficiencies. By partnering with local agricultural production, these programs can also provide a stable market for Smallholder Farmers (SHF). These school feeding programs can provide short-term benefits after crises, help communities recover and build resilience, in addition to long-term benefits by developing human capital[48, 49]

51 Given the reliance of Congo on food imports, the FY21 McGovern-Dole school feeding program Market Study found no significant negative economic impact of the U.S. donated commodities (rice, split peas and vegetable oil) that will be distributed through the McGovern-Dole school feeding program. The study noted that additional supply to the market (through the U.S. donated commodities) could even potentially deflate market prices for these commodities which would have a positive Impact on the availability and access to food.[50]

52 The country has strategic and policy documents which support school feeding. For instance, the National Development Plan 2022-2026 deals with the in-depth reform of the education system and indicates the need for continuous and universal school feeding. The 2021-2030 Education Sector Strategy specifically target the enrolment of disadvantaged populations and the coverage

[37] Commission Européenne (2021). Plan d'action sur l'égalité entre les hommes et les femme III – 2021-2025 : Plan. De mise en oeuvre au niveu national – CLIP Republique du Congo

[38] Stratégie Nationale de Scolarisation de la Fille en Republique du Congo. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/congo/media/591/file/STRATEGIE%20DE%20SCOLARISATION%20DE%20LA%20FILLE%20AU%20CONGO.pdf

[39] GDI is the ratio of female Human Development Index (HDI) to make HDI, therefore, the value 1,000 stands for perfect gender parity.

[40] UNDP (n.d). Gender Development Index. Available at: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/tr/UNDP-TR-EN-HDR-2019-FAQS-GDI.pdf

[41] IWGA. The Indigenous World 2022: Republic of the Congo. Available at: https://www.iwgia.org/en/republic-of-congo/4641-iw-2022-republic-of-the-congo.html

[42] IWGA. The Indigenous World 2022: Republic of the Congo. Available at: https://www.iwgia.org/en/republic-of-congo/4641-iw-2022-republic-of-the-congo.html

[43] Bundy et al. Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector. January 2009 DOI:10.1596/978-0-8213-7974-5

[44] Ahmed, 2004; Gelli, Meir, and Espejo, 2007

[45] Jacoby, Cueto, and Pollitt, 1996; Powell et al., 1998; Kristjansson et al., 2007.

[46] Whaley et al., 2003; Kristjansson et al., 2007; Jukes et al., 2008

[47] Tan, Lane, and Lassibille, 1999; Ahmed, 2004; Adelman et al., 2008.

[48] SABER 2015 School Feeding

[49] WFP, 2013.

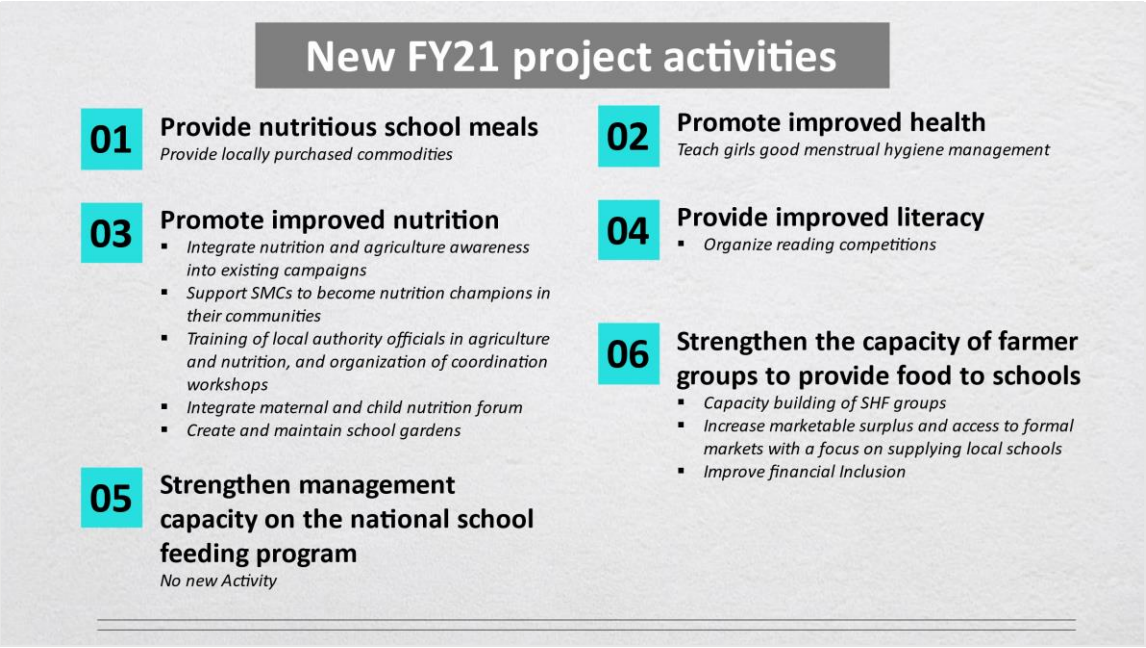
[50] FY21 McGovern-Dole school feeding programme Market Study Update Republic of Congo

of school feeding for all schools by 2024. The evaluation of the education system using the SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) tool has made it possible to define priorities, including the development of the national school feeding policy, which aims specifically at promoting the cognitive, intellectual, physical, mental and moral development of children through healthy school nutrition, balanced and based on local products.

53 The WFP's goal in the Congo is to end hunger in all its forms by 2030, and it plans to do so by bolstering local communities and the school feeding program will have the greatest impact on SDG 2: Ending hunger, as well as SDG 17: Building a global movement for good health, Education, gender equality, and climate action. By the end of the panned interventions, the expectation is that the WFP activities will have increased chances for the Congolese population to escape poverty and hunger in a sustainable manner, increase awareness of improved practices, and minimize gender imbalances and societal problems. The strategy's execution aids in realizing the 2030 United Nations SDGs, which call for improved justice, more stability, and stronger institutions.

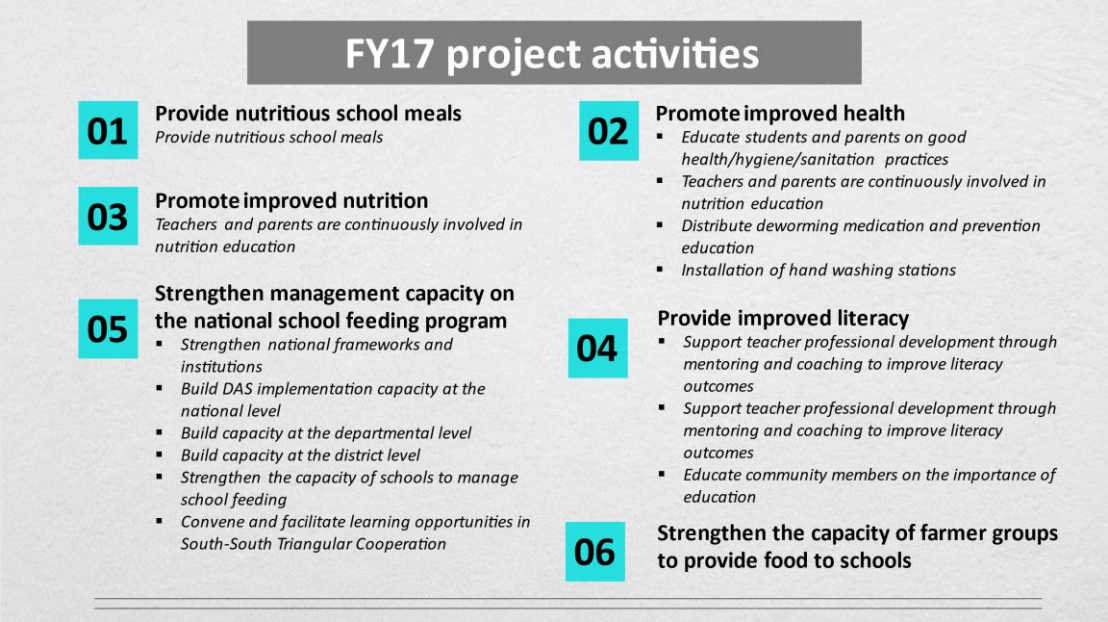
54 It is important to note that the McGovern-Dole FY21 project in Congo is the second award by the USDA to WFP (and fifth McGovern-Dole project overall) and builds on the FY17 project. WFP works in collaboration with UNICEF, CRS and UNESCO to deliver the project objectives. New activities incorporated in the McGovern-Dole FY21 are highlighted in italics in figure 1 and the previous FY17 activities which will be continued in the FY21 cycle are highlighted in figure 2.

Figure 1: New activities incorporated in the FY21 project.



Source: OAG

Figure 2: FY17 project activities



Source: OAG

2. Subject of the baseline, theory of change and baseline questions

2.1 Subject of the baseline, activities, intended outputs and outcomes; and theory of change

55 This baseline study focused on McGovern-Dole school feeding program WFP is implementing in the Republic of Congo from October 2021 to 30 September 2026 with US$ 25 million in funding from USDA. Two strategic objectives (SO) are sought by this project and contribute to the objectives of the school feeding program:

- ✓ Improve literacy among school-aged children (SO1);
- ✓ Improve health and dietary practices (SO2).

USDA also considers one more strategic objective of the project:

- ✓ Improve effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement (LRP SO1)

In accordance with the grant agreement between USDA-FAS and WFP, this school feeding project in Congo has the following specific objectives:

- Improve attentiveness, increase attendance, reduce dropout, and alleviate short term hunger of school children through the provision of school meals;
- Improve health and dietary practices through infrastructure improvements, as well as awareness and behavioural change strategies around health, nutrition and diet through school and community interventions;
- Improve literacy capabilities of pupils, the quality of literacy instruction, and enhance school leadership capacity;
- Strengthen capacity of Government and school communities to manage and implement a nutrition sensitive and holistic school feeding programme; and
- Support farmer groups to become reliable and sustainable suppliers of high-quality food commodities to local schools.

56 In line with the agreement between USDA-FAS and WFP, the main activities of the project include food distribution, promoting better health at school and near communities, promoting improved nutrition and feeding practices, supporting improved literacy, strengthening national school feeding capacities and building farmers' capacities to support local procurement of school meals. The details of the key activities of the program are elaborated in Annex 4.

57 Given the above, the project's **theory of change** (ToC) postulates several conditions under which the desired results would be achieved. These include the ability of the project to: 1) leverage the government's commitment to universal school feeding and support at the community level; 2) provide the right accompaniment through knowledge management and learning of the current McGovern-Dole FY17; 3) enable dynamic and strong partnerships at both the strategic and implementation levels; and 4) position innovation as a multiplier effect (using the program activities dashboard for evidence-based decisions at the management level, capacity building of teachers and integrated multisectoral programming for sustainability). The foregoing is expected to result in increased community and institutional capacity for the operation and management of the NSFP as well as improved literacy and the quality of education. These will result in children being better educated, better nourished and better prepared to achieve Congo's national development goals. In addition, it will translate into progress towards a sustainable and resilient national school feeding program, with significant benefits for education, nutrition, agriculture and local economic development.

58 Several critical assumptions underpin the ToC including i) continued government commitment to education, school feeding and handover as well as continued national economic and political stability; ii) stability of the food pipeline and sufficient agricultural production for local purchase

of non-USDA commodities; iii) availability of government resources and other donor contributions that complement USDA McGovern-Dole funding; and iv) sufficiently qualified personnel hired by the government in the intervening schools including teachers, cooks and storekeepers. A detailed illustration of the global ToC for WFP school-based programs is found in Annex 5 and the project-level results framework is displayed in Annex 6.

59 The design of the new program cycle took into account lessons learned from the previous cycle - lessons learned from the FY17 baseline and recommendations from the mid-term evaluation. For instance, the new program cycle places a strong emphasis on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) considerations with specific elements involving women in shaping school feeding policies, and empowering teachers to educate girls about menstrual hygiene management. These initiatives aim to bolster attendance and retention among girls in school. Furthermore, the cycle underscores the need to enhance the national school feeding program's management capacities through DAS, to prioritize imported foods, while also building farmers' capacity to supply schools and sustain productivity. Inclusivity remains paramount, with concerted efforts to better include autochthonous populations. No changes we were to the project design during the baseline phase. The geographic areas targeted by the McGovern-Dole project are visually depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Map of the Republic of Congo showing the project target areas

Source: WFP

2.2 Evaluation criteria and questions

60 This baseline purposes to establish situational analysis before the beginning of the McGovern-Dole program FY21 and to develop learnings on the most efficient approach to monitor the program based on the indicators in the PMP. As the first product of the three-phased evaluation, the baseline study has served several critical purposes. It has established baseline values for the indicators with which WFP will account for results achieved and resources utilized. It has determined if the targets are realistic in the PMP or if adjustments are needed. It has reflected on gender and other social components inequalities, thereby serving as an assessment start point to evaluate the capacity of the program in tackling them. The baseline study has also measured the literacy achievement of pupils in program schools and non-program schools[51] but did not assess WFP's accountability for literacy results.[52] The baseline findings will inform operational and strategic decision-making and adjustments that include any course correction measures by WFP and/or USDA.

Baseline Evaluation criteria

61 The baseline used the criteria of coverage, equity, and human rights. The ET integrated GEWE throughout the evaluation including in the analysis of all evaluation questions.

Baseline Evaluation questions

62 The baseline study answered the following key questions:

1. What are the baseline values for each indicator in the performance monitoring plan? Do the indicators reflect McGovern-Dole project's commitments on gender equality and social equity? Are the indicators appropriate for measuring the results of the program? Do the indicators require adjustment or do additional custom indicators need to be included?
2. Based on the stated objectives of the McGovern-Dole project, are the targets set for each indicator clear, realistic, and achievable considering the baseline? How is the theory of change / logic design aligned with the result framework?
3. What are the key success factors for efficient and effective M&E of the program? What are the enabling or hindering factors for effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme? What factors could impact on the reliability and accessibility of monitoring and evaluation data?
4. To what extent is the environment in the implementation area conducive to learning and child development for boys, girls and indigenous children? What factors make the environment more or less conducive to learning? To what extent is education considered important by parents and communities for both boys and girls?
5. To what extent are farmers, women's farmers cooperatives, traders, and other suppliers in the implementation area equipped (with skills, infrastructure, and inputs) and capable of providing a reliable and sustainable supply of high-quality food commodities to local schools? How are farmers and women's farmers cooperatives structured and organised?
6. To what extent are the Government and school communities equipped with the relevant skills and capacity to manage and implement a nutrition-sensitive and holistic National School Feeding Program (NSFP)? What are the current capacity gaps and strengths of the NSFP? What activities need to be undertaken to address the capacity gaps?

63 The evaluation questions reflect those in the ToR with some text added to mainstream gender and inclusion. Details of how the questions were addressed are found in the baseline study matrix in Annex 8._An additional matrix in Annex 21 provides a line of sight between baseline indicators and mid and endline questions.

[51] As per McGovern-Dole SO1

[52] As per WFP's School Feeding Policy WFP/EB.2/2013/4-C

2.3 Scope of the evaluation

Chronological scope

64 The overall evaluation will cover the period between October 2021 to June 2026 in three phases - Baseline, Midterm and Endline.

Thematic scope

65 Thematically, the baseline evaluation focused on the PMP and the indicators that will be used for monitoring and tracking results of activities that will be implemented to 1) Improve attentiveness, increase attendance, reduce dropout, and alleviate short term hunger of school children through the provision of school meals; 2) Improve health and dietary practices through infrastructure improvements, as well as awareness and behavioural change strategies around health, nutrition and diet through school and community interventions; 3) Improve literacy capabilities of pupils, the quality of literacy instruction, and enhance school leadership capacity; 4) Strengthen capacity of Government and school communities to manage and implement a nutrition sensitive and holistic NSFP; and 5) Support farmer groups to become reliable and sustainable suppliers of high-quality food commodities to local schools.

66 The baseline also focused on obtaining information regarding how to enable a successful M&E system; a conducive environment for learning and child development; and insights into capacity of government, school communities and SHF groups.

Geographical scope

67 The evaluation focused on the areas covered by the program- the rural areas of seven (7) departments of the Republic of Congo, namely, Bouenza, Cuvette, Lekoumou, Likouala, Plateaux, Sangha and Pool; and 354 focal primary schools in thirty-eight (38) districts in Congo.

68 This baseline also paid special attention to the situational analysis of autochone groups in Lekoumou, Likouala, Plateaux and Sangha.

69 There were no changes to the scope of the evaluation detailed in the ToR. However, primary data collection prioritized Likouala (since that was not done in the FY17 evaluation), and Cuvette was excluded due to logistical considerations.

Stakeholder analysis

70 This evaluation sought the views of, and will be useful to, a broad range of WFP internal and external stakeholders. A number of stakeholders played a role in the evaluation process in light of their expected interest in the results of the evaluation and relative power to influence the results of the program being evaluated. A comprehensive stakeholder analysis showing their detailed involvement and interests is found in Annex 14 while the detailed list of stakeholders interviewed at baseline is in Annex 17.

3. Evaluation methodology, limitations and ethical considerations

71 WFP decentralized evaluations must conform to WFP and UNEG ethical standards and norms. The contractors undertaking the evaluations are responsible for safeguarding and ensuring ethics at all stages of the evaluation cycle. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring fair recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups) and ensuring that the evaluation results in no harm to participants or their communities.

3.1 Methodological approach

72 Details of the methodological approach are presented in Annex 3 and a summarized version is presented below.

Overall Evaluation approach

73 The evaluation team followed a **participatory and consultative evaluation approach,** ensuring meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, especially girls and women and other vulnerable groups. We ensured through the **use of mixed methods** that women, girls, men and boys from different stakeholder's groups participated and that their different voices were heard and used. We believe that the participation of direct and indirect beneficiaries, especially women, and the autochone groups, has helped us enhance the transparency, validity, reliability and usability of the evaluation results. The evaluation explored gender equality with a multilevel approach, reviewing how the McGovern-Dole school feeding interventions have made practical and strategic considerations for women's and girls' needs. The evaluation team proactively engaged national and local experts, with a deliberate emphasis on ensuring female representation. This approach fostered a greater sense of security and willingness among women and girls in the community to actively participate in the research. Feedback was actively sought on the evaluation methodology and tools from the EMs and the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) for fine-tuning of the evaluation protocol at baseline.

74 Gender and age sensitive approaches were adopted in the design of data gathering and analysis tools, sampling for primary qualitative data collection, and developing ethical and safety measures (more details are in Gender, Equality and Women's Empowerment Analysis in Annex 2). With regards to the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[53] the evaluation team ensured adequate engagement of children and adolescents throughout the evaluation process.

Evaluation design

75 For the overall evaluation we will use a **quasi-experimental longitudinal panel design** which will track a cohort of schools and pupils in the program and in non-intervention areas over the project's life (2023-2026). The design has been developed to simulate a **'before and after'** approach and a **with /without** comparison.

76 This_baseline study has been used to create the **'before'** component. We carried out a cross-**sectional exploratory study using mixed methods.** These included school and student surveys, Focus group discussions (FGDs) with community men and women, girls and boys; and key informant interviews (KIIs) with WFP, government and other stakeholders. In order to get

[53] https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text

more insight into the situation in 2022, we reviewed available endline evaluation of the FY17 cycle and other data from program documents including the PMP.

77 A real **'with/without'** comparison of intervention areas versus non-intervention areas was also carried out in this baseline. The program monitoring data was used to sample intervention communities and schools as well as comparison schools.

78 We employed a **concurrent design** for the systematic use of **mixed methods**. The **qualitative** research component provided an understanding of relationships, trends, and patterns emerging from the quantitative component.

Baseline Evaluation methods

Quantitative methods

79 **School Survey** targeted beneficiary school children from sampled primary schools in the intervention districts, and school children from non-intervention districts to enable a comparison with non-beneficiaries of the program. The school survey comprised of student survey (with pupils at the second primary school class level) which included learning outcomes assessments and surveys of head teachers, school cooks and parent- teacher associations. Schools that were used at FY17 endline evaluation were excluded from the FY21 baseline (to avoid research fatigue) without introduction of any systematic error or bias.

Qualitative methods

80 **Desk review** was carried out on program documents including national and international literature; and documents from government ministries and has continued to inform different stages of the evaluation. Overall, the documents reviewed displayed a clear presentation of the objectives of the program and the underlying theory of change. The PMP indicators provided information on how progress towards the achievement of results will be measured.

81 **Key Informant Interviews** were used to collect in-depth information regarding the program from a wide variety of key stakeholders including WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO, CRS; governmental stakeholders at national, departmental and district levels; and a USDA program analyst.

82 Participatory **Focus Group Discussions** with school children (girls and boys); parents/caregivers (community men and women grouped separately to promote open and active participation); and farmers, traders, suppliers, community leaders, indigenous local authorities, farmers and school management committees and teachers were carried out to explore community level stakeholders' views on issues relating to the evaluation questions.

83 **Direct Observation** of classrooms and learning environments was carried out using a classroom observation tool to collect data.

Sampling

Quantitative sampling

84 A two-stage sampling design was used to determine the study sample. In the first stage, schools were selected and in the second stage pupils were drawn from the selected schools. The sampling frame for the schools was generated from the list of schools benefiting from the FY21 project's interventions. This list included the ORA schools and the schools with handwashing interventions. However, we first removed all the schools that were part of the FY17 endline evaluation sample from this list. The number of schools for the treatment group in each department was drawn systematically and independently with a probability proportional to the number of pupils in the department. Indigenous schools were systematically included. However, to avoid possible contamination between the intervention and comparison samples, the team ensured that a reasonable distance was observed between the schools of the two groups. In each selected school, the list of pupils in the second year of primary school formed the sampling frame for the pupils.

85 Two major factors were responsible for the sub-optimal response rates seen in tables 2 and 3: the data collection period and the teacher census, which was in progress at the time. The survey was carried out almost at the end of the school year, and the field teams found that some schools had already released their children. This release was accelerated by the teacher census, which compelled teachers to travel to the designated centres. The arrangements made to return teachers and pupils to their schools did not achieve the expected return rate, as in some cases long distances had to be travelled to and from the schools. This also explains why the number of cooks surveyed was low, as their presence in the schools is only justified by that of the pupils.

86 Since this evaluation involves estimation of changes in programme outcomes over time between treatment and comparison groups, we utilised the power calculation programming approach which provided estimates of how large samples needed to be in each of the study groups. Details of the sampling considerations and calculations for the baseline, midline and endline samples are included in Annex 3. Tables 2 and 3 display what was planned and achieved in the surveys of school children, directors, teachers, cooks, and PTAs in intervention and comparison areas respectively.

Table 2: Intervention Group – planned and achieved surveys by gender

INTERVENTION GROUP

Department	SCHOOLS	QUESTIONNAIRES																
	Number of schools Selected	School Observations	Class Observations	Directors			Teachers			Pupils			PTA			Cooks		
				F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
Bouenza	8	8	9	1	7	8	3	14	17	52	64	116	0	8	8	5	0	5
Lékoumou	10	10	14	4	6	10	4	13	17	78	81	159	2	10	12	6	1	7
Likouala	3	3	6	1	2	3	1	5	6	35	37	72	0	3	3	5	0	5
Plateaux	7	6	10	2	6	8	5	10	15	57	62	119	0	7	7	5	0	5
Pool	11	11	19	3	9	12	9	14	23	99	83	182	0	10	10	3	0	3
Sangha	5	5	10	1	4	5	5	5	10	46	52	98	0	4	4	0	0	10
Number of questionnaires expected		44	88	**44**			**88**			**1100**			**44**			**44**		
Number of questionnaires received		43	68	44			88			746			44			25		
Return rate		**97.8%**	**77.3%**	**100.0%**			**100.0%**			**67.8%**			**100.0%**			**56.8%**		

Table 3: Comparison Group – planned and achieved surveys by gender

COMPARISON GROUP

Department	SCHOOLS	QUESTIONNAIRES																
	Number of schools Selected	School Observations	Class Observations	Directors			Teachers			Pupils			PTA			Cooks		
				F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
Bouenza	8	8	8	1	7	8	4	10	14	69	75	144	0	8	8	3	0	3
Lékoumou	9	9	11	3	4	7	7	5	12	88	65	153	3	3	6	0	2	2
Likouala	3	3	8		4	4	3	5	8	24	35	59	0	4	4	0	0	0
Plateaux	7	8	4	1	5	6	2	8	10	43	41	84	0	4	4	0	0	0
Pool	9	9	13	1	7	8	3	12	15	57	62	119	0	6	6	0	0	0
Sangha	5	5	10	1	4	5	5	5	10	49	40	89	0	0	0	3	2	5
Number of questionnaires expected		41	82	**41**			**82**			**1025**			**41**			**41**		

Number of questionnaires received	42	54	38	69	648	28	5
Return rate	**100.0%**	**65.9%**	**92.7%**	**92.9%**	**63.2%**	**68.3%**	**12.2%**

87 **Qualitative sampling** was largely convenient and purposive and was employed for the selection of KII respondents and FGD participants. This was carried out using the criteria of gender, function, organization, and interaction with the McGovern-Dole project interventions. The selection of the respondents and participants was carried out in collaboration with project implementers and stakeholders as well as community mobilizers. Purposive sampling for the FGDs was carried out using the criteria of occupation, gender, age, marital status, location and vulnerability. This ensured that different groups in the program were represented and allowed for diversity of opinions. A total of 42 KII and 28 FGDs were conducted. The list of interviewees and focus groups are elaborated in Annexes 17 and 18.

3.2 Data collection

88 We enlisted the services of field researchers in Congo via local research organizations experienced in conducting school-based surveys - the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and PASEC. Training of field researchers and pre-testing of tools were carried out before data collection.

Quantitative data collection methods and tools

89 **Student Survey -** This consisted of primary data collection to measure learning outcomes of pupils/pupils. We assessed the abilities of the pupils on numeracy and literacy at baseline using student school-based assessment surveys {Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)} in order to measure their learning outcomes.

90 **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)** EGRA is an individually administered oral assessment of the most basic foundation skills for literacy acquisition in early grades. The assessment focuses on what it labels the ''three early stages of reading acquisition": emergent literacy (birth to grade 1), decoding (beginning grade 1) and confirmation and fluency (end of grade 1 to end of grade 3). The assessment requires about 15 minutes to administer per child. EGMA is a one-on-one oral assessment designed to measure a student's foundation skills in numeracy and mathematics in the early grades. The instrument was first developed by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International[54] EGMA measures essential early mathematical knowledge and skills that are foundational to more advanced mathematical abilities, prognostic of later achievement, and teachable. EGMA includes four cognitive subdomains to be assessed, accompanied by eight subtests. These subtests are Number Identification, Number Discrimination, Missing Number, Addition Level 1, Addition Level 2, Subtraction Level 1, Subtraction Level 2 and Word Problem. The EGRA and EGMA tools used in this evaluation are included in Annex 9.

91 **Survey of head teachers, school cooks and parent- teacher associations** was carried out using structured questionnaires in sampled schools across the focal districts to collect data on health and dietary practices, provision of school meals, literacy capabilities of pupils and school leadership capacity.

92 **Direct observations** were carried out via a classroom observation tool and checklists. The observations included the availability of school canteens/functionality of canteens, access to drinking water, presence of improved, separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls etc.

93 The quantitative data collection tools are displayed in Annex 9.

[54] RTI International, 2014

Qualitative data collection methods and tools

94 **Desk study and literature review -** were carried out on programme documents existing studies at national and district level and documents from government ministries: (organizational, country levels, etc) and UN agencies. More details are provided in Annex 3 and the bibliography in Annex 20 displays documents reviewed.

95 **Key Informant Interviews -** were carried out using topic guides. The questions were framed to elicit informed opinions from the internal and external stakeholders including those who have had leading roles in the program at WFP HQ, regional, country and program intervention locations.

96 **Focused Group Discussions –** using topic guides involved community women and men including autochone populations and farmer groups, school girls and boys teachers, purposively sampled with the support of country program staff, community gatekeepers, and mobilizers. Where possible FGDs were held separately for the different sexes to ensure women did not hesitate to discuss their views in front of men.

97 Qualitative data collection tools are displayed in Annexes 10-13

3.3 Data analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

98 INS collected the data using digital tools, which gave the ET the opportunity to instantly address issues relating to missing data while the team was still in the field. Data was processed after field work with the support of the INS, who followed up with respondents whenever possible. With regard to the data collected by PASEC, the ET simply considered the missing data as the cases where pupils did not record any marks, since this was a test, hence the score 0.

99 Descriptive and exploratory analysis were carried out using two software packages: SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Excel. Frequencies, central tendency characteristics, statistical tests and reduction of items in a dimension were calculated using SPSS. The statistical tests carried out were mainly Student's t-test, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and Pearson's chi 2 test. In addition, Excel was used to generate tables and construct graphs.

Measurement of Pupils Proficiency in Literacy and Numeracy

100 The EGRA/EGMA data was analysed using SPSS and Excel. The first step was to analyse children's performance by task for reading and mathematics in the intervention and comparison groups. These performances were disaggregated by department and by sex in order to gain a better understanding of the disparities. A synthetic indicator was then calculated for numeracy and literacy in both groups. The thresholds set made it possible to classify the children in three broad categories, namely the lower level, the average level and the higher level. A descriptive analysis was used to determine the percentage of children in each category for the two groups. Within the intervention and comparison groups, we also disaggregated this indicator by department, gender and ethnicity (indigenous and non-indigenous). A test of equality of means was carried out between various groups and sexes. The quantitative analysis of item responses and reliability tests are detailed in Annex 3.

Qualitative Analysis

101 FGD and SSIs (including KII) were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data was analyzed using Excel software. An inductive approach and open thematic coding were used. Transcripts were read and thematized by five qualitative assistants, using common themes and sub-themes according

to the evaluation matrix and topic guides Analysis was conducted iteratively by the qualitative experts using a three-pronged approach: "noticing, collecting, and thinking".[55].

102 **Gender, Equality and Women's Empowerment Analysis -** Data was sex-disaggregated and, subject to data availability, other drivers were taken into account, such as age, ethnicity, disability, displacement, etc. to inform a comprehensive gender analysis. The GEWE analysis aimed to understand the differences between women, men, boys and girls related to their social roles, division of labour, distribution of resources, decision-making abilities, opportunities, barriers and power relations. The GEWE relied both on secondary data (DHS, MICS, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) World Development Indicators (WDI) etc.) and on primary data. During primary data collection, the ET conducted a gender rapid assessment during field visits to gather evidence on gender-related attitudes, practices, stereotypes within school, households, and communities. The findings of the GEWE analysis are incorporated in all the answers to the evaluation questions.

3.4 Ethical considerations

103 Evaluations must conform to the 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines. Accordingly, the ET was responsible for safeguarding and ensuring ethics at all stages of the evaluation cycle. This includes, but was not limited to, ensuring informed consent, protecting privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, ensuring cultural sensitivity, respecting the autonomy of participants, ensuring fair recruitment of participants (including women and socially excluded groups) and ensuring that the evaluation results cause no harm to participants or their communities.

104 The evaluation adhered to UNEG's directive on Ethical Standards and was guided by standard good practice and professional interagency. Our ethical strategy included obtaining relevant government approvals, training for the field staff, obtaining informed consent from all participants, assuring participants' anonymity and confidentiality and ensuring that visual data is protected and used only for the agreed purposes, respect of applicable child protection laws while conducting FGDs with children, obtaining consent of parents/guardians. Informed consent forms used are displayed in Annexes 10 and 12.

105 The ET has demonstrated an understanding of ethical principles and standards defined by the UNEG in its reporting including ensuring **anonymity and confidentiality** of the people who provided information; integrity **and responsibility** by the ET regarding the contents of the report**;** and maintaining **our independence** with respect to the Mc-Govern Dole FY21 program.

106 In line with UNICEF's Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC) guidelines we considered ahead of fieldwork, any and all issues which may affect the children and adolescent respondents in the FGDs to ensure that all our work in the Congo is ethical and took the requirement to 'do no harm' to children and adolescents into account. We ensured all the research assistants and data collectors were trained to understand and implement the ERIC guidelines. More details on ethical considerations are in Annex 3

3.5 Limitations

107 Due to access difficulties in certain departments caused by heavy rainfall at the time of the survey, it was decided, with the agreement of the WFP, to exclude the Cuvette department, which presented the highest risk. In addition, the requirements of the local partners responsible for the data collection led the evaluation team, with the agreement of the WFP, to reduce the

[55] Seidel J.V Qualitative Data Analysis 1998 http://eer.engin.umich.edu/wpcontent/uploads/sites/443/2019/08/Seidel-Qualitative-Data-Analysis.pdf

number of schools to be surveyed from 224 to 85 for both groups. However, to avoid the reduction in the number of schools having a negative impact on the quality of the sample, the number of pupils to be surveyed was increased from 10 to 25 per school, for a total of 2,125 pupils to be surveyed. The rigorous selection of schools and pupils also reduced the effect of this reduction in the number of schools on the representativeness of the sample.

108 An important factor that also influenced data collection was the teacher census that took place during the survey period. It turned out that in some localities, schools were closed because teachers had travelled to the place indicated for the census. The only alternative to ensure teachers' participation in the survey was either to wait until the end of the census, or to provide transportation for them to and from the census site to their respective schools. Despite the logistical difficulties occasioned by this situation, the evaluation team released additional funds to enable the partners to organize transport for teachers from the census sites to their schools, so that they could collect the data and then return them to the census site once the collection was complete. The school principals, with the help of the presidents of the Parents' Association, facilitated the mobilization of the pupils.

109 As the presence of the cooks in the schools was justified by the presence of the pupils, it was not easy to mobilize them either, hence the low participation rate observed in both samples. The fact that this rate was particularly low in the control sample is simply explained by the fact that very few schools in this group offer meals to pupils. It was therefore difficult to have cooks in these schools.

3.6 Quality assurance

110 WFP has developed a Decentralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System (DEQAS) based on the UNEG norms and standards and good practice of the international evaluation community (the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) and the Development Assistance Commission (DAC)). It sets out process maps with in-built steps for quality assurance and templates for evaluation products. It also includes checklists for feedback on quality for each of the evaluation products. DEQAS was systematically applied during this evaluation and relevant documents have been provided to the evaluation team. OAG has followed the requirement of the DEQAS Quality Checklist for Evaluation to make sure the evaluation respects the UNEG Standard.

111 The evaluation team ensured that we maintained the principles of **independence** and **impartiality** in respect to the program under review, and that none of us have been or will be involved in its implementation or any other phase.

112 Additionally, we ensured validity, reliability and usability of the study findings by ensuring effective coordination and communication during field work; regular bi-weekly calls with WFP to discuss the status of the field work and evaluation. Training of the field team and pre-testing of tools by a small sample of potential respondents as well as the translation and back-translation of tools; audio-recording of qualitative interviews; and report writing consistent with the ToR requirements

113 We carried out **data triangulation** using a variety of data sources to corroborate findings. Primary quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated with data from desk review. We also conducted **methods triangulation** – using multiple methods to study the situation. Different methods worked better for some of the evaluation questions than others. For instance, in the assessment of quality of learning pupils' EGRA and EGMA provided a comparative advantage. More details on triangulation and overall quality assurance are in Annex 3.

4. Baseline findings

4.1 Baseline values, appropriateness and targets of the PMP indicators

PMP Indicator baseline values, their appropriateness and review of set targets

Q1A What are the baseline values for each indicator in the performance monitoring plan?

Q1B Are the indicators appropriate for measuring the results of the program?

Q2A Based on the stated objectives of the McGovern-Dole project, are the targets set for each indicator clear, realistic, and achievable considering the baseline?

114 In answering the Evaluation Questions 1A & B, we have also included Evaluation Question 2A to avoid repetitions because the questions are closely linked,

115 Overall, many of indicators are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound), in that they are understandable, easy to calculate, appropriate to measure the program results and are well aligned with the results framework. But some of them do not match the activity envisaged. There is thereby a risk of inconsistency between the activity reports and the indicators if the monitoring system is not rigorously developed to facilitate data collection directly linked to the selected indicators. Also, some of the indicators are redundant, and some are not realistic within the context or have been formulated in such a way that they will be difficult to measure. These are highlighted in subsequent sections.

116 It is also important to note that the late start of the FY21 project will affect the achievement of targets even those initially realistic within the timeframe of the project. Consequently, almost all the targets need to be adjusted. The project has three out of five years to deliver on its objectives and the PMP is structured to achieve targets in 5 years. In assessing the realistic nature of the targets, we have reviewed to see what can be accomplished within 3 years.

117 **A colour code has been included, either in relevant tables or within text**, to visualize the extent to which, according to the ET, adjustments should be made:

Indicator is appropriate/ baseline may require minor change		Indicator requires reformulation for clarity		Indicator baseline requires major change		The project should consider removing the indicator from the PMP		The indicator is not linked directly to the project's activities		The indicator yearly and/or overall targets should be adjusted	

Standard Indicator 1 - Percent of pupils who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text.

118 This is an outcome indicator and to be tracked at baseline, midline and endline by the ET. It is appropriate for tracking progress of second grade pupils' capacity to read and understand the meaning of grade level text. The indicator is SMART - measurable and achievable through the literacy activities that will be carried out as part of the program. It is easy to calculate as the denominator and numerator derived from the EGRA test are readily available.

119 The target indicated in the PMP for this indicator is 50% for girls and boys. This differs from the baseline values from the EGRA test in the school survey.

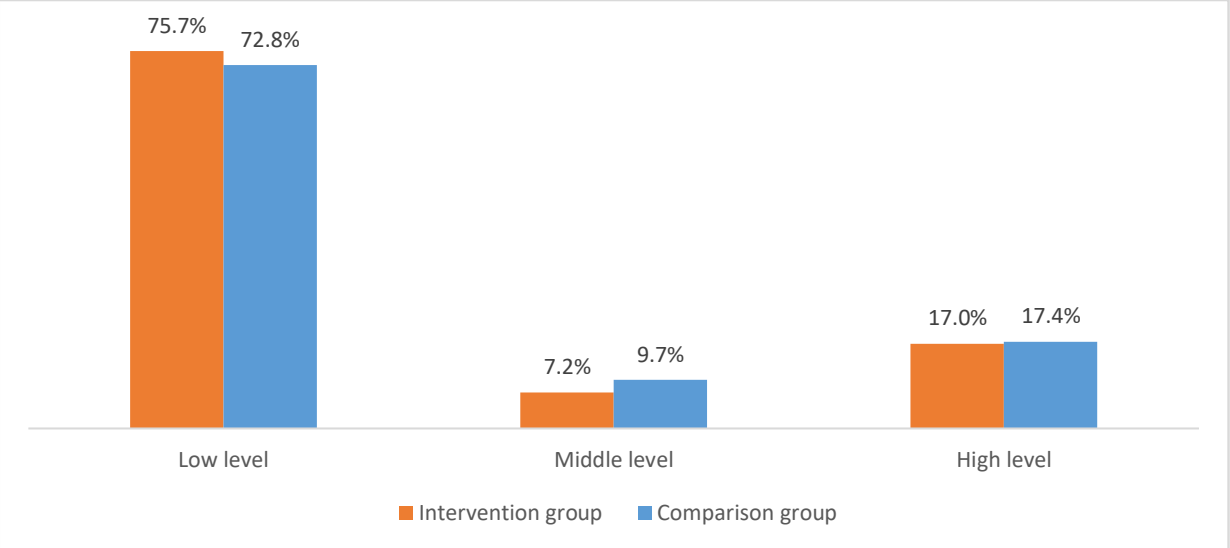
The analysis of the test carried out according to the EGRA method presents the basic values of approximately 36.5% of pupils in the intervention group against 33.1% in the comparison group who demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text. On the other hand, 63.5% for the experimental group and 66.9% for the control group failed to read a simple sentence fluently and answer the related questions. EGRA tests have been chosen for this evaluation because they are specific and clearly establish what is acquired by the learner and what is not within each task. EGRA tools have been used in the assessment of basic reading skills in Mali[56], the Democratic Republic of Congo[57], Haiti[58],etc. with the USAID support. All of these studies used the ability to read and understand text as the key indicator, as shown in this report. Table 4 presents the EGRA tests and content description.

Table 4: EGRA tests and content description

EGRA TESTS		CONTENT
T1	Identification of letter names/ sounds	Alphabetic knowledge
T2	Identification of syllables	Reading of syllables
T3	Familiar words	Recognition of written words
T4	Invented Words	Decoding Ability
T5	Reading and comprehension of text	Comprehension of written language
T6	Listening comprehension	Oral language comprehension

120 **The proportion of pupils who have acquired basic reading skills (24.3% and 27.2%) in intervention and comparison groups** respectively, as shown in figure 4. Over 74% of pupils (more in the intervention schools) still had difficulties with basic reading skills, as they cannot read fluently and understand what is read. Overall, there is no significant differences between pupils in the two groups, irrespective of performance level. When analysed by gender**, girls outperformed boys in the intervention schools** (**26.7%** girls; **21.9%** boys)[59] different from the pattern in the comparison schools (**26.1%** girls; **28.3%** boys) as displayed in figure 5.

Figure 4: Percentage of pupils with basic reading skills by group**



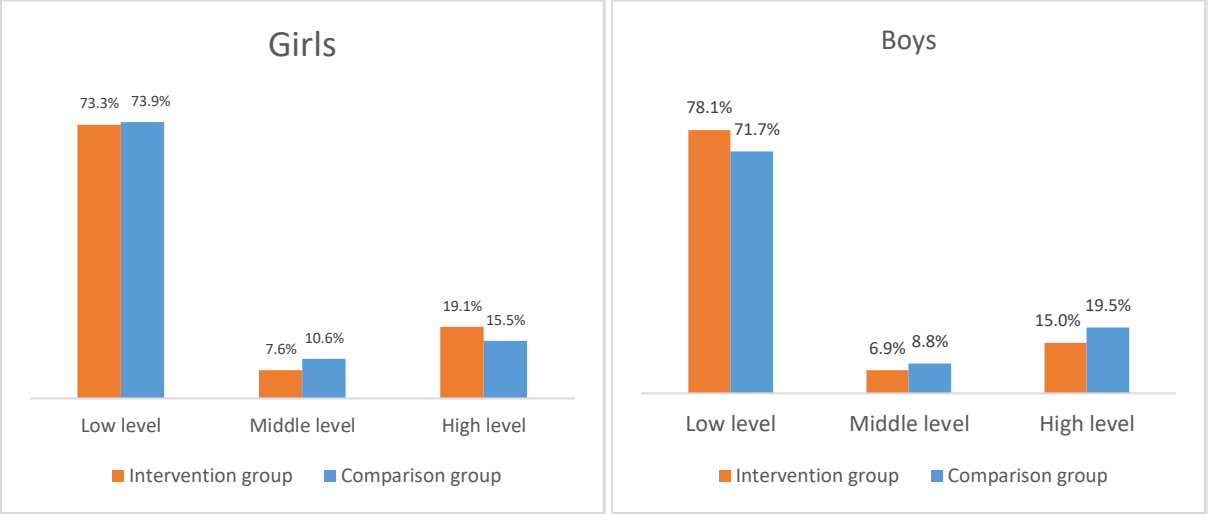
[56] Mali (.2019). Evaluation initiale des compétences fondamentales en lecture-écriture base sur l'utilisation de l'outil "EGRA" adapté au français et en arabe au Mali.

[57] République Démocratique du Congo (RDC, 2015). Services d'évaluation de l'éducation en République Démocratique du Congo.

[58] Haïti (2017). Rapport de l'évaluation de base EGRA. Projet Haïti Gagne, Lire, Ecrire et Réussir.

[59] Children with basic reading skills are those in the middle and high levels indicated in figure 4.

Figure 5: Percentage of pupils with basic reading skills by gender according to group



121 Table 5 shows that only **22.3% and 26.4% of the pupils in the intervention and comparison groups respectively succeeded task 1** "Identification of the letter SON". In task 2 "Syllable identification", the average performance is similar for the two groups. Approximately 34% of the pupils in the intervention group in Bouenza reached the performance required for this test- the best performance of all the departments, followed by pupils in Likouala (26%). Pupils in Plateaux had the lowest performance in task 2 (1.7% and 0.0% in intervention and comparison groups respectively). For tasks 3 "Identification of familiar words" and 4 "Simple decoding of non-words" the average performance of pupils in both groups was considerably low, with about 5% or less of the pupils reaching the minimum threshold of skills required on these tasks. Task 5 **"Reading and understanding passages" recorded about 36.5% and 33.1% of pupils who were able as said above to read and understand grade 2 text** in the intervention and comparison groups respectively. The comparison group in Likouala performed notably highly in this task (83%). More than half of the pupils in both groups succeeded task 6 "oral comprehension" with the best performance (85%) by pupils in the Pool intervention group and the least in Sangha intervention group (25%).

Table 5: Results of reading tasks by department and according to group

Departments	T 1		T 2		T3		T4		T 5		T 6	
	Int . group	Comp. group	Int . group	Comp. group	Int . group	Comp. group	Int . group	Comp. group	Int . group	Comp. group	Int . group	Comp. group
BOUENZA	36.1	29.6	33.8	20.5	20.0	4.1	3.8	3.2	21.1	16.8	52.2	42.4
LEKOUMOU	12.9	26.6	3.3	17.4	0.0	10.5	1.2	7.3	32.9	36.7	51.2	66.9
LIKOUALA	33.9	37.2	25.6	22.3	12.8	7.4	5.5	3.1	33.9	82.9	54.1	79.7
PLATEAUX	10.5	11.2	1.6	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.5	0.0	43.0	48.0	50.2	63.2
POOL	30.1	18.7	19.6	7.7	3.0	3.3	5.6	1.1	58.4	20.4	84.9	58.5
SANGHA	12.6	37.9	6.0	18.6	2.0	3.8	0.6	4.6	16.0	21.7	25.	46.5
TOTAL	**22.3**	**26.4**	**14.3**	**14.7**	**5.4**	**5.3**	**2.9**	**3.5**	**36.5**	**33.1**	**56.0**	**57.8**

122 It is pertinent to note that **according to UNICEF,[60] only a third of 10-year-olds globally are estimated to be able to read and understand a simple written story.** The rest, about two-

[60] UNICEF Available from URL: https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/press-releases/unicef-only-third-10-year-olds-globally-are-estimated-be-able-read-and-understand

thirds (64%) are unable to cover this marker for minimum proficiency in reading comprehension. This is an increase from 52% pre-pandemic. In September 2022, UNICEF warned of a global education crisis and a need for urgent action at the Transforming Education Summit during the UN General Assembly.[61] The Knowledge and Information Exchange (K) Observatory[62] report on learning assessments during COVID-19 in 2022 indicates that the Republic of Congo is one of the three countries in which, in the aftermath of the pandemic, more than half of pupils at the start of primary school were unable to read and calculate. Furthermore, the PASEC 2019[63] report revealed that 55% of pupils at the start of primary school in the 14 countries had difficulties with languages, compared to 29% in Mathematics. **This underscores the pertinence and the critical positioning of the McGovern-Dole FY21 literacy related interventions.**

123 **The ET suggests the adjusting of the targets for standard indicator 1** in consideration of the baseline values, in view of the contracted nature of the project life and to reflect current realities. Suggested target adjustments are detailed in table 6. It should be noted that more time would be needed to achieve significant changes in learning outcomes. A no-cost extension of the program life by at least one year may enable the appropriate interventions to generate more desired results. The targets have been set based on considerations of the global and regional trends, the attainment of the pupils at baseline, the context within which the schools are operating and how it compares to schools in similar circumstances.[64],[65]

Table 6: Suggested target adjustments - Standard Indicator 1

Standard indicator 1	**Percent of pupils who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text.**						
	Baseline	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Life of Project**
Girls basic reading skills	50%	50%	60%	70%	80%	80%	80%
Suggested Target adjustment	**26.7%**	**27%**	**28.5%**	**30%**			**30%**
Boys basic reading skills	50%	50%	60%	70%	80%	80%	80%
Suggested Target adjustment	**21.9%**	**22%**	**24%**	**25.5%**			**25.5%**
Major change							
Adjust target							

Standard Indicator 2 - Average student attendance rate in USDA supported classrooms/schools.

Appropriate /minor change | Adjust target

124 This is an outcome indicator. It is also important to note that while the attendance rate can easily be calculated, the average rate is more difficult and challenges the SMART requirements for this indicator within the context. However, this indicator is useful to track how many children attend school at a given time compared to how many could be (based on enrollment). Data on this indicator will be collected twice within each reporting period: October 1 – March 31 and April 1 – September 30 (i.e. 4 times in the year). Record aggregation of student attendance registers will be used to assess this indicator. The survey showed an average of 57 and 55 pupils per

[61] Ibid
[62] KIX Observatory Report on Reopening Schools in Africa During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Twists and Turns, April 2022.
[63] PASEC Report 2019. Quality Educational Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa Francophone. Performance and Environment of Teaching and Learning in Primary School. (Executive summary).
[64] Target Setting: Guidance for Primary Schools. Department of Education for Northern Ireland. Available from URL: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/target-setting-guidance-for-primary-schools.pdf

[65] Ian Bremner & David Cartwright (2004) Target setting in primary schools: The big squeeze, Education 3-13, 32:1, 4-8, DOI: 10.1080/03004270485200021

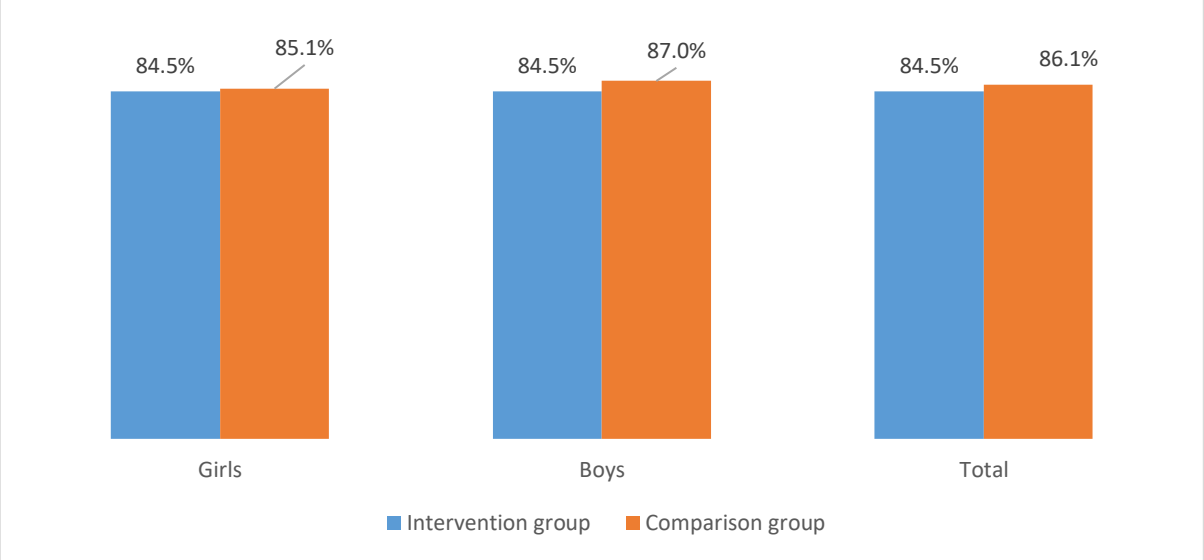
classroom in the intervention and comparison groups respectively. Likouala was the department with the highest number of pupils per class. The average proportion of pupils present in the class on the day of the test was 84% and 86% for the intervention and comparison groups respectively (see table 7). However, it is noted that USDA's indicator handbook[66] indicates that attendance should be measured over the years and should not reflect a single point in time. However, this kind of data is not available in Congo. Currently, the average student attendance rate is computed by dividing the average number of pupils attending throughout the school year by the number of pupils enrolled at the beginning of school year, multiplied by 100 to convert it to a percentage.

125 Based on the school survey, **the baseline value of 80% for girls and boys in the PMP is realistic for this indicator but can be revised slightly upwards** (see figure 6). From the PMP, the first-year target is still 80% then increases by 5% yearly. The target for the first year can be increased by 5% as well.

Table 7: Attendance rate in USDA supported classrooms/schools by department according to the group

Department	Intervention Group		Comparison group	
	number of pupils enrolled	number of pupils present on the day of the test	number of pupils enrolled	number of pupils present on the day of the test
Bouenza	2170	1608(74.1%)	2097	1748(83.4%)
Lekoumou	1708	1635(95.7%)	1628	1418(87.1%)
Likouala	1333	1221(91.6%)	2252	2134(94.8%)
Plateaux	1885	1657(87.9%)	1029	838(81.4%)
Pool	3029	2396(79.1%)	851	643(75.6%)
Sangha	1754	1518(86.6%)	1520	1292(85.0%)
Total	11879	10035(84.5%)	9377	8073(86.1%)

Figure 6: Attendance rate by gender according to the group



Standard indicator 3 - Number of teaching and learning materials provided as a result of USDA assistance.

[66] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019

126 This is an output indicator and the baseline is indicated as zero. This indicator is SMART and can be tracked easily by record aggregation of material distribution reports. In the school survey 6 out of the 44 intervention schools reported having 10 teaching materials and 3 out of the 41 comparison schools reported having 6 teaching materials as a result of USDA assistance. **None of the schools in the sample reported learning materials**. The project has a target of distributing 21,250 teaching materials and 63,750 learning materials in the intervention schools over five years. A more realistic target for the 3 years of the project cycle is displayed in table 8.

Table 8: Suggested target adjustment - standard indicator 3

Standard indicator 3	**Number of teaching and learning materials provided as a result of USDA assistance per type of material according to the group**						
	Baseline	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Life of Project**
Number of teaching materials provided (25%)	0	4.250	4.250	4.250	4.250	4.250	21.250
Suggested Target adjustment	**10**	**7.085**	**7.085**	**7.070**			21.250
Number of learning materials provided (75%)	0	12.750	12.750	12.750	12.750	12.750	63.750
Suggested Target adjustment	0	**21.250**	**21.250**	**21.250**			63.750
Appropriate							
Adjust target							

Standard indicator 4 - Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants in target schools who demonstrate use of new and quality teaching techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance.

127 This is an output indicator and the baseline is zero. Tracked by consolidated partners' activity reports. **This indicator is complex in that it takes into account two elements that can be difficult to measure, namely new techniques and quality.** It is important to first define the quality indicators that will be measured in order to make the assessment. Furthermore, the link with the project activity is not clear enough, as the activity aims to support teachers' professional development through mentoring and coaching in order to improve literacy results. New and quality teaching techniques within the context need to be defined. The indicator should be reworded to be better adapted to the activity and to help assess the change expected from the intervention. It is also important to clarify how this demonstration of use will be tracked by UNICEF and UNESCO – whether they will carry out classroom observations / teaching assessments (which would be a more reliable measure) or whether this activity will be self-reported by the teachers/educators/teaching assistants. The baseline values from the survey based on teachers' self-assessment is displayed in table 9.

Table 9: Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants who demonstrate use of new and quality techniques or tools (self-reported) as a result of USDA assistance by gender according to the group

Gender	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Female	21 (31.3%)	18 (33.3%)
Male	46 (68.7%)	36 (66.7%)
Total	67	54

128 In terms of targeting, the PMP indicates that the project will have 491 teachers/educators/teaching assistants (231 female; 260 male) who can demonstrate use of new and quality techniques by the first year. The project will then increase the target till 642 teachers/educators/teaching assistants are reached by the end of the project. Table 10 displays a more realistic progression based on the contracted project cycle.

Table 10: Suggested target adjustment - standard indicator 4

Standard indicator 4	Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants who demonstrate use of new and quality techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance by gender according to the group						
	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Life of Project
Female teachers	0	231	248	266	284	302	302
Suggested Target adjustment	**21**	**266**	**284**	**302**			302
Male teachers	0	260	280	300	320	340	340
Suggested Target adjustment	**46**	**300**	**320**	**340**			340
Clarify							
Adjust target							

Standard indicator 5 - Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance.

129 This is an output indicator and the baseline is indicated as 0. According to the Education Sector Strategy 2015-2025[67] "Of the 8,438 teachers in public education in 2011, civil servants and contractual were representing 49.7%. The other teachers (50.3%) were made up of volunteers, unpaid volunteers (mostly rural areas) and others who have not declared their status and diplomas". According to this nomenclature of the teaching staff, the ET did not see the category "teaching assistants" however information received from the CO indicates that these include volunteers. **The training target of 755 persons per year for the 354 focal schools is achievable since volunteers are involved.** In many schools visited during the survey, the ET noted two teachers for a full cycle of primary school. The survey baseline values are detailed in table 11. The proportion comparison test shows a significant difference between the two groups at a significance level of 5%. There was also a significant difference between the proportions of male and female teachers ($p<.05$ intervention group, $p<.05$ comparison group) who had undergone USDA-supported training/certification, irrespective of the group.

Table 11: Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance**

Gender	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Female	23 (31.1%)	19 (33.3%)
Male	51 (68.9%)	38 (66.7%)
Total	74	57

Standard indicator 6 - Number of school administrators and officials in target schools who demonstrate use of new techniques or tools as a result of USDA assistance. Clarify

130 This is an output indicator and the baseline is zero. The indicator is SMART and can be tracked via consolidated partners' activity reports. However**, it is not clear how this demonstration of use will be assessed by UNICEF and UNESCO -** whether through observations or if this activity will be self-reported by the school administrators and officials in the planned surveys. To appreciate the data for collection and the future evaluation, it would also be important to define the new techniques.

Standard indicator 7 - Number of school administrators and officials trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

[67] Stratégie sectorielle de l'éducation pour les années 2015 à 2025 de la République du Congo p.31

131 This is a SMART output indicator, with the baseline indicated as zero. The survey showed that a few administrators reported being trained or certified due to USDA assistance (table 12). School administrators or other education officials (public or private) are trained in aspects of their current positions, including areas such as finance, management (e.g. logistics, monitoring, personnel use and support), governance (e.g., legislation, communication, enforcement), infrastructure (e.g. building, supplies) or quality assurance for improving literacy skills.[68] **The project plans to train 1,463 administrators and officials (688 women and 755 men) yearly. This target is realistic and achievable.**

Table 12 : Number of school administrators and officials trained or certified as a result of USDA assistance by gender according the group

Gender	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Female	10 (33.3%)	**0 (0%)**
Male	20 (66.7%)	7 (100%)
Total	30	7

Standard indicator 8 - Number of educational facilities (i.e., school buildings, classrooms, kitchens, improved water sources, and latrines) rehabilitated/constructed as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

132 These are output indicators with baseline indicated in the PMP as zero. The indicator is SMART and can easily be collected from school records. The project aims to construct water systems and disability-inclusive latrines (Activity 2.1). For select schools not connected to a running water source, WFP will construct 35 water systems and rehabilitate water systems. WFP will install a water tank for water storage and work with the construction agency to train the school administration and teachers on water point maintenance. WFP will increase access to safe drinking water and sanitation services and adoption of key hygiene behaviors. WFP will construct or rehabilitate 60 disability-inclusive latrine buildings, with FAS funds, in select schools. Also, WFP will deliver and establish 300 handwashing stations to 125 schools.[69] The PMP indicates that no classrooms will be rehabilitated but plans to rehabilitate a total of 30 kitchen/cook areas (10 per year over 3 years). The baseline values from the survey are detailed in table 13. **The targets for this indicator will be achievable if the bulk of the construction is carried out in the next two years of the project (i.e. 2024 and 2025) .**

Table 13: Number of educational facilities rehabilitated/constructed as a result of USDA assistance per type according to the group

Type of educational facilities	Intervention Group	Comparison group
School building	NA	NA
classrooms	NA	NA
Improved water sources	4	1
School Fence	1	0
Latrines	12	3

Standard indicator 9 - Number of pupils enrolled in school receiving USDA assistance.

Appropriate

[68] USDA Indicator Handbook

[69] Attachment A Plan of Operation, McGovern-Dole Program FY 2021

133 The activity linked to this indicator relates to the provision of school meals and nutrients. The indicator is SMART. The target is the 65,000 pupils planned for the intervention.

Standard indicator 10 - Number of policies, regulations, or administrative procedures in each of the following stages of development as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

134 This is an output indicator and the baseline is zero. The first part of the indicator is refers to the number of policies, regulations or administrative procedures, and the indicator handbook details five stages of development to be measured. This indicator is disaggregated by two types of policies/ regulation/ administrative procedures: educational, and child health and nutrition. The indicator is SMART. The project targets to achieve one of the elements in both the education and health sector (2 in total) within the life of the project. **The target is realistic but is outside the control of WFP –** it is subject to the complexities in the political environment and the multifaceted adaptive system in which the school feeding program is positioned.

Standard indicator 11 - **Value of new United States Government (USG) commitments, and new public and private sector investments leveraged by USDA to support food security and nutrition**.

Clarify | Adjust target

135 This is a quantitative indicator but can be misinterpreted as qualitative because of the term 'value'. The disaggregation column shows that the value will be measured in USD, however it would improve clarity for the program monitors if it is clarified that the indicator refers to the **financial value** of new USG commitments, and new public and private sector investments leveraged by USDA to support food security and nutrition. The baseline of this output indicator is 0. **The target of US$ 1 million in three years within the context appears ambitious especially because a quarter of the amount is expected from the government.** There is weak political will regarding national school feeding and financial commitment by the government is low. Though there is a budget line in the education budget for school feeding, funding has not been disbursed for several years.

Standard indicator 12 - **Number of public-private partnerships formed as a result of USDA assistance.**

Not linked | Adjust target

136 This is not an explicit activity in the project's Plan of Operation and the PMP highlights the involvement of MoE, WFP, UNICEF, CRS. Also, there is no evidence of public-private partnerships on school feeding brokered in the past in Congo and the project documents do not articulate a strategy on how this will be achieved within the FY21 project cycle. **The target of five (5) public-private partnerships (PPP) within the first year does not appear realistic within the context and should be adjusted.** Several things challenge the development of PPPs including different organizational cultures and goals between the partners; poor institutional environment and support; weak political and legal frameworks; unreliable mechanisms for sharing risk and responsibility; inadequate procedures for the selection of PPP partners; inconsistency between resource inputs and quality; inadequate monitoring and evaluation of PPP processes; lack of transparency; and the inherent nature of PPPs.[70] Forming one (1) PPP within the three years of the project cycle would be a laudable achievement.

Standard indicator 13 - **Number of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) or similar "school" governance structures supported as a result of USDA assistance**.

Appropriate

[70] Batjargal, Temulin & Zhang, Mengzhong. (2021). Review of key challenges in public-private partnership implementation. Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development. 5. 1378. 10.24294/jipd. v5i2.1378.

137 **The latter aspect of this indicator may need to be standardized for clarity of the monitors** - to ensure that people in charge of the school reports understand what qualifies as a similar school governance structure. The school survey included school council as a similar governance structure (see table 14). The expectation is to support 354 of such structures in the project intervention schools. The target is realistic. USDA assistance enables capacity building of the PTA members.

Table 14: Number of school governance structures supported as a result of USDA assistance by type according to the group

Type of School governance structure supported	Intervention Group	Comparison group
School Council	26	0
PTA	20	3

Standard indicator 16 - Number of daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) provided to school-age children as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

138 This indicator is SMART and aims to measure the number of school meals given to school-age children. Only lunch is taken into consideration in the presentation of results (table 15) since only 3 out of the 41 intervention schools in the sample reported that they provide breakfast and 2 reported providing snacks. This indicator collects similar information with standard indicator 17 however, programme stakeholders noted the usefulness of triangulating both indicators. The indicator targets providing 11.7 million meals yearly to 65000 children. A no-cost extension would enable better leveraging of the total 58.5 million meals planned for a 5-year period for the children.

Table 15: Number of daily school meals (lunch) provided to school-age children in the treatment group by department

Department	Number of schools providing lunch	Number of daily lunch provided to school-age children as a result of USDA assistance
Bouenza	8	2197
Lékoumou	10	1361
Likouala	1	663
Plateaux	6	1349
Pool	6	2039
Sangha	5	1639
Total	**36**	**9248**

Standard indicator 17 - Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) provided as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

139 This is an output indicator and the baseline is indicated as zero but because we have intervention schools from the FY17 project cycle, the baseline needs to be adjusted (see table 16). The school survey displays the baseline from the intervention group. The target of 65,000 school-age children is achievable though the project is contracted.

Table 16: Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals in the intervention group by gender

Number of school-age children receiving daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) provided as a result of USDA assistance.	Intervention Group	target number of school-age children to receive daily school meals
Number of girls receiving daily school meals	**4,331 (46.83%)**	**27,375 (42.1%)**
Number of boys receiving daily school meals	**4,917 (53.16%)**	**37,625 (57.9%)**
Total number of children receiving school meals	**9,248**	**6,5000**

Standard indicator 18 - Number of social assistance beneficiaries participating in productive safety nets as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

140 This is a SMART output indicator with the baseline of zero. According to the USDA indicator handbook,[71] three kinds of activities can provide the foundation for a "productive safety net" program. These are: Activities which strengthen community assets (e.g., public works); Activities which strengthen human assets (e.g., school feeding, maternal and child health visits such as prenatal and well-baby visits); and/or Activities which strengthen household assets (e.g., take-home rations). The first two elements (community and human assets) relate to the project. The target is the 65,000 pupils whom the FY21 project intends to reach in the first year. The target is appropriate and achievable.

Standard indicator 19 - Number of individuals who demonstrate use of new child health and nutrition practices as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

141 This is a SMART outcome indicator though the rationale for targeting 232 individuals was not explicated. The PMP indicates that this indicator measures the number of people in target communities trained in child health and nutrition and notes and that this is a sentinel indicator for project theory of change: people trained shared nutrition and health information through communities. WFP's partners will provide technical assistance and deliver nutrition education trainings. One teacher representative from each school will attend WFP/UNICEF-led refresher trainings at model "Green Schools" focused on identifying successes and challenges related to school nutrition and school gardens. WFP will deliver trainings to pupils and teachers on nutrition-sensitive agriculture principles and the importance of a balanced diet including regular consumption of vegetables and fruit, using and adapting where possible existing in-country materials from government and partners. To engage parents on nutrition education, WFP will organize annual nutrition-focused Parents' Days at district levels with teachers, parent committees, and student groups.

Standard indicator 20 - Number of individuals who demonstrate use of new safe food preparation and storage practices as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate Adjust target

142 This is an outcome indicator. The PMP states that the data will be used to assess the change in safe food preparation and storage practices at schools. The USDA indicator handbook[72] notes that this indicator measures the total number of individuals who are applying the new knowledge and skills received in USDA-supported training and certification programs. Food

[71] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019. Available at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_indicator_handbook_feb_2019_0.pdf

[72] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019. Available at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_indicator_handbook_feb_2019_0.pdf (p. 100).

preparation is conducted mainly by school children's mothers and other women in the community, while the school directors, in collaboration with the SMC members, manage the school's food storage. The assumption is that most individuals trained in safe food preparation are female, while the individuals trained in food storage are male. However, the rationale for targeting 40% females and 60% males in the PMP is not clear. The PTA in the survey reported on this indicator and the findings in the intervention group (table 17) does not support the gender proportionality of the PMP target**. Furthermore, actual figures reported under the FY17 project evaluation displays men as 53% and women as 47%. A target of 50% females and 50% males may be more appropriate** taking all the elements into account.

Table 17: Number of individuals who reported use of new safe food preparation and storage practices as a result of USDA assistance.

Gender	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Female	**119 (76.3%)**	6 (28.6%)
Male	37 (23.7%)	15 (71.4%)
Total	156	21

Standard indicator 21 - Percent of participants of community-level nutrition interventions who practice promoted infant and young child feeding behaviours.

Remove

143 This is an outcome indicator and the baseline is 0%. However, the USDA indicator handbook notes that this indicator is directly linked to the McGovern-Dole output indicator 25 (FtF HL.9-2)**.** *Number of children under two (0-23 months) reached with community-level nutrition interventions through USDA-supported programs. It is only applicable to projects for which indicator 25 is also applicable.*[73] Therefore, this is not a relevant indicator for the McGovern-Dole FY21 school feeding program. **The ET suggests removal of this indicator.**

Standard indicator 22 - **Number of individuals trained in safe food preparation and storage as a result of USDA assistance.**

Appropriate

144 This capacity building indicator prioritizes male individuals (see table 18). USAID-Food Assistance and Indicators and Definitions Guidelines indicates that this indicator should include "health professionals, primary health care workers, community health workers, cooks, school personnel, volunteers, or other non-health personnel". [74] Indicator 20 and 22 are linked - the number of individuals who demonstrate the use of new safe food preparation and storage are measured after indicator 22 is measured. It should be noted that this is a composite indicator (food preparation and storage) and involves both the cooks, school directors and PTA. This explains the gender targeting of the indicator though the main individuals expected to be directly involved in food preparation and storage are cooks (mostly female). **In the school-based survey 90% of the cooks in the sample were female**. However, it is noted that most directors are male. **The project should confirm the gender targeting of this indicator to ensure that it reflects the reality of the schools and promotes women's empowerment.**

Table 18: Number of individuals trained in safe food preparation and storage as a result of USDA assistance.

Performance Indicator	Type of Indicator	Dissagregation

[73] Ibid (p.101)
[74] Ibid (p. 103).

Number of individuals trained in safe food preparation and storage as a result of USDA assistance	Standard Indicator 22	Total
		Female (40%)
		Male (60%)

Standard indicator 23 - Number of individuals trained in child health and nutrition as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

145 This is an output indicator with the baseline indicated as zero in the PMP. The indicator is SMART. The USDA indicator handbook states that *this indicator measures the number of health professionals or others trained or certified in child health and nutrition directly as a result of USDA funding in whole or in part.* Since health professionals are not a core target group of the project, the ET tried to gain insight into this indicator in the school survey by investigating the number of persons in the PTA who had been trained on the child health and nutrition practices as a result of USDA assistance. Table 19 displays the baseline values. **The project target of 174 females (60%) and 116 males (40%) within the life of the FY21 project is realistic.**

Table 19: Number of individuals trained in new child health and nutrition practices as a result of USDA assistance.

Gender	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Female	70 (68%)	9 (69.2%)
Male	33 (32%)	4 (30.8%)
Total	103	13

There is no standard indicator 24-26 in the PMP

Standard indicator 27 - Number of schools using an improved water source.

Appropriate

146 This is a SMART output indicator. According to the USDA indicator handbook, this indicator measures the total number of project schools that have an improved water source and not only those supported by USDA.[75] The school survey shows that only few schools have improved water sources (see table 20).

Table 20: Number of schools using an improved water source by department and according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group	Total
Bouenza	0	3	3
Lékoumou	1	0	1
Likouala	0	0	0
Plateaux	1	0	1
Pool	1	0	1
Sangha	3	0	3
Total	**6**	**3**	**9**

147 91 improved water sources were supposed to be constructed within 5 years of the project life, to be tracked through consolidated partner reports, thereby implying that WFP aims to achieve this in collaboration with partners. WASH infrastructure is poor, and an inventory is being discussed by WFP with the Ministry of Hydrology, CRS and UNICEF. **The target of 91 improved**

[75] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019. Available at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_indicator_handbook_feb_2019_0.pdf

water sources can be achieved within the next three (3) years (2023 -2026) instead of the original five as planned but this depends on fiscal and logistical realities some of which are outside the control of WFP. However, it is noted that the possibility of a no-cost extension exists and can be leveraged.

Standard indicator 28 - Number of schools with improved sanitation facilities. Appropriate

148 Similar to the previous WASH infrastructure related indicator (SI 27), the school survey shows that this baseline can be adjusted (see table 21). This activity intended to all school children without distinction of sex is conducted by the WHO in coordination with the government and WFP provide the logistic if needed. **The target of construction of 79 improved sanitation facilities can be achieved within the next 3 years instead of original five (2021 -2026) as planned.**

Table 21: Number of schools with improved sanitation facilities by department according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group	Total
Bouenza	2	2	4
Lékoumou	6	3	9
Likouala	2	1	3
Plateaux	3	0	3
Pool	3	2	5
Sangha	3	3	6
Total	**19**	**11**	**30**

Standard indicator 29 - Number of pupils receiving deworming medication(s).

Appropriate

149 This is an output indicator with baseline indicated as zero in the PMP. This indicator is SMART and according to WFP program stakeholders, will be disaggregated by sex at the point of reporting – this would be useful to track gender equality. The activity is ongoing in both intervention and comparison schools and the baseline needs to be adjusted as shown in table 22. The project targets the 65,000 school age children yearly, which is appropriate. WHO provided deworming tablets and WFP provided transport services to ensure that schoolchildren receive deworming medication.[76] Significantly more pupils in the intervention group (11,069) received deworming medications compared to those (8262) in the comparison group ($p<.05$).

Table 22: Number of pupils receiving deworming medications by department according to group and gender

Division	Intervention Group			Comparison group		
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
Bouenza	964	1,238	2,228	806	1,069	1,949
Lékoumou	616	748	1,741	725	758	1,622
Likouala	330	333	663	999	1,125	2,247
Plateaux	904	1,008	1,961	370	400	774
Pool	1,503	1,438	2,945	330	332	662
Sangha	702	799	1,531	552	449	1,008

[76] WFP, Congo Annual Country Report 2021

Total	**5,019**	**5,564**	**11,069**	**3,782**	**4,133**	**8,262**

Standard indicator 30 - Number of individuals participating in USDA food security programs.

Appropriate

150 This is an output indicator measuring the number of individuals directly participating in USDA-funded interventions, including those reached directly and those reached as part of a deliberate service strategy, as well as, those participating in the markets strengthened by USDA.[77] According the USDA handbook, individuals should not be double counted. The PMP identifies different categories of people to be reached yearly: the 65,000 school-aged children who are recipients of USG school feeding programs; 1,423 community members participating in USDA food training; 360 Farmers group members participating in USDA LRP; and 1463 Teachers, administrators, government personnel, participating in USDA training. The rationale for the choice of 1423 community members is not clear. However, the yearly targets for the different categories are appropriate.

Standard indicator 31 - Number of individuals benefiting indirectly from USDA-funded interventions.

Appropriate

151 This is an output indicator measuring the number of individuals indirectly benefitting from USDA-funded interventions. The individuals will not be directly engaged with a project activity or come into direct contact with a set of interventions (goods or services) provided by the project. This may include, for example, family members of pupils receiving school meals.[78] WFP uses estimates of the average family size of five members in Congo as a proxy measure to calculate the target for this indicator. **A target of 300,000 individuals is realistic considering the average family size and the potential for spontaneous spillover to neighbours** (though this has to be clearly documented through spot surveys or similar means).[79]

Standard indicator 32 - Number of schools reached as a result of USDA assistance.

Remove

152 This indicator does not seem to add much value. 354 schools have been chosen for the interventions and it is expected to be 354 from the first year to the end of the program. **This indicator is already tracked by various preceding indicators. It can be removed.**

153 The six Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP) Indicators in the PMP are reviewed in table 23 below.

Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP) Indicators

Table 23: Review of LRP indicators

Performance Indicator	Aim	Comments

[77] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019. Available at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_indicator_handbook_feb_2019_0.pdf pg.61

[78] Ibid pg. 129

[79] USDA. Food Assistance Indicators and Definitions. February 2019. Available at: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_indicator_handbook_feb_2019_0.pdf pg.129

LRP 5 **Cost of commodity** procured as a result of USDA assistance (by commodity and source country) Appropriate Adjust target	To measure the LRP program's impacts on the local or regional market in the country or region receiving USDA assistance. This measurement also helps track access to markets and availability of commodities in the beneficiary areas	A total amount of 1.164.449 USD is planned to be spent on vegetable oil, beans and cassava flour both locally and externally procured in USD. This indicator is appropriate and can be measured easily. **In terms of target, commodities procurement needs to be adjusted** from across five years to three years and this requires logistical planning and supply chain considerations.
LRP 6 **Quantity of commodity** (MT) procured as a result of USDA assistance (by commodity and source country) Appropriate	To measure the quantity in metric tonnes (MT) of procured commodities at the local and regional level provided to direct beneficiaries and is an indication of the availability of local foods for those beneficiaries receiving USDA assistance.	Tracks the volume of vegetable oil, beans and cassava flour procured locally. Targets procuring 157, 458 and 287 MT (respectively) by commodity by the end of the project life. Achievable and measurable.
LRP 7 **Value of annual sales** of farms and firms receiving USDA assistance. Appropriate Adjust target	To measure the value in U.S. dollars of the total amount of sales of products and services by USDA-assisted farms and firms during the reporting year within USDA-supported agricultural commodity value chains or markets	Measurable in USD. The indicator targets value of annual sales of vegetable oil, beans and cassava flour of 73,600 USD; 203,020 USD; and 48,750 USD (respectively) by commodity, yearly, from the third year of project life. There is no planned sales for the first year of implementation and some sales are expected from the second year, though not up to the yearly targets. The targets for the annual sales of the SHF receiving USDA assistance, displayed in the PMP, can be adjusted upwards to accommodate the contraction of the project life from five to three years. **A no-cost extension of the project** would enable the targeting in the PMP to remain the same.
LRP 8 **Volume of commodities** sold by farms and firms receiving USDA assistance. Clarify	To measure the value in U.S. dollars of the total amount of sales of products and services by USDA-assisted farms and firms during the reporting year within USDA-supported agricultural commodity value chains or markets.	The variables and targets are exactly the same as LRP 6. The indicator definition refers to volume of commodities (similar to LR6) but the measurement definition refers to value in USD (similar to LRP 7). **The indicator measurement definition should be rephrased to align with the definition in the USDA indicator handbook.**
LRP 11 **Number of individuals** who have received short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training as a result of USDA assistance. Appropriate	To measure the number of individuals to whom significant knowledge or skills have been imparted through interactions that are intentional, structured, and purposed for imparting knowledge or skills should be counted as received training, through formal or informal means.	Targets training 299 women (83%) and 61 (17%) men on a yearly basis over five years. **Yearly training targets can be maintained over 3 years**.

LRP 12 **Number of individuals in the agriculture system** who have applied improved management practices or technologies with the USDA assistance. Clarify	To measures the total number of agriculture system actors participating in USDA-funded activities who have applied improved management practices and/or technologies promoted by USDA anywhere within the food and agriculture system during the reporting year	**This indicator is multi-layered and would be difficult to measure reliably within the context.** First, the improved management practices and technologies promoted by USDA anywhere within the food and agricultural system needs to be specified. Then, the parameters that determine if these practices and technologies have been applied should be clarified; after which the number of individuals in the agricultural system that meet the requirements can be counted. **The ET suggests simplifying this indicator specifically for the Congo context.**

Custom Indicators

Custom indicator 1 - Number of meals provided that include fruits, vegetables, legumes and/or animal source proteins in addition to the donated US commodity.

Remove

154 There is some ambiguity in this indicator – it aims to address LRP 1.3 focused on improved utilization of nutritious and culturally acceptable foods that meet quality standards but the measurement of this indicator would be tedious, time consuming and may not add much value. **The ET recommends removal of this indicator also in view of the information that can be obtained from Custom indicator 2.**

Custom indicator 2 - Number of school-aged children who receive 5 or more meals per week that include fruits, vegetables, and/or animal source proteins in addition to US commodities.

Appropriate

155 This indicator can be used to provide the insight sought for in Custom indicator 1. It targets the 65,000 focal pupils but the specificity of the number of meals and the temporal consideration make it more measurable.

Custom indicator 3 - Number of school gardens established and maintained.

156 This indicator is linked to *Activity 3.6 Establish and maintain school gardens:* WFP will provide school garden inputs to 100 Model schools, or Green Schools. WFP will establish and promote selected school gardens, to be used as learning platforms for nutrition and environmental education for primary school children. The baseline is indicated as zero and indeed very few schools have gardens (see table 24). The target for this indicator needs to be adjusted to accommodate the contracted project life (table 25).

Table 24: Number of school gardens established and maintained

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	**2**	0
Lékoumou	0	**1**
Likouala	0	**1**
Plateaux	0	**1**
Pool	0	0
Sangha	0	0
Total	**2**	**3**

Table 25: Suggested yearly target adjustment - custom indicator 3

Custom indicator 3	Number of school gardens established and maintained						
	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Life of Project
Target in PMP	0	20	20	20	20	20	100
Suggested Target adjustment	**2**	**35**	**35**	**30**			100
Appropriate							
Adjust target							

Custom indicator 4 - Number of pupils benefiting from the establishment and maintenance of school gardens.

Appropriate

157 This indicator aims to measure community engagement through a number of pupils benefiting from the establishment and maintenance of school gardens. According to the Plan of Operation document,[80] to increase parent and student engagement in garden activities, WFP will work with school to organize Nutrition Oversight Committees (NOCs) made up of selected members from the school community. The baseline is indicated as zero. The PMP expects that a total of 12084 boys and 9116 girls would benefit from the 100 school gardens. The rationale for these numbers and the reason why the school gardens are supposed to benefit more boys (57%) than girls (43%) is not detailed.

Custom indicator 5 - Average nutritional adequacy of pupils

Remove

158 This indicator is poorly formulated and is not SMART. The PMP states that the indicator aims "To improve the take on health and nutritional practices." There is no clarity about what is to be measured. The unit of measurement is indicated as percentage but the numerator and denominator are not detailed. The USDA Monitoring and Evaluation policy noted the importance of the objectivity of indicators – "the indicator should be precise and unambiguous about what is being measured and how. There should be no doubt on how to measure or interpret the indicator."[81] **The ET suggests that this indicator be removed.**

Custom indicator 6 - Number of pupils participating in reading competitions facilitated as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate

159 This is a SMART output indicator. The baseline is indicated as zero but the school survey indicates that some pupils have already participated in this activity (see table 26) more in the intervention schools (84) than in the comparison schools (10). The activity is targeted at the same number (5310) of girls and boys yearly – a total of 10620 pupils yearly. The McGovern-Dole FY21 Plan of Operation indicates that WFP will support schools to organize reading competitions for primary grade learners where children will compete to read grade level texts. If the reading competitions are held in all the 354 schools, to reach the number of 10620 yearly involves 30 pupils per school yearly – an achievable target. From a practical point of view, the

[80] Attachment A Plan of Operation McGovern-Dole Program FY 2021

[81] USDA Monitoring and Evaluation policy. Foreign Agricultural Service – Food Assistance Division United States Department of Agriculture. February 2019.

reading competitions should be ongoing, but one challenge should not be too long. A series of challenges could work better than one long challenge throughout the year.[82]

Table 26: Number of pupils participating in reading competitions facilitated as a result of USDA assistance.

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	0	0
Lékoumou	0	0
Likouala	0	0
Plateaux	0	0
Pool	24	10
Sangha	60	0
Total	84	10

Custom indicator 7- Number of WASH committees established at schools

Appropriate

160 Activity 2.5 notes that, WFP will establish and support the functioning of WASH committees in selected schools made up of teachers and community members. The project has an achievable target of establishing 38 WASH committees within the project life. The school survey baseline values are detailed in table 27.

Table 27: Number of wash committees established at schools by department according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	2	4
Lékoumou	2	1
Likouala	0	0
Plateaux	2	3
Pool	1	3
Sangha	5	0
Total	12	11

Custom indicator 8- Number of female pupils trained on good menstrual hygiene practices.

161 *This* indicator *is linked to Activity 2.3 Teaching girls on good menstrual hygiene management (MHM):* WFP will use FAS funds to leverage the girls' sanitary rooms as safe spaces to display MHM messaging and resources while also equipping female teachers to teach girls about MHM and nutrition education. The survey baseline values are detailed in table 28. The project targets a total of 46,875 girls but the yearly target needs to be adjusted (see table 29).

Table 28: Number of female pupils trained on good menstrual hygiene practices by department according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	47	0
Lékoumou	47	4
Likouala	25	0
Plateaux	70	0
Pool	78	21
Sangha	272	116

[82] National Literacy Trust. Reading challenges: How to design and run them to make them work. A review of literature and survey findings. National Literacy Trust UK. 2020

Total	539	141

Table 29: Suggested target adjustment - custom indicator 8

Custom indicator 8	Number of female pupils trained on good menstrual hygiene practices.						
	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Life of Project
Target in PMP	0	9,375	9,375	9,375	9,375	9,375	46,875
Suggested Target adjustment	**539**	**15,625**	**15,625**	**15,625**			46,875
Appropriate							
Adjust target							

Custom indicator 9- Number of Information Education and Communication (IEC) hygiene materials distributed.

Remove

162 This indicator, although SMART, is not directly related to any project activity in the Plan of Operation. According to the PMP, this indicator aims to understand how the IEC materials contribute to awareness raising and changing health behaviour. Measuring the number of IEC materials distributed would not enable this aim to be achieved. Custom indicator 10 is a better proxy for assessing effectiveness of sharing the materials. **The ET suggests that this indicator be removed.**

Custom indicator 10 - Number of pupils reached with health and hygiene messages as a result of USDA assistance.

Appropriate Adjust target

163 This is an output indicator, SMART, and the baseline is zero. The project targets 60,000 pupils yearly. The rationale for this number is not clear given that there are 65000 pupils targeted by the program.

Custom indicator 11 - Number of parents trained as part of School Feeding Committees

Appropriate

Custom indicator 12 - Number of parents trained as part of School Procurement Committees

Appropriate

164 These are SMART output indicators. The survey showed baseline values for the latter (table 30). The PMP targets for both indicators of training a total of 3540 parents over the project life is realistic and can be accomplished within three years.

Table 30: Number of parents trained as part of School Procurement Committees by department

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	13	1
Lékoumou	25	3

Likouala	2	10
Plateaux	9	0
Pool	11	2
Sangha	16	0
Grand Total	76	16

Custom indicator 13 - Number of pupils benefiting from newly constructed/rehabilitated latrines

Appropriate

Custom indicator 14- Number of pupils benefiting from newly constructed or enhanced water systems.

Appropriate

165 Custom indicators 13 & 14 are also SMART output indicators. From the survey only 605 pupils in the intervention group were benefiting from enhanced water systems compared to 333 pupils in the comparison group (table 31). The targets for both indicators (10810 and 7336 pupils within the project cycle) are achievable in view of the activities of **standard indicators 27 and 28**.

Table 31: Pupils benefiting from newly constructed water supply systems

Division	Intervention Group			Comparison group		
	girls	boys	total	girls	boys	total
Bouenza	1	1	2	0	0	0
Lékoumou	119	131	250	0	0	0
Likouala	0	0	0	64	64	128
Plateaux	126	152	278	0	0	0
Pool	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sangha	35	40	75	107	98	205
Total	281	324	605	171	162	333

Custom indicator 15- Number of Government staff trained at national level

Appropriate

Custom indicator 16- Number of Government staff trained at district level

Appropriate

166 These two are SMART output indicators with baseline of zero. They can easily be documented from training reports. However, there may be need to disaggregate who the government staff are – school directors, monitoring and evaluation officers, health professionals, school inspectors etc. The program targets training 28 government staff at national level and 747 staff at district levels on a yearly basis.

Custom indicator 23 Number of nutrition-focused clubs established by School General Assembly Committee (SGAC) members

Appropriate

167 SMART output indicator with baseline of zero. The survey showed clubs already established in the two groups (table 32). The target of 190 within three years seems realistic.

Table 32: Number of nutrition-focused clubs established by SGAC members by department according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	0	1
Lékoumou	5	3
Likouala	2	11
Plateaux	12	2
Pool	3	0
Sangha	0	0
Total	22	17

Custom indicator 24- Number of nutrition-focused educational materials distributed

Appropriate

168 SMART Output indicator with baseline as zero. The survey baseline is shown in table 33. The yearly target of 17,000 materials distributed is achievable.

Table 33: Number of nutrition-focused educational materials distributed by department according to group

Department	Intervention Group	Comparison group
Bouenza	0	1
Lékoumou	10	4
Likouala	167	625
Plateaux	8	0
Pool	0	0
Sangha	500	0
Total	685	630

Custom indicator 25- Number of pupils benefiting from Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) training

Clarify

169 This indicator needs to be reformulated as the parents benefit directly from SILC training not the pupils. The pupils are expected to benefit indirectly through their parents' participation. The evaluation team proposes that the custom indicator be reformulated as *"number of parents / caregivers benefiting from Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) training."*

170 It is important to note that though financial inclusion is a new addition in the FY21 project, there is no standard or custom indicator linked to it and hence no baseline nor targets set. This means that tracking progress of financial inclusion may not be possible in the project.

171 **Considering that the stakeholder interviews highlighted the difficulties in monitoring the number of indicators (28 standard and 8 custom indicators) in the FY17 project** due to the increased workload it created, it is important to review the number of indicators in the FY21 **(27 standard, 6 LRP and 26 custom indicators)** significantly downwards. Some of the custom indicators are not directly linked to the project activities or are linked at a very micro level. The

added value of monitoring these indicators would likely be outweighed by the inefficiencies that may be introduced into the M&E system by over-burdening it with non-critical indicators**.** As a result of the foregoing, **the ET recommends that the Country Office should critically review the indicators in table 34 with a view of removing them**. Also, an important issue to note for the consideration of the WFP stakeholders is that no standard or custom indicator specifically measures the nutritional status of children.

Table 34: Custom indicators for critical review

Q1C Do the indicators reflect McGovern-Dole project's commitments on gender equality and social equity?

Indicator	Description	
Custom +indicator 17	Number of District School Feeding Steering Committee meetings supported	Remove
Custom indicator 18	Number of National School Feeding Technical Working Groups meetings supported	Remove
Custom indicator 19	Number of pupils who participated in school internal class competitions on nutrition	Remove
Custom indicator 20	Number of nutrition focused Parents' Day Implemented at schools	Remove
Custom indicator 21	Number of maternal and child nutrition community events in which GHI shared nutrition and agriculture messaging	Remove
Custom indicator 22	Number of cooking demonstration sessions conducted during maternal and child nutrition events	Remove
Custom indicator 26	Number technical working groups and district coordination meetings in which GHI shared lessons learned from the project and Maternal and Child Nutrition integration	Remove

172 **McGovern-Dole FY21 has carefully selected and designed gender-sensitive indicators that will enable the assessment of the project's interventions' impact on various target groups**. These indicators focus on measuring improvements in school attendance, literacy, and nutrition status for girls and boys. Additionally, they aim to assess the project's impact on women and men in school and local communities, specifically in terms of enhancing their knowledge in teaching, WASH, nutrition and dietary practices, and agriculture.

173 **Nonetheless**, **McGovern-Dole FY21 lacks important equity-focused indicators** that take into account significant social components that differentiate contexts, needs, and obstacles among the diverse target population. For example, **the project does not consider indicators related to ethnicity, which would enable measuring its impact on autochone populations.** Place of school location (rural or urban) is also not taking into account in the indicators. In developing indicators related to autochone populations, it is important to ensure that the context related to absenteeism of autochone pupils due to social events in their communities is considered. Likewise, it is important to note critical periods of their group life (collecting mushrooms, caterpillars, harvesting on plantations, etc.)

174 **Most indicators are adequately disaggregated by sex**. Not only indicators targeting pupils are disaggregated, but the McGovern-Dole FY21 design was also careful in disaggregating by sex other target public such as parents, teachers, school staff, farmers and community-based organization participants. In addition, **the percentage of targeted women, men, boys and girls is mostly appropriate**. LRP Indicators 11 and 12, which focus on capacity building for agricultural, food security, and management practices, specifically prioritize women farmers as the main beneficiaries (83%). **However, some indicators prioritize male individuals even though the realities on ground are different** (e.g., standard indicator 22).

175 **There are some indicators that have not been disaggregated by sex** (see table 35). However, WFP programme stakeholders indicated that **disaggregation by sex will occur at the point of reporting for those indicators**. By ensuring the sex-disaggregation of relevant indicators,

McGovern-Dole FY21 would enhance its capacity to assess the extent to which the intervention has supported GEWE.

Table 35: Some indicators with targets not disaggregated by sex

Performance Indicator	Type of Indicator
Percent of participants of community-level nutrition interventions who practice promoted infant and young child feeding behaviors	Standard Indicator 21
Number of pupils receiving deworming medication(s)	Standard Indicator 29
Number of individuals benefiting indirectly from USDA-funded interventions	Standard Indicator 31
Number of pupils reached with health and hygiene messages as a result of USDA assistance	Custom Indicator 10
Number of parents trained as part of School Feeding Committees	Custom Indicator 11
Number of parents trained as part of school Procurement Committees	Custom Indicator 12
Number of pupils benefiting from newly constructed/rehabilitated latrines	Custom Indicator 13
Number of pupils benefiting from newly constructed or enhanced water systems	Custom Indicator 14
Number of Government staff trained at national level	Custom Indicator 15
Number of Government staff trained at district level	Custom Indicator 16
Number of pupils benefiting from SILC training	Custom Indicator 25

176 **By incorporating capacity building for MHM practices into the framework, McGovern-Dole FY21 demonstrates its commitment to promoting girls' school attendance and attainment**. However, it is important to note that the number of female pupils targeted accounts for approximately one third (9.375 girls - approximately 34%) of the total number of girls targeted in the intervention (27300 girls). It is assumed that this is the proportion expected to be at puberty within the overall group but it is not clear if this is supported by evidence.

177 **Furthermore, a gender-sensitive approach to WASH should include the provision or construction of female-exclusive sanitary rooms**. While Standard Indicator 28 (number of schools with improved sanitation facilities) is not explicitly clear about gender-separated sanitary rooms, the USAID-Food Assistance and Indicators and Definitions Guidelines (p.115) state that "the school must have separate improved sanitation facilities available for the use of both males and females" to be considered adequate for this indicator. To ensure clarity and inclusivity, it would be beneficial to specifically include the construction of female-exclusive sanitary rooms in the corresponding activity (2.1 - construction of water systems and construction of disability-inclusive latrines).

178 **Overall, reducing the number of indicators would improve monitoring efficiency**. Several suggestions have been made in the previous section with specific reasons, on indicators that should be adjusted or removed. The ET does not recommend additional custom indicators rather that the number should be trimmed down.

Q1D Do the indicators require adjustment or do additional custom indicators need to be included?

Key Findings and Conclusions – Question 1

1. **Overall, many of indicators are SMART** in that they are understandable, easy to calculate, time-bound, appropriate to measure the program results and are well aligned with the results framework. However, some of them do not match the activity envisaged thereby introducing a risk of inconsistency between the activity reports and the indicators if the monitoring system is not rigorously developed to facilitate data collection directly linked to the selected indicators. Some of the indicators are redundant, and some are not realistic within the context or have been formulated in such a way that they will be difficult to measure.
2. Considering that stakeholders in the key informant interviews highlighted the difficulties in monitoring the **(28 standard and 8 custom) indicators in the McGovern-Dole FY17 project** due to the workload it created, it is important to review the number of indicators in the **McGovern-Dole FY21 (27 standard, 6 LRP and 26 custom indicators)** significantly downwards. Some of the custom indicators are not directly linked to the project activities or are linked at a very micro level. The added value of monitoring those indicators would likely be outweighed by the inefficiencies that may be introduced into the M&E system by over-burdening it with non-critical indicators.
3. Overall, **McGovern-Dole FY21 has carefully selected and designed gender-sensitive indicators** that will enable the assessment of the project's interventions' impact on various target groups. Nonetheless, **the project lacks important equity-focused indicators** that take into account significant social components that differentiate contexts, needs, and obstacles among the diverse target populations. For example, the project does not consider indicators related to ethnicity, which would enable measuring its impact on autochone populations. Place of school location (rural or urban) is also not taken into account in the indicators. Though the project is primarily focused on rural areas, some of the intervention schools are located in urban or peri-urban areas and these differences should be kept in view.
4. Baseline values of the indicators frequently differed from that in the PMP but without much consequence. **A variation of importance relates to Standard Indicator 1** - the PMP indicated a baseline of 50% for girls and boys *who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text,* but the survey sample displayed lower proficiency in reading, with girls significantly outperforming the boys (p=0.05). The baseline values for the project intervention schools are **26.7%** girls; **21.9%** boys

4.2 Alignment of the program theory with the results framework

Q2B How is the theory of change / logic design aligned with the result framework?

Alignment of the program theory with the results framework

179 Though the FY21 program does not yet have an illustrated theory of change (ToC), it is well aligned with the WFP global ToC for school feeding programs, and the program logic is clearly articulated in the results framework.

180 The results framework uses evidence-based principles in the design of the project and the critical assumptions of the ToC are clearly outlined. **The logic of the ToC illustrated in the results framework is structurally sound and plausible with linkages showing the pathway of achievement of outcomes**. The plausibility of the elements highlighted in the results framework is largely supported by evidence of the stakeholders' common understanding of the program objectives in the key informant interviews, and in part due to the level of integration of the programme across other sectors including health, WASH and Agriculture.

181 The interventions highlighted in the results framework consider different stakeholders' needs and interests as well as long-term results by the improved capacity building efforts articulated in the results framework, aimed at creating a potential for sustainability.

182 The ToC has appropriate linkages across various elements and variables. However, **in a few cases, the linkages are too linear and do not adequately reflect the complexity presented by the context and the inter-relationships between some variables and issues.** For example, increased engagement with community is not linked with strengthened local capacity of local actors but both are inter-related elements. Additionally, increased meaningful engagement with community would also influence increased market participation of SHFs with diversified products given the intra-community dynamics that exists within the context.

183 The **framework has a gender perspective which explicitly targets boys, girls, children in vulnerability and women farmers.** Taking into account that the gender parity index for gross enrollment ratio in primary level of education is 0,97[83], it is comprehensible not to have a specific intervention target at tackling gender inequity. Nonetheless, the fact that the gender parity index for gross enrollment ratio is lower in secondary school (0,92)[84], which means a tendency of a gender gap widening, an intervention target in girls could contribute to halt this gender inequity in school enrollment rates. **McGovern-Dole FY21 could tackle the expected gender gap widening in girls' school retention by adding to community-based activities** (4.3 Sensitize Community Members on the Importance of Education), social behaviour change approach to discriminatory gender norms and practices.

184 In terms on equity, rural and ORA schools are amongst intervention schools, which indicates that autochthonous and rural children are included within the beneficiaries. Nonetheless, as mentioned in the section on EQ1, **indicators do not track either rural or the autochone populations specifically;** and they are not specified in the results framework, though there is mention of 'girls and boys especially those that are vulnerable' in the ToC. However, specifically tailoring the project design and interventions to the autochone populations, is crucial due to their unique cultural values, social norms, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities that distinguish them from the Bantu population. Recognizing and acknowledging the specific needs and challenges faced by autochthonous children is vital in designing interventions and initiatives that are culturally sensitive and effectively address their distinct circumstances. Reflecting this in the ToC, the results framework and the monitoring indicators is important to display understanding of their cultural context, and would result in interventions that can better support and empower autochthonous children, promoting inclusivity and equitable outcomes.

[83] World Bank. School enrollment, primary (gross), gender parity index (GPI) - Congo, Rep. (2018).

[84] World Bank. School enrollment, secondary (gross), gender parity index (GPI) - Congo, Rep. (2018).

185 Furthermore, to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of the ToC and the results framework, it would be advantageous to provide greater clarity on how women farmers are reflected in the program. **While the ToC acknowledges women as a target population, it only mentions them at the impact level.** Explicit details within the ToC that outlines how interventions and initiatives will directly address the needs and challenges faced by women farmers would be beneficial given that there is evidence of commitment of McGovern-Dole FY21 to enhancing women farmers' capacities and promoting local women's empowerment.

Key findings and Conclusions – Question 2

1. **The late start of the FY21 project will affect the achievement of targets even those initially realistic within the timeframe of the project**. The project currently has three years to deliver on activities initially planned to be achieved over five years. Some targets also require alteration due to the survey baseline values (e.g., standard indicator 1).
2. Though the FY21 program does not yet have an illustrated theory of change (ToC), it is well aligned with the WFP global ToC for school feeding programs, and the program logic is clearly articulated in the results framework.
3. The results framework uses evidence-based principles in the design of the project and the critical assumptions of the ToC are clearly outlined. **The logic of the ToC illustrated in the results framework is structurally sound and plausible with linkages showing the pathway of achievement of outcomes.** The plausibility of the ToC is largely supported by evidence of the stakeholders' common understanding of the program objectives in the key informant interviews, and in part due to the level of integration of the programme across other sectors including health, WASH and Agriculture.
4. **The ToC has a gender perspective which explicitly targets boys, girls, children in vulnerability and women farmers. However, rural and autochone populations are not specified**. To enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of the ToC, it would be advantageous to provide greater clarity on how women farmers are reflected in the program – while the ToC acknowledges women as a target population, it only mentions them at the impact level.

4.3 The monitoring and evaluation system

Q3A What are the key success factors for efficient and effective M&E of the program?

Key success factors for efficient and effective M&E of the program

186 A comprehensive review of literature identified five key determinants of effective monitoring and evaluation system as budgetary allocation for M&E,[85],[86] data quality,[87],[88] technical capacity of the M&E team or department,[89] leadership and monitoring and evaluation information

[85] Kamau, C.G., Mohamed, H.B.: Efficacy of monitoring and evaluation function in achieving project success in Kenya: a conceptual framework. Sci. J. Bus. Manag. 3(3), 82 (2015)

[86] Mugambi, F., Kanda, E.: Determinants of effective monitoring and evaluation of strategy implementation of community-based projects. Int. J. Innov. Res. Dev. 2(11), 67–73 (2013). ISSN 2278-0211

[87] Gudda, P.: A Guide to Project Monitoring & Evaluation. AuthorHouse, Bloomington (2011) 21.

[88] Ile, I.U., Eresia-Eke, C., Allen-Ile, C.: Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies, Programmes and Projects. Van Schaik, Pretoria (2012)

[89] Mulandi, N.M.: Factors influencing performance of monitoring and evaluation systems of non-governmental organizations in governance: a case of Nairobi, Kenya. University of Nairobi (2013)

system (MEIS).[90] Several of those factors were identified from the desk review and key informant interviews as fundamental to the success of the McGovern-Dole FY21 program. They include:

187 The use of a monitoring information system – **the existence of a program monitoring dashboard** was recognised as a strength of the M&E system. Consolidated data from all schools is available from the dashboard on a monthly basis.

188 Comprehensive information is collected regularly, despite the geographical accessibility difficulties of some schools. The M&E system aims to provide **comprehensive and relevant data that supports decision making.** In the system put in place, the school produces two main types of report, namely the monthly report and the quarterly report. Two data collection systems were identified: a collection of paper-based activity reports (daily inventory management record and monthly distribution report) and a collection of digital activity reports. For the system to function properly, it would be useful for these reports to be prepared on time and according to an appropriate canvas mastered by all the actors concerned.

189 It is recognised that achievement of **data quality** requires automation of the M&E process and the utilization of information technology systems.[91] Data quality was recognised in this baseline as enhanced by the use of the program monitoring dashboard and by capacity building of relevant stakeholders.

190 In terms of **technical capacity and leadership**, Government staff are responsible for collecting information through its decentralized structures such as the education inspectorates, the SAS, the DDEPPSA and the DAS. Their commitment in the collection and reporting of data was described by stakeholders as critical for success.

191 Within the schools, management committees are in place to ensure the proper functioning of the canteens, including a pupils' representative who is involved in measuring the pupils' daily ration. This aspect enables **tracking of activities at a more micro level**.

192 **Capacity building of all the actors** including organization of seminars by WFP to sensitize inspectors was noted as necessary and imperative.

Q3B What are the enabling or hindering factors for effective monitoring and evaluation of the program?

193 The success of the program depends in part on the effectiveness and efficiency of the monitoring and evaluation system that will be put in place. It is based both on a mechanism for collecting and reporting data, the capacity of stakeholders to play their role properly, and on the ability to document the various indicators on the basis of available data.[92] Thus, a number of factors can facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of the programme's monitoring and evaluation system.

Factors that hinder the effective monitoring and evaluation of the program

194 With regard to the factors that impede the M&E of the program, the interviews with stakeholders highlighted several issues including:

195 **Insufficient capacity of stakeholders (school principals, DAS officials)** to understand their role and to play them appropriately in the implementation of the programme, including the delay in transmitting monthly canteen monitoring reports to WFP. Indeed, several actors in the interviews stressed the fact that the delay in the transmission of monthly school canteen

[90] Tengan, Callistus & Aigbavboa, Clinton & Thwala, Wellington. (2019). Conceptual Description of the Key Determinants of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation System. 10.1007/978-3-319-93882-0_12.

[91] Tengan, Callistus & Aigbavboa, Clinton & Thwala, Wellington. (2019). Conceptual Description of the Key Determinants of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation System. 10.1007/978-3-319-93882-0_12.

[92] OECD, Kusek, Jody Zall– Ten steps to a results-based monitoring and evaluation system: a handbook for development practitioners 1952. ISBN 0-8213-5823-5

management reports limits the possibility of having certain monitoring indicators available on time to make decisions.

196 Interviews and the desk review also indicate that **currently, the dashboard is not fully used as a tool for implementing the program as originally designed**. Therefore, there is a need to improve communication and information sharing between different stakeholders. Similarly, it is important for WFP to provide feedback to inspectors.

197 The dashboard was designed to measure only indicators directly related to the implementation of school feeding. These include indicators on enrolment and attendance of girls and boys in schools, and school meals received. WASH and literacy indicators are not measured via the dashboard. As such, **better collaboration with UNICEF and UNESCO could help create a synergy of data on WASH, literacy and other activities.**

198 In view of the fact that the monthly and quarterly reports must be produced in five copies by the school principal, this may constitute an additional burden since the directly responsible staff often do not have additional administrative staff to assist them in carrying out their activities. Indeed, **according to some key informants, the number of indicators in program present a difficult workload**. For some actors interviewed, reducing the number of indicators would improve the effectiveness of monitoring.

199 On the technological front, key informant interviews noted that android tablets with the Open Data Kits application are used for data collection and reporting. As such, the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation system also depends on the matrix of these tools used by all stakeholders, and their capacities. **In most program areas, technical and logistical difficulties contribute to delays in data collection and reporting.** Additionally, it was noted that the majority of DAS staff have a teaching background and **few skills adapted to the computerized monitoring of the school feeding program,** the dashboard is mainly managed by WFP M&E staff as a result, to evade the risk of errors. Also, there is lack of experience of the DAS in the management of school feeding because the roles and responsibilities of the different staff within the direction are not clear and there is no knowledge management system in place.

200 **Though data is disaggregated by sex, data is not really analyzed to inform gender sensitive programming.** Factors that hinder the M&E system from achieving its gender sensitive and equity objectives is the lack of disaggregation by ethnicity and the difficulty in reaching women in some communities.

201 To ensure effective monitoring and evaluation, it is crucial that the data collected by the government is properly disaggregated by sex as is already the case to a large extent. This is a positive step towards improving the understanding of gender dynamics and evaluating the impact of interventions on different population groups:

> *"The question of gender with us at the Direction de l'Alimentation Scolaire is taken into account. Even the results are in the tablet there it is defined like this: number of admitted: girls, boys; dropouts: girls, boys. And even I spoke to you about our direction, the Direction of School Food, how many women, how many men, we follow it very well."* **Government Stakeholder- Department of School Food (DAS)**

202 **However, there is currently no evidence to suggest that data will be disaggregated by ethnicity, which would be crucial to improve monitoring of the autochone population and** understanding of the specific impact of interventions on them. Additionally, during the fieldwork conducted for this evaluation, researchers encountered challenges in reaching out to women in

those communities. These difficulties in engagement hinder the comprehensive assessment of the interventions' effectiveness and the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

203 Interviews with stakeholders also show that **the level of commitment of the academic, SAS, DDEPPSA and DAS inspectorates in collecting and communicating information is crucial for success.** However, capacity-building needs were identified during data collection especially in view of occupational mobility within different public administrations and institutions, including beneficiary schools. For instance, some trained actors such as the DAS representatives at departmental level and inspectors do not usually ensure a transfer of competence to their subordinates, resulting in a gap once there is attrition from those positions.

Factors that enable the effective monitoring and evaluation of the program

204 With regard to the factors that can facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme, stakeholders in the interviews reported that **WFP's awareness-raising of stakeholders has made it possible to provide information on the indicators to be informed in order to facilitate their appropriation.** In addition, the organization of regular meetings with WFP was mentioned as a means of helping to facilitate the proper functioning of the monitoring and evaluation system, as the difficulties encountered find solutions and corrective measures immediately within these consultation frameworks. **These meetings also allow a rapid escalation of problems to the appropriate function within the system,** if they are held regularly and if a mechanism for escalating difficulties is effectively functional. However, if these actions are only carried out at the central level, field actors who are directly involved in data collection and the production of monthly and quarterly reports face difficulties.

205 The **program monitoring dashboard as already noted is a key factor** in setting up an effective M&E system. For all those involved in monitoring and evaluation, it reports on the set of data to be mobilized in the context of monitoring and evaluation and allows them to know what the workload is to have useful information to document them.

206 **A strengthening of the monitoring system is recommended by the stakeholders in the key informant interviews** to ensure its effectiveness in responding to problems encountered, and in decision-making. Currently, the dashboard is not acting as a program implementation tool as it was originally designed. There is need for better communication and sharing of information between different stakeholders; also, it is important for WFP to provide feedback to the inspectors. Data is used for decision-making internally – to manage the performance of the program, however, it would be strategic to share data more broadly also.

Q3C What factors could impact on the reliability and accessibility of monitoring and evaluation data?

Factors that could impact the reliability and accessibility of M&E data

207 The reliability of monitoring data could be determined by the effectiveness and regularity of field missions and regular review of management reports. Given the experience of key actors in implementing interventions during the **McGovern-Dole FY17, lessons learned can help overcome challenges to facilitate the reliability of monitoring and evaluation data**. Overall, interviews with stakeholders indicate that they have knowledge of the indicators and data to be collected, although capacity-building needs have been expressed to ensure that they have good ownership of the process. Some of the actors in the interviews who were involved in collection of data in the FY17 program reported some redundancies in certain indicators - a situation which creates misunderstandings on their part and can have an impact on the quality of the data collected. From this point of view, clarity and precision in the formulation of all indicators would ensure the reliability and accessibility of the data.

208 **Staff changes in some departments may lead to capacity-building needs** to ensure reliability and regularity in data collection insofar as those actors who enter the process do not always have the good knowledge of the programme and the role expected of them in the context of monitoring and evaluation. As such, capacity building should be organised on an ongoing basis by considering different methods such as formative supervision, coaching or mentoring in the workplace to ensure the effective application of the knowledge acquired by key actors. These capacity-building sessions at the school level should be held regularly and as often as possible. They should involve more actors to ensure the correct filling of tools and the timely transmission of data. The DAS officer at the departmental level could assume this role if he or she has sufficient capacity from WFP to manage and monitor the school feeding programme. As such, it is important to engage the government through intense advocacy activities, regarding maintaining trained staff in schools and partner structures to take advantage of the benefits of the training that will be carried out in the McGovern-Dole FY21.

209 **The use of data should be systematic in capacity building** to better assess the situation by all actors at different levels and to take corrective action in time. It is also a way to strengthen the motivation of managers by knowing their performance. In order to motivate actors, a performance-based motivation system should be considered. However, partners should also work together to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation system is uniform and standardized. To assess the impact of the school nutrition programme on pupils, it was suggested that the nutritional status of children could be considered before and after the programme intervention.

210 Furthermore, **it is particularly important to improve the monitoring and evaluation capacity of the SAS.** In addition, continued involvement and devolution of education inspectors in their work would help the M&E system to function better. Though the SAS are paid salary, they do not receive transport allowances and sometimes because of this, they do not work, making the system non-functional at those times. This can have an impact on data feedback time as well as data quality and reliability. Interruptions can increase workload and impact the quality control of the data needed for performance.

Key findings and Conclusions – Question 3

1. **Several factors were identified from the desk review and key informant interviews as fundamental to the success of the M&E system of the McGovern-Dole FY21 program** including the existence of the program monitoring dashboard; the commitment of the Government staff responsible for collecting information such as the education inspectorates, the SAS, the DDEPPSA and the DAS; school management committees who track activities at a more micro level; capacity building of all the actors including organization of seminars by WFP to sensitize inspectors; and awareness-raising on monitoring and evaluation due to WFP advocacy efforts.
2. **Factors that hinder efficiency of the M&E system** include insufficient capacity of stakeholders (school principals, DAS officials) to understand their role and to play them appropriately in the implementation of the programme; the delay in transmitting monthly canteen monitoring reports to WFP; poor communication and information sharing between different stakeholders and at a broader level, beyond the program; and no feedback provided by WFP to inspectors. WASH and literacy indicators are not measured via the dashboard. As such, better collaboration with UNICEF and UNESCO would help create a synergy of data on WASH, literacy and other activities.

4.4 The Extent to which the environment is conducive for Learning and Child Development

Q4A To what extent is the environment in the implementation area conducive to learning and child development for boys, girls and indigenous children?

Q4B What factors make the environment more or less conducive to learning?

211 Three categories of factors are likely to influence pupils' learning - factors relating to the school environment, factors relating to the teacher and factors relating to the student. [93]

Factors relating to the school environment

212 Factors related to the school environment include the availability of school feeding[94,95,96,97] conditions of the classrooms and schools, school infrastructure and amenities, the school's operating regime and availability of teaching materials in the classroom.[98] The school-based surveys, the FGDs and the KIIs highlighted several factors which render the school environment challenging for learning in the focal departments.

213 **Lack of school feeding was reported in the interviews to affect autochone children the most**, **as they do not attend school when school feeding is not available.** Information gathered from the school directors' survey showed that 10012 pupils received at least one meal a day- more in Bouenza and Pool. These beneficiaries include 46 children living with disabilities and 718 autochone children (see table 36).

Table 36: Number of school-aged children receiving daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) with USDA assistance

Department	Number of school-aged children receiving daily school meals (breakfast, snack, lunch) with USDA assistance			Children living with disabilities			Children from autochone populations		
	Girls	Boys	Total children	Girls	Boys	Total children living with disabilities	Girls	Boys	Autochone children
Bouenza	961	1,236	2,228	17	13	30	0	1	1
Lékoumou	613	748	1,741	8	2	10	179	191	370
Likouala	330	333	663	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plateaux	627	722	1,571	2	0	2	108	112	220
Pool	991	1,048	2,043	1	3	4	0	0	0
Sangha	809	830	1,766	0	0	0	53	74	127

[93] PASEC2019 Quality Of Education Systems In French-Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa Teaching/Learning Performance And Environment In Primary Education

[94] WFP (World Food Programme). State of school feeding worldwide. Rome, Italy: WFP; 2022.

[95] Wang, D., Fawzi, W.W. Impacts of school feeding on educational and health outcomes of school-age children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Syst Rev* **9**, 55 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01317-6

[96] Adelman S, Gilligan D, Lehrer K. How effective are food for education programs? a critical assessment of the evidence from developing countries: Intl Food Policy Res Inst; 2008.

[97] Bundy D, Burbano C, Grosh ME, Gelli A, Juke M, Drake L. Rethinking school feeding: social safety nets, child development, and the education sector: The World Bank; 2009.

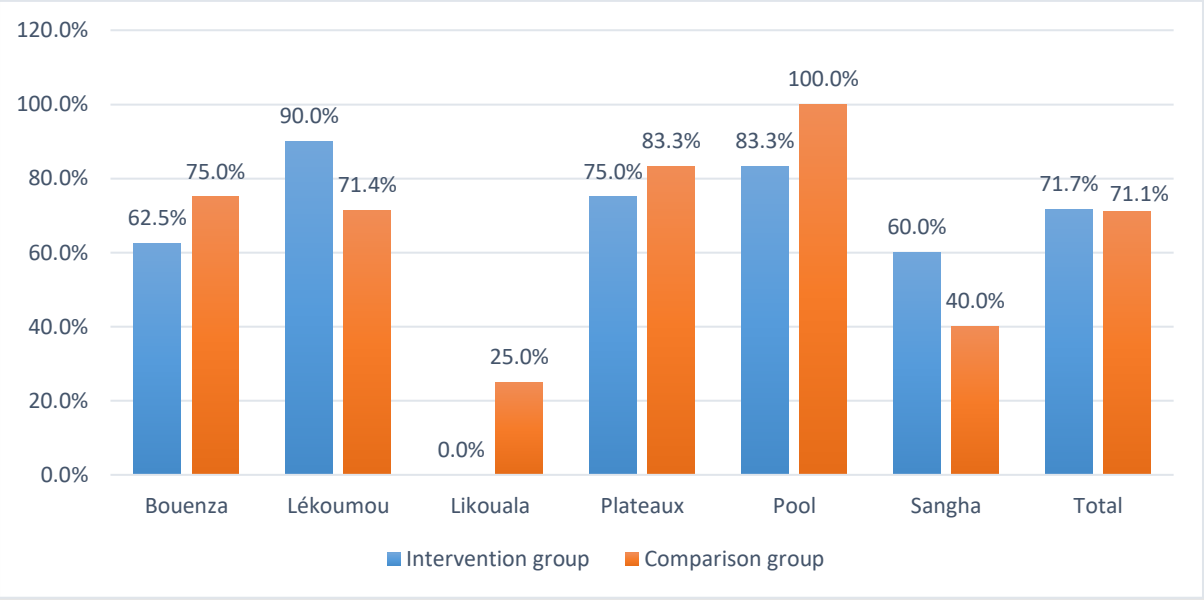
[98] PASEC2019 Quality Of Education Systems In French-Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa Teaching/Learning Performance And Environment In Primary Education

Grand Total	**4,331**	**4,917**	**10,012**	**28**	**18**	**46**	**340**	**378**	**718**

214 The benefits of school feeding on children and adolescents is well documented and include alleviating hunger, reducing micronutrient deficiency and anaemia, improving school enrollment and attendance, increasing cognitive and academic performance, and contributing to gender equity in access to education.[99,100,101,102,103]

215 **Poor conditions of the school and classroom environments** were highlighted in the interviews as constraints to a conducive learning environment. These include **lack of fences** (which has security implications and allows **intrusion of people** from outside the school into the school grounds during classes**; lack of bench tables and chairs**; and **insufficient number of classrooms** leading to **overcrowding** and the use of **multigrade classrooms.** These views were supported by findings in the survey. **Very few schools had a fence in the survey.** The proportion of schools with a fence was lower in the treatment group (7.8%) than in the comparison group (14.3%). Sangha sample had the highest proportion unlike Bouenza and Plateaux which had no school with a fence. USDA assistance provided support to the Sangha schools. Nearly **7 out of 10 schools surveyed had multigrade classrooms**. The departments of Lekoumou, Plateaux and Pool stand out with the highest proportions in contrast to Likouala, which had no school with multigrade classrooms in its intervention group (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of schools with multi-grade classrooms by department



216 In the survey, there was an average of 55 pupils per classroom in the intervention group and 53 pupils per classroom in the comparison group. However **large disparities were observed at the departmental level.** The department of Likouala had a record 74 and 88 children per classroom in the intervention and comparison groups respectively. The departments of Plateaux (37 pupils per class) and Pool (22 pupils per class) had the lowest averages of the treatment group and the control group. There was no significant difference between the two groups.

[99] Wang, D., Fawzi, W.W. Impacts of school feeding on educational and health outcomes of school-age children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: protocol for a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Syst Rev* **9**, 55 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01317-6

[100] Bundy D, Burbano C, Grosh ME, Gelli A, Juke M, Drake L. Rethinking school feeding: social safety nets, child development, and the education sector: The World Bank; 2009.

[101] Adelman S, Gilligan D, Lehrer K. How effective are food for education programs? a critical assessment of the evidence from developing countries: Intl Food Policy Res Inst; 2008.

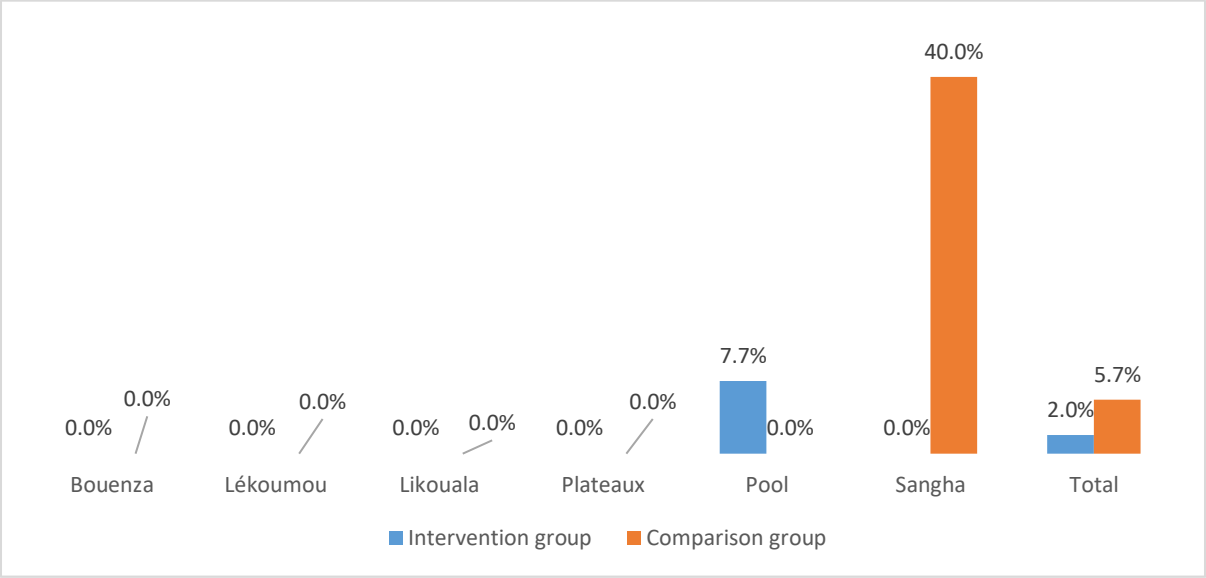
[102] WFP (World Food Programme). State of school feeding worldwide. Rome, Italy: WFP; 2022.

[103] Drake L, Fernandes M, Aurino E, Kiamba J, Giyose B, Burbano C, et al. School feeding programs in middle childhood and adolescence. Child and Adolescent Health and Development 3rd edition: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank; 2017

217 **Poor infrastructure and insufficient amenities in the schools** were highlighted by stakeholders in the interviews including **insufficient water points and separate latrines** in schools which affected children's enrolment and learning, especially girls. Furthermore, **most schools were perceived as not suitable to receive children with disabilities** due to lack of physical installations and appropriate pedagogical methods. In terms of infrastructure and amenities in schools in the survey**,** the classrooms were mostly built of concrete blocks plus cement, more than 8 out of 10 schools in the intervention group have classrooms built of concrete blocks plus cement and this was similar for the comparison group (7 out of 10 schools). 11.4% of comparison schools control vs 5.9% in the intervention group were built of baked bricks and the least number were rammed earth classrooms.

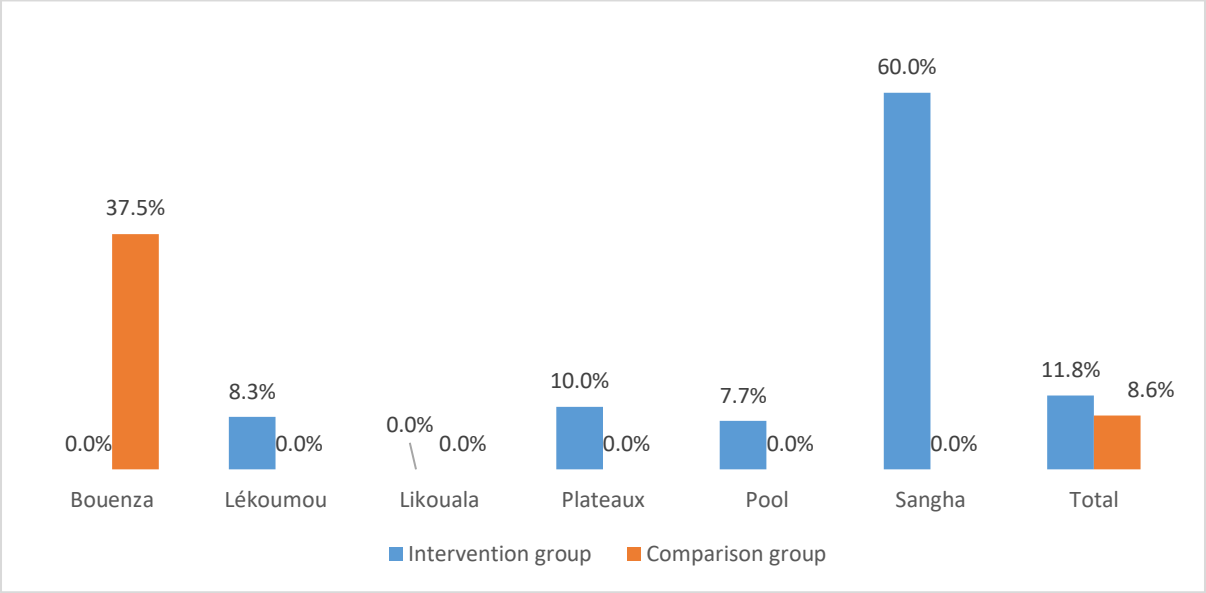
218 **Most of the schools in the sample did not have electricity (figure 8)**. 2% of the schools in the intervention group had an electrical connection compared to 5.7% in the comparison group. This proportion was highest in Sangha (40%) in the control group and Pool (7.7%) in the intervention group. Bouenza, Lekoumou, likouala, and Plateaux had no schools in the sample with electricity..

Figure 8: Percentage of schools with electricity by department and group



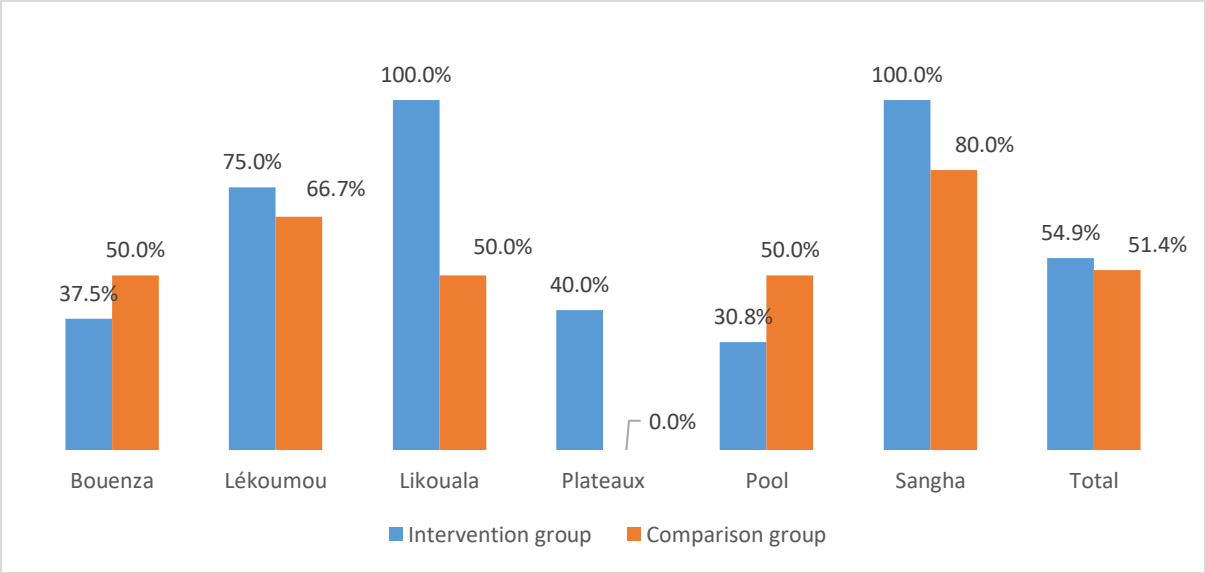
219 Similarly, **many of the schools did not have a functional drinking water point.** The proportion of schools with a functional drinking water point was relatively higher in the intervention group (11.8%) compared to the comparison group (8.6%). Likouala had no school with a functional drinking water point in the sample, independent of the group (figure 9). The high proportion (60%) observed in the Sangha was the result of USDA support which enabled the construction of several drinking water points.

Figure 9: Percentage of schools with a functional drinking water point



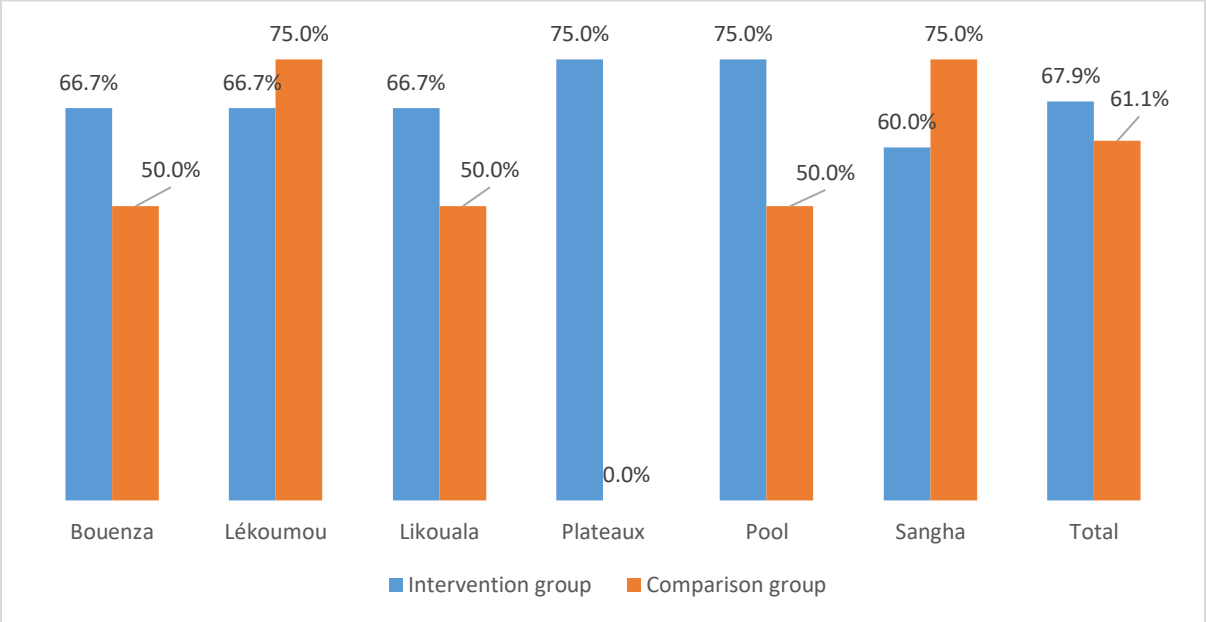
220 Just **over half of the schools surveyed had functional latrines.** The proportion of schools with functional latrines was slightly higher in the intervention group (54.9%) than in the comparison group (51.4%). Likouala (100%) and Sangha (100%) stand out with the highest proportions in the intervention group. None of the comparison schools surveyed in the Plateaux had functional latrines (figure 10).

Figure 10: Percentage of schools with functional latrines



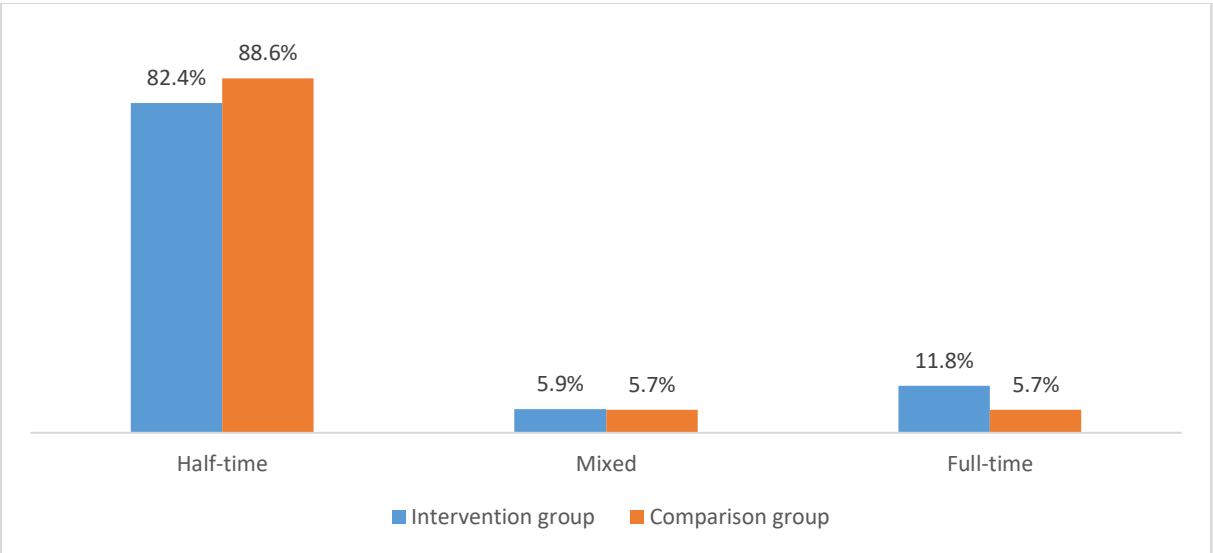
221 For the schools which had latrines, there was some evidence of consideration of gender. Just over 6 in 10 schools with toilets clearly distinguished between girls' toilets and boys' toilets – a situation that can be a factor in prolonged absence of girls during their menstruation. Overall, this gender consideration was somewhat higher in the intervention group (see figure 11). The conditions of the toilets were also poor - in most schools they were made from corrugated iron, were pit latrines and had long grass / vegetation around them.

Figure 11: Percentage of schools with gender-sensitive toilets



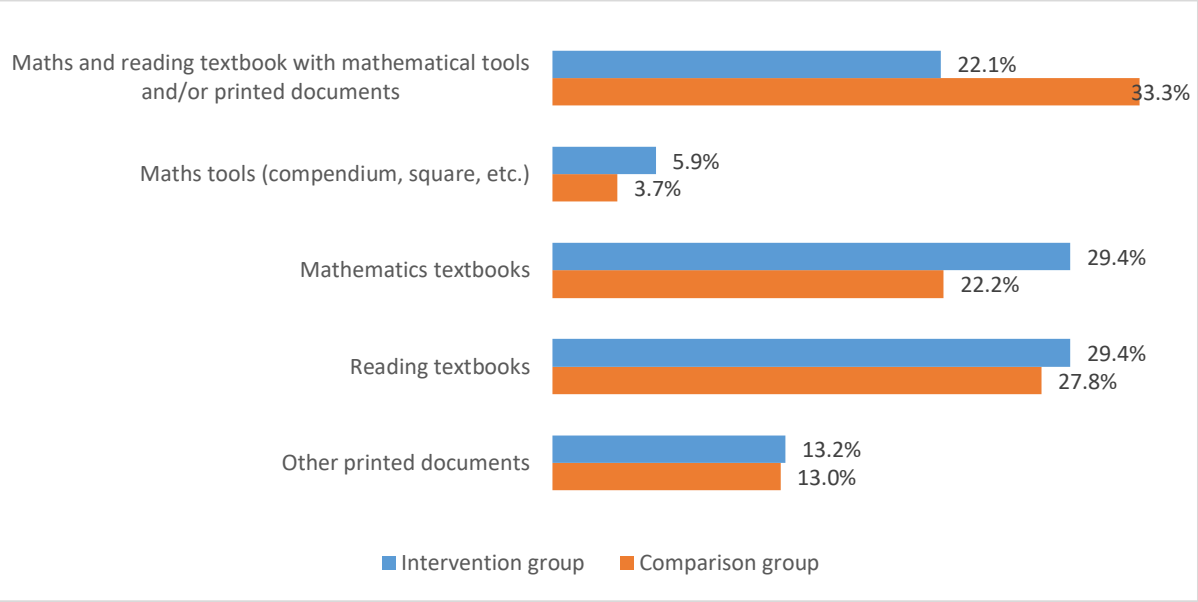
222 **Regarding the school operating system, almost all (8 out of 10) of the schools in the sample operated in half-time mode,** whether it is the intervention or comparison group. Although the proportion was low, schools operating full-time in the intervention group were more than in the comparison group. The proportion of schools operating in mixed mode was almost identical in the two groups (see figure 12).

Figure 12: School operating system by group



223 **In terms of availability of teaching materials in the classroom,** almost half of classrooms had only one textbook, with a slightly higher proportion in the intervention (59%) than in the comparison (50%) group. Very few classes had both mathematics and language textbooks at the same time and more specifically in the intervention group. Mathematics tools are almost absent in classrooms (figure 13). A significant proportion of classrooms use printed materials instead of textbooks. However, there is no significant differences between the two groups in terms of the availability of educational resources in the classroom.

Figure 13: Educational resources in the classrooms



Factors relating to the teacher

224 **Teacher-related factors** that influence learning include the availability of trained and qualified teachers, seniority, remedial methods used, and teaching methods**.** [104]

225 **Poor availability of qualified teachers paid by the government** was highlighted in the KIIs as an important factor. Stakeholders perceived that over 60% of teachers are recruited as volunteers without initial training – resulting in poor quality of teaching and poor learning outcomes in basic subjects. Many schools operate with a high number of volunteer teachers. In many of the schools visited during data collection, the headteacher was the only government official, and the other teachers were volunteers. The use of a large number of volunteer teachers also places a major financial burden on the parents because the communities have to pay for the volunteer teachers.

226 **Nearly 7 out of 10 teachers surveyed in this baseline were male.** The average age of teachers was 41 years old - male teachers (42.2 years old) were older than their female colleagues (38 years) on average. The youngest teachers regardless of sex were located in the department of Likouala (36.4years).

227 **Teachers' professional experiences and practices** were explored in the survey; and the findings supported the perceptions in the KIIs. Overall, **46.1% and 46.4% of the teachers in the intervention group end comparison group respectively had the Baccalaureate as their highest academic qualification.** Only 7.9% and 14,4% of the teachers in the intervention group end comparison group respectively had a university degree. Others (46% and 39% in the intervention group and comparison group respectively) had lower certification than the Baccalaureate (see table 37). There is no significance difference between the two groups and between the gender.

Table 37: Level of qualification of teachers in the sample

Highest academic degree	Intervention group			Comparison group			Total
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	
Baccalaureate	17	24	41 (46.1%)	12	20	32 (46.4%)	73 (46.2%)

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BEPC (Ordinary Level Secondary Certificate)	9	28	37 (41.6%)	8	17	25 (36.2%)	62 (39.2%)
CEP (Primary Completion Certificate)		4	4 (4.5%)		2	2 (2.9%)	6 (3.8%)
Higher than the Baccalaureate (University Degree)	1	6	7 (7.9%)	4	6	10 (14.4%)	17 (10.8%)
Total	27	62	89 (100%)	24	45	69 (100%)	158 (100%)

228 **About half (54%) of the teachers surveyed had undergone initial teacher training before starting to practice.** While only 10% explicitly reported having no professional qualifications, only 36% of the teachers indicated that their professional achievements were validated.

229 Research shows that the vast majority of teachers get better with experience – particularly in their first three to five years in the classroom.[105] It is acknowledged that teaching – creating lesson plans, being able to manage a classroom of diverse learners, understanding the curriculum and standards – that requires time and practice.[106] In the survey, in terms of **seniority in function**, the teachers surveyed had on average 12 and 11 years of seniority as a teacher in the intervention and comparison groups respectively (see table 38). The most experienced teachers in the profession were located in the Plateaux department independently of group. Overall, there was no significance difference between groups. **Seniority in school** was on average 7 years in the intervention group and 5 years in the comparison group with the most senior teachers located in Pool for the intervention group and in Lekoumou for the comparison group. Although the variances of the two groups were identical, there were significant differences in means. **Seniority in the class taught** was 5 years in the intervention group and 3 years in the comparison group with the most senior teachers in class taught located in Plateaux independent of group. The two groups showed significant differences both in terms of variances and means. Overall, the rate of teacher turnover is relatively higher in the control group than in the intervention group and the rate of teacher turnover between schools is higher than the rate of teacher turnover between classes in the same school, regardless of the group.

Table 38: Seniority levels of teachers

Department	Intervention Group			Control Group		
	Seniority as a teacher	Seniority in the school	Seniority in the class taught**	Seniority as a teacher	Seniority in the school	Seniority in the class taught**
Bouenza	9.2	4.6	3.5	11.1	3.8	2.9
Lekoumou	12.0	8.9	6.4	12.6	6.5	3.0
Likouala	12.7	3.5	2.8	8.5	4.6	2.4
Plateaux	14.0	10.2	6.6	13.6	6.0	4.6
Pool	13.3	7.0	4.9	10.0	5.2	3.7
Sangha	9.4	6.1	4.8	9.3	5.6	3.9
Total	11.9	7.1	5.1	10.9	5.2	3.4

230 **Besides conventional teaching, other academic support available to the pupils from teachers was reviewed.** Studies show that pupils with supportive relationships in school, report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with school.[107,108] These

[105] Darling-Hammond, L. 2000. "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," Education Policy Analysis Archives 8, no. 1. Available at: under "Darling-Hammond Review essay on teacher quality and outcomes"

[106] Center for Education Organizing. Policy Brief. What's Missing from the Debate on Seniority? The Annenberg Institute For School Reform At Brown University

[107] Battistich V, Solomon D, Kim D. Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and pupils' attitudes, motives, and performance. Am Educ J. 1995:32,627-658.

[108] Shouse RC. Academic press and sense of community: conflict, congruence, and implications for student achievement. Soc Psychol Educ. 1996;1(1):47-68.

pupils also are more engaged academically.[109] In several schools, interviews with teachers showed that they do not always have the capacity to support children with special educational needs such as those living with disabilities. Moreover, in both the FGDs and KIIs with the directors, they indicated that multigrade classes remain difficult for untrained volunteer teachers to manage. In that context, it is challenging to cover programs and improve the quality of learning as well as learning outcomes. **The teachers in the survey were asked what else they do besides the usual teaching to support the academic performance of pupils in schools** and table 39 details their answers.

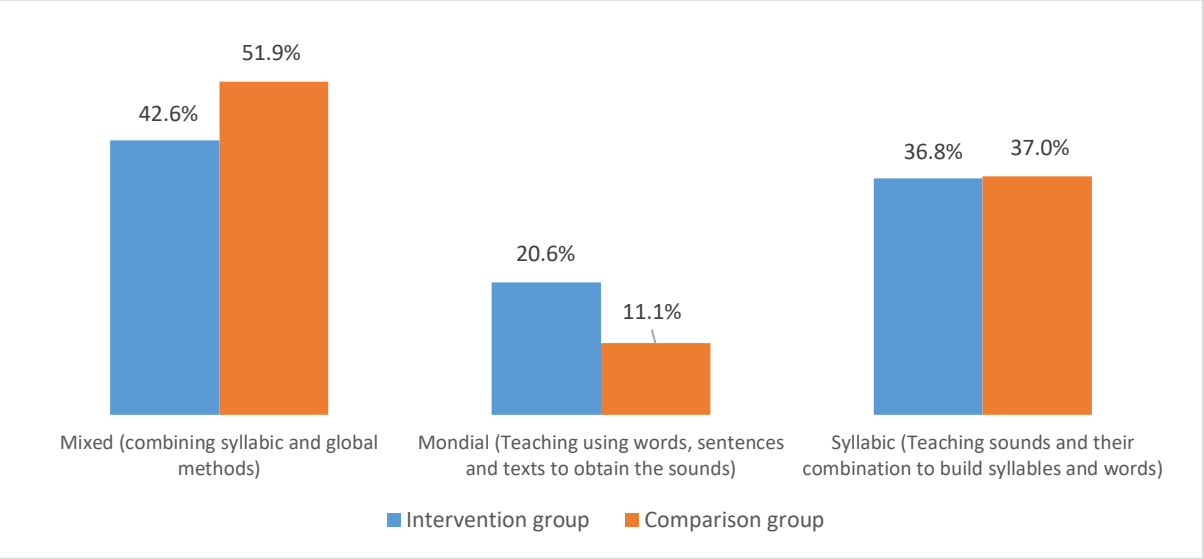
Table 39: Methods of support reported by teachers

Methods of support reported by teachers	Intervention Group	Comparison group	P
I organize remedial / remediation courses	18.0%	8.7%	***
I ask other pupils to work on reading with the student in difficulty	12.4%	17.4%	ns
I ask parents to help their child	10.1%	2.9%	***
I give homework to do at home	15.7%	15.9%	ns
I work individually with this student	33.7%	49.3%	**
Other methods	10.1%	5.8%	ns

ns: not significant

231 In terms of methods reported by the teachers in the survey, the **most recurrent teaching method used is the mixed method,** used slightly more in the comparison than intervention group. The syllabic method is in second position and the global method in third position, although the latter is more recurrent in the intervention group. There was no significant difference between the groups (figure 14).

Figure 14: Teaching methods



232 More than 84% of teachers in the survey believed that pupils' reading comprehension is guaranteed for at least 50% of the time. **Such a disparity between perceived reading activities and the effective assessment of competences calls for further pedagogical measures** to raise the level of pupils in the language, despite the use of the syllabic approach and the irregular preparation of lessons by teachers (almost 30% of teachers still prepare lessons).

233 For the creation of a more conducive environment in all schools to support language learning activities. Several elements should be noted by the program:

[109] 9. Skinner EA, Belmont MJ. Motivation in the classroom: reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. J Educ Psychol. 1993;85(4):571-581.

- teachers in the intervention group were found to be less likely to systematically (at least 75% of the time) assess their pupils than those in the comparison group though this difference was not significant.
- Storage spaces for educational resources were mostly not present in both groups; and there was need for set-up spaces for displaying pupils' achievements/productions;
- Computers/tablets, interactive whiteboards, calculators, etc. were absent in the classrooms.
- There was a noted need for greater involvement of parents in the pupils' learning/learning process.
- There is need for a strategic and operational mechanism for regular capacity building of teachers and pedagogical supervision staff;
- Initial teacher training for primary education needs to be strengthened.

Factors relating to the student

234 Student-related factors relate to frequency of use of textbooks, regular use of the language of instruction, doing homework, the availability of a loved one (such as parent) who can help with homework, etc.[110]

235 The EGRA results (detailed in EQ1) displayed the relatively low levels of reading proficiency. Table 40 displays the EGMA tests and content description. The EGMA results are detailed in table 41 show better proficiency scores in the mathematical tasks but there are important gaps.

Table 40: EGMA tests and content description

EGMA TESTS		CONTENT
T1	Identification of numbers	Identification of 30 numbers between 0 and 99, arranged in any order without repetition
T2	Comparison of numbers	Comparison of two numbers to find out which is greater or less.
T3	missing numbers	identification of and insert a missing number
T4	Level 1 Addition	Adding two numbers without a carry, the result remaining less than 100.
T5	Level 2 Addition	Adding two numbers with carry, the result remaining less than 100.
T6	Level 1 subtraction	Performing the subtraction of two numbers without borrowing
T7	Level 2 subtraction	Performing the subtraction of two numbers with borrowing
T8	Problem solving	solving everyday problems using the basic operations of adding, subtracting or dividing (by 2) several numbers, the result remaining less than 100

Table 41: Maths proficiency levels of pupils with by task, department and group

	T1		T2		T3		T4		T5		T6		T7		T8	
Department	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group	Int. Group	Comp. Group
BOUENZA	11.1	1.4	80.0	88.6	57.2	47.9	72.2	70.8	28.3	42.9	60.0	52.9	21.7	21.0	62.8	51.1
LEKOUMOU	0.4	0.0	94.6	93.6	85.4	84.9	85.4	93.6	39.6	60.1	69.2	88.5	42.5	49.5	60.0	68.8
LIKOUALA	5.5	4.3	96.3	91.5	65.1	51.1	74.3	48.9	31.2	32.9	48.6	41.5	18.4	26.6	60.6	44.7
PLATEAUX	0.0	0.0	90.1	92.8	58.6	77.6	70.7	87.2	21.6	44.0	66.3	64.8	6.1	19.2	72.4	75.2
POOL	0.8	0.0	96.2	96.7	75.1	86.2	78.1	84.5	36.6	33.7	79.3	77.4	27.9	22.7	83.8	68.5
SANGHA	2.7	20.2	83.3	85.3	36.0	34.1	71.3	55.0	40.7	33.3	72.7	48.1	18.0	20.2	51.3	59.7
TOTAL	**2.9**	**3.4**	**90.6**	**91.6**	**65.6**	**65.7**	**76.3**	**76.4**	**33.5**	**42.9**	**68.1**	**65.3**	**24.3**	**27.9**	**66.9**	**62.0**

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236 For both groups, the summary table above shows that only 3% of the pupils reached the sufficient threshold for the task "identification of numbers". In task 2 "comparison of numbers", the pupils displayed very satisfactory averages. Overall, more than 3-quarters of pupils correctly perform level 1 addition operations (T3) in both groups. 65.6% (intervention) and 65.7% (comparison) pupils reached the sufficient skill threshold to identify the "missing number" in a series of numbers. On average, pupils performed less well in level 2 addition (T7). Only 24% (intervention) and 28% (comparison) pupils reached the sufficient threshold in level 2 subtraction. Overall, 2/3 of pupils reached the sufficient threshold in problem solving (T8).

237 **The lack of reading and maths books for pupils is a constraint reported in the FGDs and seen in the school surveys.** The **textbook possession rate was very low independent of the group** but was relatively higher in the comparison group. On average 6 children in a class used the appropriate textbooks during the observed language lesson sequence in the treatment group compared to 14 in the comparison group. There were also strong disparities between departments. The departments of Bouenza, Likouala, Plateaux in the treatment group showed a zero-possession rate (see table 42). In the context of improving learning outcomes in primary education, textbook ownership should be a priority for the education system as a whole.

Table 42 : Textbook possession by department and group

Department	Intervention Group			Control group		
	Average number of pupils in the class	Average number of pupils using appropriate textbooks during the observed course sequence	Average number of pupils using appropriate textbooks during the observed math sequence	Average number of pupils in the class	Average number of pupils using appropriate textbooks during the observed course sequence	Average number of pupils using appropriate textbooks during the observed math sequence
Bouenza	38	0	0	43	1	1
Lékoumou	48	7	8	49	31	18
Likouala	74	0	0	88	4	0
Plateaux	37	0	4	47	3	3
Pool	46	8	9	27	9	8
Sangha	46	16	22	40	27	34
Total	**47**	**6**	**8**	**47**	**14**	**12**

238 **The low participation of parents in the learning process of children due to illiteracy, limits their support for learning, especially at home**. Many of the children do not regularly use the language of instruction as a result. Moreover, in several rural localities in particular, pupils do not always benefit from support and accompaniment from parents at home concerning the revision of lessons. **Conflicts between domestic or agricultural activities and school activities can also be a major constraint**, despite the importance that parents declare to attach to school education.

239 **Adequate menstrual hygiene facilities with free hygiene products** and timely education for boys and girls on menstrual health are crucial school interventions to ensure health, well-being and equal learning opportunities. Girls' training in good menstrual hygiene practices was reported in the survey - with the participation of 539 pupils in the Treatment group compared to 141 in the comparison group (table 43).

Table 43: Number of girls trained in good menstrual hygiene practices

Department	Number of girls trained in good menstrual hygiene practices in the Treatment group	Number of girls trained in good menstrual hygiene practices in the comparison group
Bouenza	47	0
Lékoumou	47	4
Likouala	25	0
Plateaux	70	0
Pool	78	21
Sangha	272	116
Total	539	141

Extent to which education is considered important by parents and communities

Q4C To what extent is education considered important by parents and communities for both boys and girls?

240 Evidence from FGDs reveals that **there is no explicit discriminatory discourse among both mothers and fathers**. **This positive finding is further reinforced by the FGDs conducted with girls and boys**, which mirror the narratives of their parents. While marriage is still considered an important aspect of girls' future, the discussions indicate that studying and working are also emphasized in parents and children's narratives. Although the value of education for girls is sometimes linked to their ability to manage future households or find suitable husbands, overall, the discourse encourages girls' education. This indicates a growing recognition of the value of education for girls, promoting equal opportunities and empowerment.

"When a girl decides to get married or not to go to school anymore, if the suitor comes forward, you tell him that your condition for the girl to marry him is that she continue her studies after marriage. Generally it is the girls who want to get married. The boys sometimes make a mess outside but save themselves at home." **Mother and Canteen Management Committee Female Secretary, Sangha**

Girl(1) *I want to get married after school*
Girl (2) *I want to work*
Girl (3) *I want to work and get married*
Girl (4) *I only want to get married, I don't want to work*
Girl (5) *Me after school I want to work, I want to be a doctor*
Boy (1) *I want to study*
Boy (2) *I want to work at the Bank before I get married*
Boy (3) *I want to be a policeman*
Boy (4) *I want to be a soldier*
FGD Children, NSAH Elementary School, Plateaux

241 Furthermore, **educational professionals hold the perception that education services are provided equally to both girls and boys** and that there is a positive attitude towards gender equality and inclusivity in education. However, a concerning issue that emerged during the discussions is the **link between adolescent pregnancy and girls' dropout rates**. This highlighted a challenge regarding ensuring equal opportunities for girls in education.

"I believe that parity there exists totally because there are even classrooms where we have more girls than boys and even there are classrooms where girls also dominate even at the level results. Girls get the top five the most, sometimes there are more girls than boys. And they are also motivated in the school setting so I could say that really is real." **Male COGES Lekoumou**

"But sometimes also especially at the level of young girls, during the year, she becomes pregnant, she will give up." **Male Director – Sangha**

"We favour both, whether it's the boy or the girl. It is perhaps from a certain level that the girl no longer wants to go to school perhaps because she has become pregnant, otherwise at the beginning it is the same between boy and girl." **(Woman Farmer – Sangha)**

242 **In some rural communities, people did not have a positive perception of the opportunity of education for their children;** this translated into low investment and support for their enrolment and retention, especially for girls. The context of vulnerability and poverty aggravates this situation. Nevertheless, there was consensus that children who attend schools with available canteens equally benefit from school meals as indicated in a typical quote below:

"All children are entitled to meals from the canteen regardless of their degree of vulnerability or poverty without any form of discrimination." **Female Cook, Sangha.**

243 However, **both indigenous children and economically disadvantaged children face challenges related to school fees**, which hinder their ability to continue attending school irrespective of the importance attached to education by their parents and communities. The financial burden of these fees disproportionately affects these vulnerable groups, limiting their access to education and perpetuating educational inequalities. Addressing these fee barriers is crucial to ensure equal opportunities for all children, irrespective of their background or economic status. Two typical quotes from FGDs and the interviews are highlighted.

"I have four siblings two girls, two boys and me alone I am in school. I was sent to school to learn and listen. The rest don't attend. There is no money." **Autochthonous girl: FGD students in Sangha.**

"But it's almost everyone because the majority of parents are peasants, excuse me for saying it, the majority of parents are peasants and they have trouble finding these amounts at first . These are such colossal amounts, sometimes we are at 10,500 per student, and then the parents find it difficult. This is really why when we do outreaches, so we see that it is the majority who are at home." **Female Teacher - Lekoumou**

244 Undoubtedly, **compelling evidence underscores the significant role of school feeding programmes in tackling inequity, particularly within the realm of education of autochone populations and promoting their social inclusion.** These programmes serve as powerful tools to bridge educational disparities by ensuring that children from indigenous communities have access to meals while attending school. By fostering a sense of belonging and equal participation, school feeding programs contribute to the broader goal of creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape for indigenous pupils, thereby fostering their social integration and overall well-being.

"At the local level, the indigenous children did not come to school before, but with the arrival of school canteens in the three schools, we see their presence at school. They even finish the school year. They take part in the assessments and we see them together with the Bantu children. The school canteen has played a major role in the field of social cohesion between the natives and the Bantu." **Male Director Sangha**

245 The lack of consistency in previous school feeding programs has had a challenging effect on indigenous children. For instance, for the canteens financed by the COVID fund (Global Partnership for Education (GPE) funding), when the funding was exhausted, the canteens ceased their activities. The duration of the food supply was reported to last for only three months, to the disadvantage of the children, autochthone pupils dropped out of schools. **It is crucial to not only establish school feeding programs but also ensure their regular and frequent implementation to fulfil their intended purpose of promoting equity**. By providing consistent access to nutritious meals, these programs can effectively address the specific needs of indigenous children, contributing to their educational success and overall well-being. Maintaining regularity in school feeding programs is vital to sustain the positive impact on equity and enable indigenous children to fully benefit from this essential support.

"As for indigenous children, they come to school when they have the school canteen. But when they don't have one, they don't come regularly. They come when they want and when they have an activity that concerns them, they leave." **Male Inspector of a school district – Plateaux**

"The dropout rate there sincerely is advanced, the basis is only food, if there is food really they will finish all the year but since there is not food really it's difficult. Before ORA 3 it was 94 Ora 2 it was 64 now there really is a drop in numbers. ORA 1 now at 50 ORA 2 is now at 40. Because the natives sometimes go to the forest, sometimes they don't come to school." **Female Director Likouala.**

Key findings and Conclusions – Question 4

1. Three categories of factors were identified as influencing pupils' learning - factors relating to the school environment, factors relating to the teacher and factors relating to the student.
2. **Factors related to the school environment** include the **availability of school feeding** which when not available was reported to affect autochone children the most because they would not come to school. **Poor school infrastructure and amenities** were displayed as key challenges. **Most of the schools in the sample did not have electricity**. 2% of the schools in the intervention group had an electrical connection compared to 5.7% in the comparison group. Similarly, **the majority of schools did not have a functional drinking water point.** The proportion of schools with a functional drinking water point was slightly higher in the intervention group (11.8%) compared to the comparison group (8.6%). Just **over half of the schools surveyed had functional latrines with the proportion** slightly higher in the intervention group (54.9%) than in the comparison group (51.4%). For the schools which had latrines, there was some evidence of consideration of gender. Just over 6 in 10 schools with toilets clearly distinguished between girls' toilets and boys' toilets. **Very few schools had a fence in the survey - th**e proportion of schools with a fence was lower in the treatment group (7.8%) than in the comparison group (14.3%).
3. Also poor conditions of the school and classroom environment presented constraints. Overcrowding due to number of insufficient classrooms was reported as an important issue in the KIIs and FGDs. Nearly **7 out of 10 schools surveyed had multigrade classrooms**. In the survey, there was an **average of 47 pupils per classroom** in both groups. However **large disparities were observed at the departmental level.** The department of Likouala had a record 74 and 88 children per classroom in the intervention and comparison groups respectively.
4. Furthermore, most schools were **not suitable to receive children with disabilities** due to lack of physical installations and due to lack of appropriate pedagogical methods.
5. **Regarding the school operating system, almost all (8 out of 10) of the schools in the sample operated in half-time mode,** whether it is the intervention or comparison group.
6. In terms of availability of teaching materials in the classroom, almost half of classrooms had only one textbook, with a slightly higher proportion in the intervention (59%) than in the comparison (50%) group. Very few classes had both mathematics and language textbooks at the same time.
7. **In relation to the teacher,** poor availability of qualified teachers paid by the states was a key issue reported by government and other stakeholders. In the survey, 46.2% of the teachers in the sample had the Baccalaureate as their highest academic qualification and only 10.8% of the teachers had a university degree. Others (43%) had lower certification than the Baccalaureate. **Only about half (54%) of the teachers surveyed had undergone initial teacher training before starting to practice** – a factor that contributes to poor quality of teaching and poor learning outcomes in basic subjects. The use of a large number of volunteer teachers also places a major financial burden on the parents because the communities have to pay for the volunteer teachers.
8. **In relation to the pupils, t**he low participation of parents in the learning process of children due to illiteracy, limits their support for learning, especially at home. **The lack of reading and maths books for pupils is a constraint reported in the FGDs and seen in the school surveys.** The textbook possession rate was very low independent of the group and on average 6 children in a class used the appropriate textbooks during the observed language lesson sequence in the treatment group. There were also strong disparities between departments. The departments of Bouenza, Likouala, Plateaux in the treatment group showed a zero-possession rate In the context of improving learning outcomes in primary education, textbook ownership should be a priority for the education system as a whole.

4.5 Capacity and organization of farmers, women's farmers cooperatives, traders, and other suppliers

Q5A To what extent are farmers, women's farmers cooperatives, traders, and other suppliers in the implementation area equipped (with skills, infrastructure, and inputs) and capable of providing a reliable and sustainable supply of high-quality food commodities to local schools?

Q5B How are farmers and women's farmers cooperatives structured and organised?

The extent to which farmers, women's farmers cooperatives, traders, and other suppliers in the implementation area equipped and capable of providing a reliable and sustainable supply of high-quality food commodities to local schools

246 As a strategy and key objective of the CSP, WFP set up about twenty farmers' groups whose administrative and financial capacities have been strengthened. According to the McGovern-Dole FY21 Plan of Operation,[111] WFP will purchase beans, fortified vegetable oil and fortified cassava flour locally from the smallholder farmers (SHFs) and the private sector. WFP will also work with the GoC, schools, and communities to support ongoing investments in production diversification, processing, and market access. WFP will enhance the capacity of SHFs to produce, store, process, and distribute food to schools and other institutional markets. Mapping of palm oil, bean and cassava producers and suppliers has also been carried out by an international consultant.

247 The modes of production used (subsistence farming) as well as **the low level of capital invested in agriculture, trade and transport limits the sustained productive capacities of farmers during the school year** as well as those of traders and suppliers. Evidence from the FGDs of these groups also showed that the farmers, women's farmers' cooperatives, traders and other suppliers in the implementation area are generally unaware of the challenges of the program and the need for their involvement in the process. The determinants of their accession seem to be essentially economic, namely the search for the disposal of products and the improvement of incomes. Although they clearly state that they know the importance of the school feeding program for children, social issues seem to be less important than economic ones.

248 Data collected from the leaders of farmers' groups indicate that in some departments, such as the Sangha and the Plateaux, these groups consist mostly of smallholder farmers who produce for domestic consumption generally and sell a tiny part of their production for family savings and to be able to meet social needs (health, education, socio-family solidarity). Usable areas[112] are often reduced to meet the demand of the program and other community actors. This can have an effect on their ability to support the program in case of speculation because they will have to look for gains. **Their production capacity is still very embryonic to respond effectively and quantitatively to demand.** They need to be supported for a better and growing production in order to satisfy canteens. For example, discussions with farmers -women as well as men highlight a plurality of difficulties that can ultimately discourage traders and other suppliers. Women believe that product prices need to be known in advance to motivate them. In addition, the men with whom they discuss prices do not always put into consideration the 'pains' they endure in the production cycle. In this situation, if they manage to find other flow

[111] Attachment A Plan Of Operation McGovern-Dole Program FY 2021

[112] usable areas refers to the land availablele for the community or farmers to use

circuits that may be more profitable for them, they can use them and, in this case, the program runs the risk of not surviving in those areas. **As indicated by some participants, the collaborative mechanism remains very precarious or very informal and puts suppliers in a vulnerable situation**. It would have been preferable to identify a list of suppliers, contract them and agree on prices at the beginning of the cycle or at least for a given period given the fluctuation of food shortages in local markets. By way of illustration, the following comments made by some participants during the group discussions which were organised testify to the importance of these difficulties:

"We often have to rent motorbikes to transport food from the forest to the village the miller's expense to crush the Saka-Saka and all this is at our expense until delivery to school. Unfortunately it happens that when you propose your invoice, it is often not accepted; Otherwise it is a ridiculous price that is imposed on you: a thousand francs for example, it is not normal in view of all the energy spent! So it's up to them at school to decide."

"The realities are different in different schools. At home in Henry Bounda where I am focal point and at the same time supplier, what we can provide is preparing for the eve. We agree with the director of the institution and the focal point to take out the money (example we take out tomorrow's money today) and the person just comes to provide the amount of food relative to the money he received. Now elsewhere I do not know how it is done."

At home in Moussanda, mothers (suppliers) bring their already cooked saka to school and it is the "men" focal points who discuss the price with them. There is no measure but it is arbitrary: we can tell you well, for this pot, we give you five thousand francs, sometimes it is three thousand, etc. That depends. I often send a big pot. I'm not even on the ground. But I only sometimes see like that they bring me three thousand francs, and I am surprised: the big pot like that, you only give me three thousand, it discourages in view of all the hassle that it imposes!

"What I think is to sit down at the beginning. You are chosen as your supplier, that's when you have to debate the price of your food. Like the saka, it must be measured: if it is a ton what do I know, it must have a fixed price. The same goes for all other products: prices must be set before delivery. At our level this is what has been done, and so I could propose this to others because at home there has been no problem. If you are a supplier of the saka, the can of paint has been set at five thousand francs and for a bucket of ten tons you have five jars to provide. Regarding beans, copal is used as a measure: prices must therefore be set in advance."

- **FGD Women Farmers**

249 **McGovern-Dole FY21's plans to enhance women's empowerment** by increasing the capacities of local women farmers for local purchases in the school feeding program builds upon evidence from previous successful experiences with similar activities. This evidence suggests that the goals of increasing local purchases and empowering women can be achieved effectively. According to a WFP stakeholder in the KII, in 2016, WFP has implemented a trial project to incorporate locally sourced beans into school meals, supporting small-scale producers and addressing issues like harsh production conditions and child labour. This led to a significant shift in the production practices of small-scale farmers, with increased bean seasons in previously limited areas. Recognizing the importance of women's participation, the project then focused on cassava, where women played a key role in traditional production methods. The project successfully introduced cassava derivatives into school meals, which were well-received by children. Efforts were made to establish synergies between different project activities, connecting small producers and school canteens. Ongoing communication with producers was maintained through the CSA, facilitating future collaborations, and strengthening the link between producers and schools.

250 Given that women constitute nearly 70% of agricultural workers in the Congo, it is noteworthy that only 28.8% of agricultural holdings belong to them. [113] Recognizing their significant role in household feeding, the prioritization of women farmers in McGovern-Dole FY21's strategy is crucial. This approach aims to improve school feeding nutrition standards by incorporating local and fresh products, while also **promoting women's economic empowerment**. By enhancing their ability to provide nutritious meals for their households, **this strategy supports the retention of children in school, even in the absence of school feeding programs.**

"Household nutrition because it is not only a question of improving the nutrition of children at school because when he reaches secondary school he is no longer supported so it is the households who must also have their diet improved." **WFP stakeholder**

251 **Stakeholders in the KII and FGD participants provided insight into their views of what should be implemented in the McGovern-Dole FY21 project to ensure the production of diversified foods in sufficient quantities.**

1. Capacity building for farmers:
    a. to form a cooperative but also to explore other markets
    b. New cultivation techniques
2. Allocation of financial resources for:
    a. Tending the fields
    b. Acquiring land
    c. Increasing the number of human resources for the workforce
    d. Acquiring seeds and materials
    e. Boosting the farmers' ability to produce sufficient quantities and quality
3. Collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture
    a. to select groups with the capacity to meet needs (produce in large quantities) and able to meet the commitments of the project and go very far.
    b. to organize training sessions or seminars for capacity building of farmers by their field agents "Groups that are able to hold out until the end of the year by providing local products for school feeding canteens".
4. Establishment of contracts between WFP and the farmer groups to decide on the various commitments of both parties; For example, prices, method of payment of farmers, products sought (legumes, vegetables, ...)
5. Setting up a purchasing mechanism, estimating producers' yields per hectare and signing contracts with them while they have sown
6. Implementation of a preservation system for products that are generally perishable.

How farmers and women's farmers cooperatives are structured and organised

252 The farmers are organized in cooperatives composed by both female and male farmers. Smallholder groups range from 12 to 40 members structured by product and location. Follow-up and support are recognised as necessary to enable them to play their role effectively. In addition to the support provided to the SHFs, WFP has also strengthened the capacity of a group of artisans and built cassava processing sheds that will be made available to SHFs (majority of whom are women) to build their capacity.

[113] 2015. National Human Development Report 2015: enterprise competitiveness, youth employment and sustainable human development in the Republic of Congo. UNDP.URL: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/cg/UNDP-CG-RNDH-Congo2015-2016.pdf

253 In terms of the **institutional framework to support the activities**, **the legal agreement on SHFs identifies three commodities** - beans, fortified oil and fortified cassava flour, but there is currently no mechanism to fortify the products. **Safety and regulatory challenges exist**. For example, for cassava oil and flour, regulatory frameworks are not yet in place. Contextual challenges include poor access networks, especially secondary roads; vast distances; lack of connectivity; moving goods in the North can only be done within six months a year because of climactic constraints. It is necessary to ensure that the logistics and contractual strategy is well articulated.

Key findings and Conclusions – Question 5

1. As a strategy to complement the US commodity rations and ensure the sustainable supply of food to local schools, WFP set up about twenty farmers' groups whose administrative and financial capacities have been strengthened. WFP will purchase beans, fortified vegetable oil and fortified cassava flour locally from the smallholder farmers (SHFs) and the private sector.
2. **The modes of production used (subsistence farming) as well as the low level of capital invested in agriculture, trade and transport limits the sustained productive capacities of farmers** during the school year as well as those of traders and suppliers. Evidence from the FGDs of these groups also showed that the farmers, women's farmers' cooperatives, traders and other suppliers in the implementation area are generally unaware of the challenges of the program and the need for their involvement in the process. The determinants of their accession seem to be essentially economic, namely the search for the disposal of products and the improvement of incomes. Although they clearly state that they know the importance of the school feeding program for children, social issues seem to be less important than economic ones. FGDs with the farmers and traders revealed a plurality of difficulties that could ultimately discourage them. For instance, the women had the consensus that product prices need to be known in advance to motivate them. In the situation where they consider the pricing unreasonable, if they manage to find other flow circuits that may be more profitable for them, they can use them and, in this case, the program runs the risk of not surviving in those areas. **As indicated by some participants, the collaborative mechanism remains very precarious or very informal and puts suppliers in a vulnerable situation**. FGD participants indicated that it would have been preferable to identify a list of suppliers, contract them and agree on prices at the beginning of the cycle or at least for a given period given the fluctuation of food shortages in local markets.
3. **Nevertheless, McGovern-Dole FY21's plans to enhance women's empowerment** by increasing the capacities of local women farmers for local purchases in the school feeding program are supported by evidence, as they build upon previous successful experiences with similar activities. This evidence suggests that the goals of increasing local purchases and empowering women can be achieved if structured and managed appropriately.

4.6 Capacity of government and school communities to manage and implement a nutrition-sensitive and holistic NSFP

Q6A To what extent are the Government and school communities equipped with the relevant skills and capacity to manage and implement a nutrition-sensitive and holistic National School Feeding Program (NSFP)?

Q6B What are the current capacity gaps and strengths of the NSFP?

Capacity and skills of Government and School Communities to manage and implement a NSFP

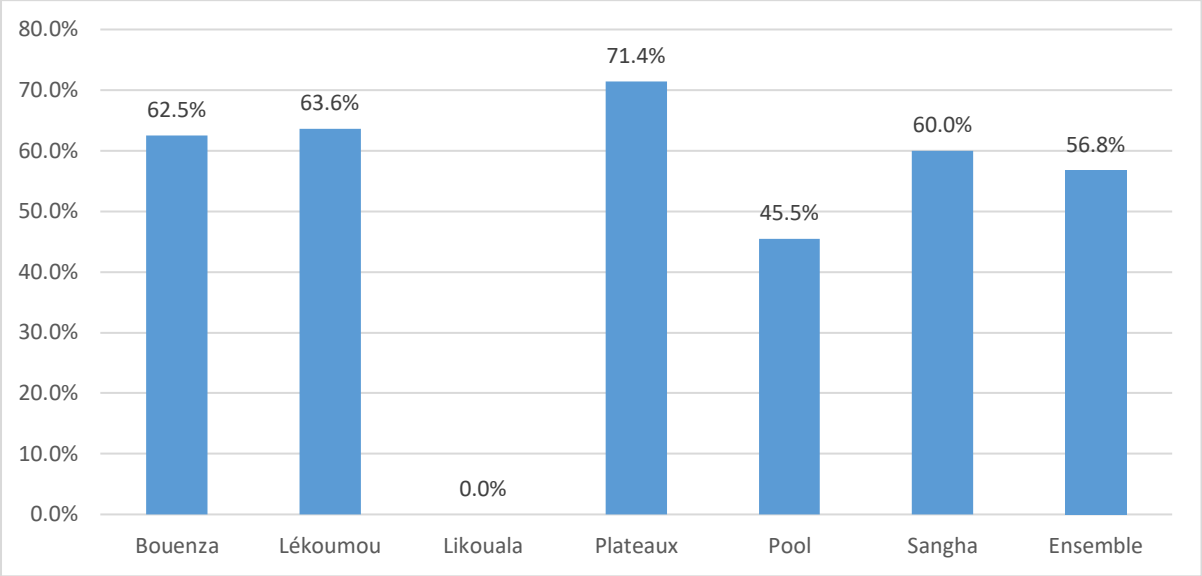
254 **The Government has the legal and policy framework that are aligned** with the national development policy agenda and provide an enabling institutional environment that takes agriculture, the food system, procurement, nutrition education and cross-cutting issues into account. WFP has supported this process over the years and will continue to support policy development in the McGovern-Dole FY21. **There is some evidence of improved capacities especially at the national level** to support the implementation of a nutrition-sensitive NSFP and the monitoring and evaluation system to support evidence-based analysis for learning and accountability. However, **there are important capacity gaps,** the most critical being the weak political will regarding the SFP and the low financial commitment towards the program.

255 **There is a foundation of structured capacity building** - WFP has different tools for program management and organizes capacity building at different levels for teachers, principals, inspectors, cooks and the Management Committee (COGES) in school feeding. Several themes are covered such as their participation in the school canteen, activities on the health component, or nutritional health, kitchen management, kitchen cleanliness, cleanliness of food and nutrition, balance in nutrition. An application developed by WFP called CHECK KIST is currently being used to monitor the quality of the programme. But organizing periodic trainings during the year to bring teachers together in a locality is a challenge because of their resultant absences for almost a week in order to cover the different themes.

256 **Capacity building by WFP is perceived as insufficient at the level of subnational levels** which face many difficulties in the implementation of school canteens. The school communities that are involved in school feeding are the Management Committees (COGES) and the Parents' Association (APE). In many schools, there is sometimes confusion in roles and responsibilities. Parents who are members of the APEs, despite the sensitization carried out, are unaware of their roles. According to some parents in the FGDs, parents' associations only play an observer role, but it is the management committee, of which some parents are members, that play the active role of checking the quality of food and diversifying food. The APEs received information but parents interpreted past messages differently. COGES have received training but not consistently, with some members reporting that they have not received any training at all. These findings highlight a lack of clarification of roles and deficits in human resources management and organizational capacity, including likely flawed communication.

257 **The survey displayed that over half of the cooks (56.8%) in the sample had received training on new techniques and tools**. The proportion of cooks that had received this training was highest in Plateaux, and lowest in Likouala where no cook had received training. Figure 15 displays this:

Figure 15: Cooks in the sample who had received training on new techniques / tools



258 **Regarding the management of the canteens, the actors generally organized themselves in their own way without specific instructions, especially with the Ya bwala canteens**.[114] Several problems were reported such as cases of theft of utensils or their poor condition, insufficient utensils to serve the meals to pupils, either pupils brought their own plate, or the distribution was organized in turns and waves of 50 until the 250 pupils were served. In some cases, the meal was served on notebook sheets.

259 With regard to women who cook in the kitchen, in one department (Lekoumou) they mentioned that an awareness-raising campaign among the population to support school feeding for children had been conducted. The women volunteered because they had children in the school. But **in general, women who work in the kitchens have received training in cooking (hygiene, preparation, organization, health, nutrition, etc.).** The organization of meal preparation by volunteer mothers seems to be problematic. According to a director *"when mothers of volunteer families are not motivated, they may not cook well or may bring infections to children"*

260 In addition, **the following issues reported in the interviews about the kitchen also indicate capacity deficits:**

- Lack of monitoring of kitchen hygienic conditions, including food quality and non-compliance with lunch schedule: this confirms the lack of capacity in the organization of work and monitoring;
- a diet with little variety and little diversity: generally, rice with peas all year round with salt, sometimes even a little too salty for the taste of some pupils;
- pupils who complained about the undercooked meal, who had diarrhea;
- non-standardization of rations distributed by women some pupils seem more favored than others and leftovers that are not distributed while the pupils wanted;

[114] Cantines Ya Bwala received funding for the purchase and supply of local food. The COVID (Global Partnership for Education) fund was used to support these school canteens in the villages.

- the frustration of mothers who have agreed to work in the kitchen voluntarily who feel neglected. They fear that they will have to continue like this for a long time without receiving anything in return or even meals, while they have left their homes to devote themselves to cooking. Because of the noted frustration of the women: they hide food and took it home, thereby reducing the pupils' rations for themselves.

261 **The school directors and the pedagogical managers do not seem to be really involved in the management of school canteens**. However, some mentioned that they receive and deposit the food that arrives quarterly in the warehouse, fill in the daily logs, order firewood and fill in the monthly daily distribution reports (report of the inspection and school guidance). They have received training, participate in seminars but are more focused on teaching methods. Little mention was made of training on school feeding, and one director pointed out that it is from the reports that he is informed of the management of canteens. That if there was a delay in the supply of food, they only waited without taking any action.

262 **At the departmental level, there is a government representative of school feeding, but the role of that person is not well defined.** This person seems to be ignored by other actors, whether they are directors or inspectors. It appears that this representative of the school feeding service and the inspector are engaged in similar activities. Although deficits are noted, remedial actions are not undertaken.

263 The State's contribution to the school feeding programme is the supply of salt, and there is evidence of more regularity of the supply since 2020.[115] However, the supply does not meet the requirements in terms of volume (inadequate quantity). **Sometimes, schools have been forced to charge parents for the purchase of salt to make up for the deficit**. This insufficiency was also confirmed by government stakeholders in the KIIs. Findings from FGDs with parents and interviews with principals, indicate that they are not confident that the government will be able to take over when the project ends. The directors gave an example of a previous experience where it was expected that at the end of that project, the government would continue operations. According to them, up to the time of data collection, nothing had been done.

264 The idea is that the DAS should be in charge of the purchase of food and its delivery as well as the experimentation of the WFP approach in 20 schools on an apprenticeship basis, however, that is not currently being done. The respondents indicated need for training and the lack of training of newly assigned directors. The stakeholders in the interviews frequently reported the lack of capacity for human resources management, organization and coordination.

Q6C What activities need to be undertaken to address the capacity gaps?

Activities needed to be undertaken to address capacity gaps

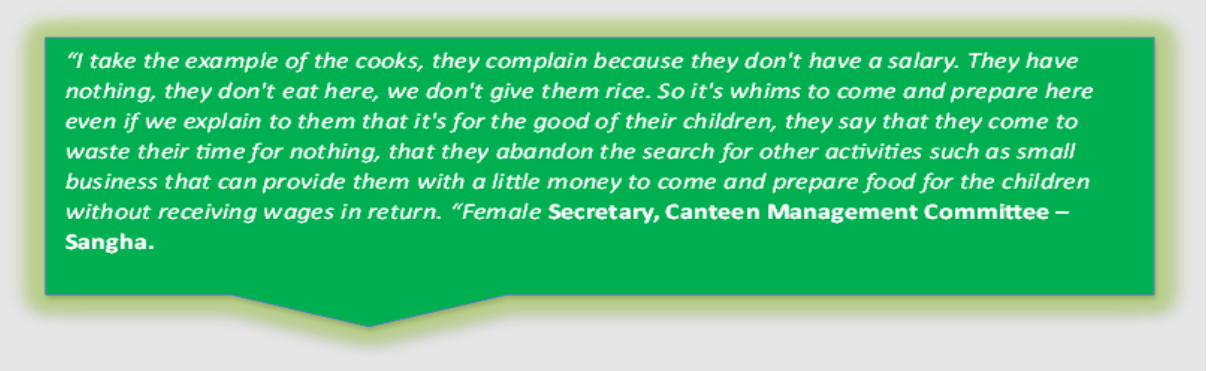
265 Based on the results of this evaluation, a capacity building plan is essential to fill the gaps identified in terms of coordination, management of human, material, relational and organizational resources, knowledge of the different actors at different levels. An appropriate communication plan should accompany the implementation of this capacity-building plan.

266 A procedure manual adaptable to the context, easy to use in the local language should be developed with clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors. It will ensure the standardization of activities, measures to be taken in case of deficit and problem frequently encountered whether in the procedures of supply, payment, in the management of canteens, in the organization of kitchens and others.

267 A system of motivation and recognition should be put in place for actors who work voluntarily in the programme, particularly for women working in kitchens, which is the very heart of school canteens.

[115] Information provided by WFP programme stakeholder

268 Insights from FGDs and KIIs also highlighted a significant aspect of previous school feeding programs that should be addressed in McGovern-Dole FY21: the fact that canteens rely on voluntary work of women. The remuneration of cooks, who are primarily or exclusively women, should be considered as a strategy to enhance the capacity of schools to manage school feeding programs. Including provisions for remuneration to cooks should be a part of the advocacy efforts with the GoC when developing NSF policies. **By recognizing the importance of fair compensation for cooks,** who often play a critical role in ensuring the success of school feeding initiatives, McGovern-Dole FY21 can contribute to strengthening the overall implementation and sustainability of these programmes and avoid the risk of widening gender gap in society, once women who serve voluntary as cook in schools miss their day of work in agriculture.



Key findings and Conclusions – Question 6

1. The Government has the legal and policy framework that are aligned with the national development policy agenda and provide **an enabling institutional environment** that takes agriculture, the food system, procurement, nutrition education and cross-cutting issues into account. WFP has supported this process over the years and will continue to support policy development in the McGovern-Dole FY21. **There is some evidence of improved capacities especially at the national level to support the implementation of a nutrition-sensitive NSFP** and the monitoring and evaluation system to support evidence-based analysis for learning and accountability. However, **there are important capacity gaps**, the most critical being the weak political will regarding the SFP and the low financial commitment by government towards the program.
2. **There is a foundation of structured capacity building** - WFP has different tools for programme management and organizes capacity building at different levels for teachers, principals, inspectors, cooks and the Management Committee (COGES) in school feeding and several nutrition, health, WASH and management related themes are covered in the trainings. **Capacity building is perceived as concentrated at the national level with more training gaps at sub-national levels.**

5. Conclusions and Learnings

269 Based on the findings presented in the previous section, overall conclusions are presented below. These are followed by learnings from the study that provide some insight into how WFP and its implementing partners could improve the PMP and the M&E system.

5.1. Overall conclusions

270 This baseline evaluation of the McGovern-Dole FY21 school feeding program in Congo has established situational analysis and has confirmed baseline values for the project's performance monitoring indicators. **Many of the PMP indicators are appropriate** but there is room for reformulation and removal of several indicators since some are redundant, and some are not realistic within the context or have been defined in such a way that they will be difficult to measure. While most indicators are disaggregated by gender, **it is important to restructure some indicators to be more equity-focused to enable measuring the project's impact on autochone populations.** The baseline findings suggest that the 27 standard, 6 LRP and 26 custom indicators would create a burdensome monitoring workload which would likely outweigh any benefits derived from tracking so many non-critical indicators. It is important to review the number of (especially custom) indicators downwards.

271 The baseline displayed a high rate of attendance (over 80%) as anticipated by the PMP. However, literacy rates demonstrated by the sample was low (26.7% girls; 21.9% boys). This weak performance coupled with high levels of attendance displays an important scope and **underscores the pertinence and the critical positioning of the McGovern-Dole FY21 literacy related interventions.**

272 The late start of the FY21 project will affect the achievement of targets even those initially realistic within the timeframe of the project. While the ET has suggested target adjustments to accommodate this reality, there is **need for critical logistical and supply chain considerations by project stakeholders** before their ratification,

273 Structured capacity building for the M&E in the FY17 round has built more capacity at national than sub-national levels. Addressing capacity gaps and building data synergy with partners would enable a more efficient system for the FY21 project.

274 In general, the learning environment is challenging for the pupils and many of the issues are beyond the control of WFP. Nevertheless, **there was evidence that school feeding encouraged enrolment and retention of girls and boys especially autochone children, in schools.** Baseline findings also emphasized the importance of the project's literacy related interventions regarding the distribution of learning and teaching resources in improving learning outcomes.

275 The goals of increasing local purchases and strengthening the capacities of local farmers may have a positive impact in women's empowerment, if structured and managed appropriately and if local women farmers are prioritized (as is currently the design). A key element would be to strengthen the collaborative mechanism between the farmers and the traders; and for them to arrive at a consensus on the setting of produce prices.

276 There is national capacity to implement a nutrition sensitive and holistic NSFP but the major deterrent is the weak political will and poor financial commitment of government towards school feeding.

277 The fact that canteens rely on voluntary work of women for cooking challenges the GEWE's goal within the MGD FY21. **Remuneration of cooks would contribute to strengthening the overall implementation and sustainability of the program** and would contribute to the reduction of the gender gap within the context.

5.2 Learnings

278 Ensuring that relevant, high priority and project activity-related indicators are primarily focused on enables a more feasible workload for monitoring stakeholders. **Reducing the number of indicators would enable a more efficient M&E system for the program.**

279 There is evidence of commitment of McGovern-Dole FY21 to enhance women farmers' capacities and promoting local women's empowerment. This commitment is reflected in LRP indicators 11 and 12, which explicitly target women farmers. **These indicators not only contribute to women's financial autonomy but also position them as active participants in improving school feeding programs** and, consequently, children's education in RoC. This demonstrates the transformative potential of McGovern-Dole FY21 in empowering women farmers and positively impacting the local community.

280 McGovern-Dole FY21 also demonstrates its commitment to promoting girls' school attendance and retention by incorporating capacity building for Menstrual Hygiene Management practices into its framework. Within the activities, it is also foreseen the support for the creation of women-led girls' groups from the parents' associations to support girls on hygiene practices and their studies. **This approach has a multiplier effect, fostering sustainability in the outcomes achieved.**

281 **The speculation observed in the prices of food products can, in the absence of contractual commitments with producers, limit the ability of producers** to ensure the sustainable supply of food to schools. In the absence of specific measures to ensure the stability of school or DAS staff, the capacity building activities carried out for them may not allow the program to achieve the expected objectives, because the actors trained may be affected. From then on, the arrival of new actors will lead to an endless cycle of training without any real impact.

282 **EGRA and EGMA made it possible to detect weak aptitudes of pupils at this level for the tasks** to which they were subjected. These shortcomings were confirmed by the other actors interviewed. However, **it is important to point out the contributory role of the McGovern-Dole project on literacy outcomes.** There are many factors relating to the school environment, teachers and pupils; and factors outside the school, in particular the overall governance of the education system and the national budget for education - that are outside the control of WFP.

283 Nevertheless, from the baseline evidence the implementation of the McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Program project which runs until 2026, would probably achieve better outcomes by strategic and operational system for regular capacity building of teachers and pedagogical supervision staff and appropriate measures for the provision of essential textbooks (language and mathematics) to pupils, in order to improve the rate of possession of textbooks. Periodic trainings of teachers which result in their absences from school for several days at a time, is also highlighted; and the programme is encouraged to leverage lessons learned and experiences in this thematic area given that this is a strategic priority outlined in the WFP CSP.

284 Yet, it is to be noted the performance of the pupils also depend on the political choices in terms of teacher training, pedagogical approaches, in particular, with regard to dominant paradigms (competency-based approach) and linguistics (mother tongue instruction alongside the French language) which also determine the internal efficiency of the education system, and lead to sustainable learning outcomes. Added to these are disparities by regions (urban, rural, landlocked areas, emergency situations, etc.), population status (indigenous or not) and the possible effects of socio-cultural or socio-economic factors on results by gender. **These are conditions on which the project cannot make a real improvement, which should be taken into account in the overall assessment of the impact of the project at midline and endline.**

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