



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP EVALUATION

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

School feeding in Cambodia

School feeding forms a key part of social protection systems across the world. It improves children's education, health and nutrition, and supports the wider community by providing an important safety net, and by strengthening food systems and economies for home-grown school models.

Over the past decade, Cambodia has made positive strides to improve primary education and reduce gender disparity in schools

While Cambodia has one of the world's fastest rates of improved Human Development Index, undernutrition continues to be widespread, affecting educational results, such as literacy, attendance and concentration in schools.

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Royal Government of Cambodia have collaborated on school feeding since 1999. School feeding interventions are targeted to areas of Cambodia with historically higher rates of poverty and malnutrition, and lower education indicators, with the aim of maximising the life chances of children and their families.

The school feeding programme design has been refined and enhanced to facilitate the transition of all schools to the Cambodia Government National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP). The process of handover is expected to be completed by 2028.

Commissioned by the WFP Cambodia Country Office

WHAT IS HOME GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING (HGSF) IN CAMBODIA?

The HGSF model is a school feeding model that is designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholders. Responsibility for the implementation and the management of the programme is given directly to the schools and the local authorities, while WFP provides capacity strengthening and infrastructure support.

KEY RECENT INITIATIVES

The joint **Food for Education (FFE) Programme** in Cambodia, is funded by donors including the RGC and the US Government's McGovern Dole funding stream, conducted in three phases from 2013 to 2024 (2013-2016, 2017-2019 and 2020-2023) with the expectation that WFP-supported schools will be taken over by the national programme. It operated in Battambang, Siem Reap and Kampong Thom provinces until 2019, then Siem Reap, Kampong Thom and Kampong Chhnang. A no-cost extension for Phase 3 was agreed until April 2024. A new phase is now operating, funded from 2022-2027.

The **Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) initiative 2020-2024** implemented jointly by the MoEYS and WFP in Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhang and Pursat provinces aimed to help enable the shift from the traditional School Feeding Programme to HGSF before handover to the Government's NHGSF programme.

The USDA-financed **Local and Regional Procurement (LRP)** programme, implemented jointly by the MoEYS and WFP, which sought to address national capacity gaps on HGSF through enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of food assistance programs by leveraging local markets, promoting local agriculture, operated from November 2019 to end September 2023. The programme was extended until September 2024.

June 2024

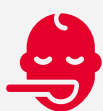
WHAT RESULTS HAS SCHOOL FEEDING DELIVERED?



EDUCATION RESULTS

Despite disruption during COVID-19, evaluations found that over time the school feeding programme had positive effects on children's educational engagement and their achievement. Children's attendance in school improved, and dropout reduced, while enrolment, completion rates and literacy skills all improved.

- **Improved student attendance and reduced dropout.** School feeding intervention improved students' attendance in schools over time. Students in targeted schools also attended more days of schools overall than in comparator schools and missed fewer days of school from 2020-2024. The dropout rate in targeted schools halved from 12% to 6% between 2013 and 2016, and reduced further to 2.4% by 2023, while the national dropout rate stood at 7.5% in 2023.
- **Increased enrolment and higher completion than the national average.** Although enrolment rates were already high in Cambodia in project schools, they increased significantly in all three phases of the project. Project intervention schools had higher net enrolment rates than schools in non-assisted districts (99.6% versus 95.2%). School completion was higher in project intervention schools than the national average (81.3% vs. 80.1%) from 2017-2019, the only period for which data was available.
- **Improved literacy.** Students' literacy doubled in targeted schools between 2017 and 2023 from 10.7% to 21.7%, a major achievement during a period which included learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic - although absolute levels of literacy remained low - highlighting the relevance of the intervention and the need for further support in the early grade reading area.
- There were positive changes for girls in project intervention schools, with **more girls advancing through grades** than boys, and fewer girls repeating grades, and/or dropping out, than boys - though comparator schools saw similar results.



ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOODS AND HEALTH AND HYGIENE RESULTS

The school feeding programme increased access to nutritious foods via school gardens and improved school infrastructure, such as kitchens and food storage. The establishment and rehabilitation of school gardens was important for educational purposes, as well as to supplement the meals. The programme also increased nutritional awareness among children and families. Students and their families' access to health and hygiene facilities also improved via provision of clean water, handwashing facilities and functioning latrines.

- **Increased availability of nutritious foods and cooking infrastructure.** By the end of 2023, 80%

of targeted schools had school gardens providing nutritious foods, compared to 60% in 2017. By contrast, comparator schools were significantly less likely to have a school garden, ranging from 42% in 2016 to 19% in 2019 and 29% in 2023. Project schools also had significantly improved kitchen facilities, storerooms and cooking infrastructure, enabling better access to more safe and nutritious school meals.

- There was **improved nutritional awareness** among families and communities engaged in the interventions, although quantitative data here was limited and inconsistent.
- The programme significantly enhanced schools' and students' **access to hygiene facilities**, including clean water sources, handwashing stations and year-round functioning - though following the COVID-19 pandemic, there was little difference between project and comparator schools due to government hygiene requirements to reopen schools.



FOOD SECURITY FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION RESULTS

School feeding improved food security for students and their families in Cambodia, making a significant contribution to the social protection system. Household food consumption, dietary diversity and the use of coping strategies all improved over time, and fewer students experienced hunger in schools.

- **A significant contribution to social protection.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, take-home rations provided during the period of school closure helped mitigate income losses for vulnerable children and their families. Government scale-up of social assistance to poor and vulnerable households (including take-home rations under the school feeding programme), limited the 2020 poverty rate to 2.8%.
- **Improved household food consumption and dietary diversity.** Although evaluations used different indicators to report on household food consumption over time, food security generally improved among targeted communities and families, with higher food consumption scores compared to comparator schools over time. Dietary diversity scores were also higher in targeted households and people used fewer consumption-related coping strategies.
- **Reduced hunger in schools.** The percentage of hungry students was lower in project intervention schools than in comparator schools (19% compared to 30.4% in 2023), though more recent periods saw overall increased hunger (an increase of 5% between 2019 and 2023), attributed to the effects of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis on food prices, among other reasons.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WERE MADE TO NATIONAL POLICY AND SYSTEMS?

Evaluations reported impressive progress over time across the five pillars of the World Bank SABER model.

SABER Pathway	2016	2019	2023	
Policy Framework	Limited progress	Emerging	Pathway well established	Navy Government pathway well established
Institutional Systems	Progress beginning	Emerging	Progress underway	Light Navy Progress is underway
Program Design & Implementation	Limited progress	Latent progress	Pathway well established	Ivory Progress beginning
Public Sector Resourcing	Limited progress	SMP & Scholarships: Emerging HGSF implementation: Latent	Progress underway	Red Progress is limited; to be an important point of priority
Engagement of Non-State Actors/Community participation & ownership	Limited progress	Emerging	Progress underway	

Contributions to national policies and strategies

- National School Feeding Policy and M&E framework
- National School Health Policy
- Education Strategic Plan (ESP) incorporating school meals and HSGF
- Guidelines on Hygiene, Sanitation and Food Safety
- Digital Khmer-language School Feeding Information System
- HGSF Implementation framework and guidelines
- Operational frameworks and guidelines for the NHGSFP and sub-decree on HGSFP implementation
- Joint HGSF transition strategy
- Water/sanitation and hygiene guidelines in schools

WHAT WERE THE MAIN SUCCESS FACTORS AND CHALLENGES?

Successes:

- **A very high level of national engagement/ownership**, with the programme effectively a joint strategy and intervention between Cambodia Government, WFP and donors.
- **Effective co-ordination between partners**, with consistent efforts by WFP, government stakeholders, local authorities, NGO and implementing partners and local communities at joint planning, implementation, performance monitoring and review.
- **A defined aim of transition and a sequenced approach**, which is noted in evaluations as an exemplar.
- **The multilevel and integrated model**, from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) down to community level, focusing not only on schools but on the broader community.

Challenges and gaps:

- **The capacity strengthening journey**, which has evolved over time, suffered from some early assumptions and over-optimistic planning.
- **Information management/ lesson learning**, which requires prioritisation – especially given the staff turnover on all sides.
- **Gender approaches**, which were weak, unsystematic and failed to seize opportunities for transformative benefits in particular.
- **Dependency on co-operating partners and community/school volunteers**, which placed sometimes unfeasible demands on individuals and communities, and assumed a level of commitment which was not always realistic.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME PLANNED TRANSITION?

- Define the implications of decentralization and deconcentration reforms in Cambodia for school feeding as a social protection contribution.
- Ensure collective and broad-based ownership across Cambodia Government within the social protection momentum beyond MoEYS and the National Social Protection Council as transition takes hold.
- Strengthen sub-national capacities - including for food safety, and for the use of technology within schools.
- Assimilate transition at provincial/school/community level particularly as decentralisation and deconcentration reforms take hold.
- Delineate resources for programme elements including gender, monitoring and information management, including at local level.

BREADTH OF EVIDENCE

This summary brings together evidence from 10 evaluations, of which three were baseline studies, three were mid-term and four were endline evaluations (see Annex). The evaluations comprised a large volume of both quantitative and qualitative evidence on school feeding in Cambodia and were completed from 2018-2023. The synthesis was conducted from January-March 2024.

ANNEX ■ LIST OF EVALUATIONS

Phase I McGovern-Dole 2013-2016: 442-2013/035-00

[Endline Evaluation USDA McGovern Dole FFE-442-2013/035-00, FY 2013 combined with Baseline evaluation USDA McGovern- Dole FFE-442-2016/015-00, FY 2017](#)

Phase II McGovern-Dole 2017-2019: FE-442-2016/015-00

[Endline Evaluation USDA McGovern Dole Grant Food for Education Programme for WFP Cambodia, FY 2017](#)

Phase III McGovern-Dole 2019-2023: FFE-442-2019/013-00

[Baseline Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grants FFE-442-2019-013-00 in Cambodia, FY 2019](#)

[Mid-Term Evaluation of USDA McGovern Dole Grants FFE-442-2019-013-00 in Cambodia, FY 2019](#)

[Endline evaluation of USDA McGovern Dole Grants FFE-442-2019-013-00 in Cambodia, FY 2019](#)

Phase IV McGovern-Dole 2022-2027 FFE-442-2022-009-00

[Baseline Activity Study of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant for WFP School Feeding FFE-442-2022-009-00 in Cambodia, FY 2022](#)

USDA Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP)

[Baseline Evaluation of USDA Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement LRP-442-2019-011-00 in Cambodia, FY 2019](#)

[Mid-Term Evaluation of USDA Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement LRP-442-2019-011-00 in Cambodia, FY 2019](#)

KOICA

[Mid-term Activity Evaluation of the KOICA supported Home Grown School Feeding programme in Cambodia in Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang and Pursat](#)


WFP EVALUATION

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