



THE LIBERIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS ON SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

How Partners plan to support government commitments

INTRODUCTION

The Liberian government strongly believes that the school feeding programme is a policy tool for driving and strengthening human capital, social economic progress, and transforming food systems in the country. As a result, the government supports global initiatives to frame school meals as a critical, cross-cutting action that will help to create a more sustainable and equitable future.

To achieve the goals set forth in its national commitments, the country will rely on support from

various partners who will work hand in hand with the government around the different commitment pillars (policy framework, financing framework, institutional framework and coordination, program design and coverage, evidence generation and monitoring, advocacy).

The goal of this paper is to highlight the services that WFP and its partners—International Financial Institutions, donors, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, —can provide to help the government meet its priorities.

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A. CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL FEEDING IN LIBERIA

1. Policy framework

The government has made efforts to establish a policy framework. School feeding was recognized in all national development plans prior to the adoption of the national school feeding policy in 2013 and the country's first SABER assessment in 2019. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) (2008-2011), the Agenda for Transformation (AfT) (2012-2017), and the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) (2018-2023) all recognized school feeding as a vital building element for achieving educational achievements. Relevant sector strategies, such as education, social protection, and agriculture, have also identified school nutrition as an intervention that helps to Liberia's human capital development. However, actual execution of school feeding-related activities in these national and sector plans has been significantly behind expectations. The key variables causing underachievement are resource constraints and prioritized decisions, which create important obstacles that must be addressed.

2. Financing framework

The financial system is one of the elements that needs the most improvement. Since school feeding resumed in post-conflict Liberia, the government has been unable to make significant financial contributions to the program. The government has made no budgetary allocation, with the majority of its contribution limited to the pay of staff allocated to the School Feeding Division at the national and sub-national levels. Other financial donations have come from donor organizations. In its national school meals commitment, the government pledged to provide \$5 million in budgetary support for school feeding over two years. However, only \$2.6 million of this total is tied to financing granted to the government through other donor-funded initiatives (\$1.5 million through the AfDB/GAFSP and \$1.1 million through the IMF's remaining MIF allocation to the COVID 19 response). This emphasizes the need for additional government financial support for the programme.

3. Institutional framework / coordination commitments

This is one of the pillars upon which the government has performed most effectively. The Ministry of Education School Feeding Division organizes a monthly coordination meeting for all school feeding partners. The meetings are conducted on the last Thursday of each month. The Director of School Feeding's perseverance in convening these meetings, as well as the priority placed on attendance, have contributed to outstanding coordination among school feeding partners on the one hand, and between partners and

the Ministry of Education on the other.

4. Program design and coverage

Some level of progress has been made in the Program design and coverage commitment, but there is room for improvement. The government has a Division of School Feeding at the national and a School Feeding governance structure at the sub-national level under the leadership of the County Education Officer with support from the School Feeding County Coordinators and District Focal Points. The structure at the sub-national level is responsible for regularly monitoring the school feeding implementation at the school level and providing monitoring reports to WFP. The Ministry of Education, through the School Principals, is responsible for preparing monthly Cooperating Partners Distribution Reports. However, reporting on monitoring and school feeding food distribution activities is still a challenge for the government despite regular support being provided in the form of training and in some cases stipends for MOE school feeding staff. There could be several factors responsible for this but two key ones are the staff capacity challenge and limited government own budget support to the program.

5. Evidence and data generation

Evidence and data generation at the sub-national level is still challenging due to the limited capacity of the Ministry's staff at the district level. The government plans to conduct a school census every two years at the national level. However, this has not been regular due to funding challenges. Some data to fill gaps in the school census are generated from reports provided by school feeding partners.

6. Advocacy and partnerships

The government has made some progress in this pillar. In addition to the many efforts been made, it is important to note that for the first time in Liberia, the First Lady of the country has accepted to serve as the Champion for School Feeding. In this role, she is leading the government's advocacy efforts supported by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education through the sector development plan has planned several advocacy activities to create awareness and mobilize resources to support School Feeding in Liberia. Through the government and partners' advocacy and collaboration school feeding is currently implemented in 1,206 pre primaries, primary, and community schools, reaching 229,418 schoolchildren in 11 out of 15 counties in Liberia. The plan of the Government is to scale up the programme from its current level to reach 332,000 schoolchildren in 1,610 schools by June 2025.

B. LIBERIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

1. Policy Framework

- ▶ Revise the National School Feeding policy.
- ▶ Incorporate School Feeding into relevant national, sectoral, and institutional policies including the national development plans.

2. Financing framework

- ▶ Establish a sustainable budget line for school feeding programme and increase the yearly allocation to USD 5 million in the next two years.

3. Institutional framework/Coordination

- ▶ Strengthen institutional framework around HGSE, including strengthening multisectoral coordination.

4. Program design and coverage

- ▶ By 2025, increase the coverage of school meals programme by 45 percent from 1,110 schools to 1,610 schools to cover 332,000 school Children.
- ▶ Develop guidelines for the integration of school health and nutrition into the school feeding programme.

C. HOW PARTNERS PLAN TO SUPPORT LIBERIA NATIONAL COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMME

Commitments pillars	Commitments	Partners' support actions
1. Policy Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Revise the National School Feeding Policy. ▶ Embed school meals into other relevant national, sectoral, or institutional policies, including the national development plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP is Planning with the government to review the policy. WFP is committed to contribute to the budget for the policy review (\$47,170). ▶ Other school feeding partners have been asked by the government to contribute to the budget for the policy review.
2. Financing Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish a sustainable budget line for the school meal program in the national budget and increase the yearly allocation to USD 5 million in the next two years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP will continue to support the Ministry of Education in advocating for creating a line in the national budget for school feeding. ▶ WFP will organize a donor roundtable for the government to engage external donors while its internal budget process is pursued. ▶ Collaboration between various UN agencies to support the School meal programme jointly with other sectors/institutions. ▶ WFP, MoE, and First Lady Office are working to diversify the fund raising mechanisms through innovative financing by engaging the Liberian citizens, including Diasporas. ▶ The Ministry has begun soliciting funding from partners to review the policy. Mary's Meals Liberia and Save the Children International have begun adhering to the commitment. They have now contributed up to 65%.
3. Institutional framework/coordination Commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strengthening institutional arrangements for Home Grown School Feeding including strengthening multisectoral coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP is committed to support the School Unit to establish a functional platform for quarterly multisectoral coordination meeting on HGSE. ▶ WFP is supporting the School Feeding Division at MOE to strengthen the capacity of the county school feeding structures to effectively coordinate school feeding activities at the sub-national level. ▶ The Ministry of Education School Feeding Division and partners Mary's Meals Liberia, Save the Children International and Mercy Corps Liberia meet every month to resolve and address program issues.

Commitments pillars	Commitments	Partners' support actions
<p>4. Program design and coverage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Commitment 1: Increase the coverage of the school meals programme by 45 percent from 1,110 schools to 1,610 schools to cover 332,000 schools. ▶ Commitment 2: Develop guidelines for the integration of school health and nutrition into the school feeding programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WFP will partner with other UN agencies (FAO & UNICEF) and relevant government ministries to scale up the HGSF to cover additional beneficiaries in all 15 counties. The HGSF scale-up proposal is to be completed by August 2024. ▶ Promote school gardens and 4-H/school health activities in schools. ▶ Partners and donors, including, Save the Children International, Mercy Corps and World Food Programme are providing school Feeding interventions in Liberia. Presently, about 17% of the student population is being fed.