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WFP's support to strengthening the national social protection system in Ghana

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Centre for Social Protection

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This case study was written for the World Food Programme (WFP) by **Roz Price** from the UK Institute of Development Studies, and **Manucheher Shafee, Nicolas Diaz Castellanos,** and **Nalifa Mehelin** from WFP.

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Acronyms

CSP	Country Strategic Plan
GDP	Gross domestic product
GHS	Ghana cedi
GSFP	Ghana School Feeding Programme
KII	Key informant interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
LIPW	Labour Intensive Public Works
MOGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection
NHIA	National Health Insurance Authority
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WFP	World Food Programme



1. Introduction

This case study reviews the role of WFP in supporting the national social protection system in Ghana over the last decade (2014-2023), including support to the national school feeding programme since 2006. It assesses how WFP has supported the building blocks of Ghana's national social protection system at large, including on non-contributory social assistance as the Government's main mechanism for supporting people living in poverty and situations of vulnerability. The case study represents a light-touch exercise, undertaken through a rapid literature review and interviews with WFP personnel and other key stakeholders.

2. Context

Country Context

Ghana is a lower-middle income country with a population of 30.8 million, according to the latest available census (2021). Recognized in the region for its general political stability and democratic governance (WFP, n.d.), Ghana has made substantial efforts in recent years towards improving its human development indicators, especially around health and education (ILO, n.d.). Now deemed ineligible for development grants or concessional financing given its middle-income country status, Ghana has, since 2017 and following the announcement of President Nana Akufo-Addo, pursued the 'Ghana Beyond Aid' vision. This vision aims for Ghana to achieve economic independence and self-reliance from foreign aid. A national strategy was consequently released in 2019 directing all development cooperation partners in Ghana to work within this framework (WFP, 2021a: 7).

Despite improvements in the country's development metrics, 23 per cent of the population still lives in poverty. What is more, the 2020 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis further indicates that 11.7 per cent of the population is food insecure (WFP,

2021a: 7; WFP, 2020a: 6). Although food insecurity remains a national challenge, there are large inequalities between the northern and southern parts of the country, as well as between rural and urban areas (WFP, 2020a: 6). For instance, hunger and malnutrition persist primarily in northern Ghana, as well as in many rural and peri-urban communities across the country (WFP, n.d.). The North-South disparity is in large part due to Ghana's geography, which is characterized by marked climate, agro-ecological, and economic differences. For example, southern Ghana has two rainy seasons each year, allowing agriculture-dependent households in this part of the country to grow more food compared to farmers in the North, which has only one rainy season (WFP, 2022). These inequalities are accentuated as the northern part of the country is experiencing increasingly erratic rainfall, with longer dry periods due to climate change (WFP, 2022). This is important, as roughly 45 per cent of the population of Ghana derives their livelihoods either directly or indirectly from the agricultural sector. In northern Ghana, for instance, roughly 90 percent of families rely on agricultural livelihoods, where severely limited food production has recently resulted in chronic poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition (WFP, n.d.).

Ghana also faces the triple burden of malnutrition. Among its population, there are high numbers of people who are underweight, overweight or who experience micronutrient deficiencies, or hidden hunger (WFP, n.d.) According to the 2022 Demographic Survey report, 17 per cent of children under 5 are stunted (chronic undernutrition), with rates in rural areas (20 per cent) higher than urban areas (15 per cent). The Northern Region and the North-East Region show the highest rates, at about 30 per cent, even though the national average has declined from 33 per cent in 1993 to 17 per cent in 2022, pointing to an unequal improvement of nutrition indicators in some parts of the country. Similar trends are seen in terms of wasting (acute malnutrition), declining from 14 per cent in 1993 to 23 per cent in 2022 (GSS and ICF, 2024).

Varying levels of food availability have also led to price fluctuations throughout the country. Ghana is a food deficit country and is therefore disproportionately exposed to global price spikes for imported foods (WFP, n.d.). The war in Ukraine and its impact on world food prices and interruption to food supply chains, together with the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-existing debt, liquidity challenges, and macroeconomic vulnerabilities in the country have all had a compounding negative impact on the Ghanaian economy in the past two years (Medina, 2024). Global oil price hikes and the depreciation of the Ghana cedi (GHS) against major currencies have also contributed to a rapid increase in prices (WFP, 2022: 1). For instance, in November 2022 Ghana recorded the highest food price inflation (122 per cent) in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank (WFP, 2021a: 1).



Trajectory of social protection in Ghana

Ghana developed its first National Social Protection Strategy in 2007, which was revised in 2012. A Social Protection Rationalization Study conducted in 2013 established the need for the strategy to be part of a holistic National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) framework to facilitate harmonization, coordination, improved targeting, and relevant capacity building at all levels of Government (MOGCSP, 2015: viii). The NSPP was approved in 2015 (MOGCSP, 2015), underwent a revision process in 2021, and is currently designed to enable a coherent, effective, and efficient delivery of social protection services, providing an institutional framework for coordination and stakeholder collaboration in monitoring and ensuring accountability measures (MOGCSP, 2015: iii). The NSPP also aims to foster a well-coordinated and inter-sectoral social protection system (Scott and Ammoun, 2021: 5).

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP) was established in 2013 to help strengthen coordination of social protection services. It was mandated as the social protection lead by the Cabinet in 2014 (MOGCSP, 2015: 8). Prior to this, coordination for social protection was undertaken by various line ministries who implemented different social protection-related activities, oftentimes in siloes (KII). The Government has also introduced several system-level reforms and innovations to strengthen programme delivery and to operationalize coordination plans and leverage linkages, such as the establishment of the Ghana National Household Registry, a unit under the MOGCSP mandated to establish a national social registry that can serve several social programmes. The Government has also worked to develop digital benefit payment systems (Scott and Ammoun, 2021: 6).

Table 1 captures the Government's main social protection programmes, largely run by the Government with some support from resource and donor partners (KII).



Table 1: Key ongoing social protection flagship programmes in Ghana

Programme and key agency	Start year	Objective	Target group
Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) MOGCSP	2008	Smooth consumption for poor households.	Since 2018, a combination of geographical targeting (community selection) and poverty targeting using a proxy means test. But no re-targeting since 2018. Previous targeting approach incorporated categorical targeting: poor households are eligible if they contain one or more of the following household members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • orphan and vulnerable children; • elderly, over 65 years; • people with disabilities who are unable to work; • pregnant women; and • mothers of children under 1.
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA)	2003	Provide financial access to quality health care.	Legal Ghanaian residents. Subscribers fall into two broad groups – the informal and exempt groups. The informal group pays premiums, while members of the exempt group do not. In addition to the premium paid, subscribers are also required to pay a processing fee or renewal fee for their ID cards; some are exempt.
Labour Intensive Public Works (LIPW) District Assemblies	2010	Provide beneficiaries with employment and income-generating opportunities, particularly during periods when there is a shortage of labour demand and in response to external shocks.	Poor rural households, targeted geographically followed by self-targeting.
Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) MOGCSP	2005	Increase school enrolment, attendance, and retention among schoolchildren; boosting children nutrition; and boost domestic food production.	Children enrolled in public pre-primary and primary schools. School attendance (conditionality).
Exemptions and basic education Capitation Grants Ghana Education Service	2005	Provide a budget for non-salary expenditures in all public basic schools.	All public basic schools.

Source: Developed from Pouw et al., 2020; Scott and Ammoun, 2021; UNICEF, 2022; WFP, 2017; KII; <https://www.nhis.gov.gh/about> [accessed 30 January 2023]

Benefits	Challenges
<p>Bi-monthly unconditional cash transfers (six payments per year), and registration in the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS).</p>	<p>Delays and inconsistencies in payments since 2019 No changes were made to the LEAP cash transfer amount between 2015 and July 2023, which is when the government announced doubling of the transfer value per month. Challenges around reaching LEAP beneficiary households and coordinating between the MOGCSP, NHIA and Districts.</p>
<p>Subscriber category defines what payment they make and whether they serve a waiting period. LEAP beneficiaries have access to health care services through the NHIS, provided they register themselves annually.</p>	<p>Insufficient budgetary allocations. Many beneficiaries are not aware of their right to access cost-free health services. Low quality of services requires users to pay for private services that would otherwise be covered under the NHIS.</p>
<p>Wages pegged to above national minimum wage, but below agricultural wage rate. Up to 180 days (no more than six hours per day) over two consecutive agricultural off-seasons.</p>	
<p>One daily hot meal made from locally produced foodstuffs.</p>	<p>Low transfer values not adequate for nutritious meals. Weak linkages to local smallholder farmers as providers of fresh produce for school meals.</p>
<p>Capitation grants are provided to all public schools with an amount of GHS 10 per student. These are divided into a base grant, which is provided to all schools in the first term, and grants based on enrolment, which are provided in the second and third terms.</p>	

On average, less than 5 percent of Gross domestic product (GDP) is spent on social protection in Africa – Ghana has spent 1.5 per cent of GDP on social protection in recent years. (ILO, 2021; UNICEF, 2023). While slightly higher than the West Africa sub-regional average (1 per cent of GDP) and that of some neighbouring countries, Ghana's total social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP is nevertheless below the average for sub-Saharan Africa and for lower-middle income countries.

Due to limited fiscal space, exacerbated by rising public sector debt in Ghana (attributed in part to the impact of COVID-19), the Government's current spending plans (2023) aim towards a significant reduction in social protection expenditures, including by reducing benefit values. There has already been a decline in social protection expenditures since 2018 (UNICEF, 2023), and many of Ghana's social protection programmes have faced budgetary and expenditure related challenges since 2020. This has included reductions in the real value of allocated funds as well as delayed or reduced disbursements to beneficiaries. For instance, despite the doubling of the LEAP transfer value in 2023, the real value of LEAP grants when adjusted for inflation has fallen by 47 per cent since 2015, which was when the last cash increase was implemented. The MoGCSP, the primarily responsible entity for social protection coordination in Ghana, has seen its budget cut as a proportion of GDP from 0.23 per cent to 0.20 per cent, which is projected to further decline to 0.13 per cent of GDP in 2026 (UNICEF, 2023).

While there has been an increase in the number of social protection activities, projects, and programmes, this has also resulted in duplications

and fragmentation of the social protection system (ILO, n.d.). Despite increasing needs, coverage remains limited and inefficient. For example, as of June 2023, the government's LEAP cash transfers cover around 1.5 million people, whereas as per the latest Ghana Living Standard Survey Report (2016-2017), it is estimated that around 8 per cent of the population (approximately 2.5 million people) were living in extreme poverty (WFP, 2021a: 7). However, in mid-2023, the government announced an expansion of the LEAP programme as well as improving its targeting to cover the extreme poor by 2024, with a target to reach the 2.5 million people living in extreme poverty (Sarpong, H., 2023). Despite announced expansions to the flagship social protection programme (LEAP), some scholars argue that the effectiveness of public programs in Ghana hinges on their institutionalization, underscored by legal frameworks and budgetary allocations, the limitations of which can subject state capacity and the delivery of public goods and services to changing political mandates (Whitfield, 2010; Ibrahim, 2020, as cited in Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021: 4).

All in all, evidence from Ghana on the impact of social protection across different socioeconomic dimensions is clear (Thorne et al., 2014 cited in UNICEF, 2022: 1; Pouw et al., 2020). For instance, for each GHS invested in the LEAP programme, evidence shows an estimated GHS 2.5 generated in the local economy (Thorne et al., 2014, cited in UNICEF, 2022: 1). Furthermore, the 2019 Ghana cost-benefit analysis for school feeding showed that each GHS invested in feeding one schoolchild yields a GHS 3.3 return on that investment in the economy over the life of that schoolchild (Dunaev and Corona, 2019).

LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The Government's COVID-19 pandemic response was swift, with an immediate national focus on strengthening the healthcare system (WFP, 2020b: 7) and a prioritization of in-kind food transfers for households vulnerable to food insecurity (Scott and Ammoun, 2021: 13). The multidimensional nature of the vulnerabilities of households coming out of the pandemic shed light on opportunities for resource partner collaboration (WFP, 2021a: 7), including as part of efforts to make social protection programmes more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable people (WFP, 2020b:3).

As part of the pandemic response, WFP worked with the MOGCSP and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to expand social protection to smallholder farmers and daily-wage earners impacted by the disruptions associated with the pandemic, providing them with cash transfers. The response also included direct food and nutrition support for people living with HIV (WFP, 2021a: 7; WFP, 2020b: 3), promoting their adherence to their drug regimen. Acknowledging the opportunity to better link the country's social protection offering to the needs of people living with HIV, WFP also undertook a programme pilot to help generate evidence for advocacy on how social protection could help support create long-term livelihood opportunities for them, while safeguarding their food and nutritional needs.

In addition, transfer values for daily wage earners were aligned to the national LEAP values (WFP, 2020b: 7), while smallholder farmers received higher values due to additional components linked to lost harvest and farm preparations following the immediate impact of the pandemic (KII).

The Government's response demonstrated Ghana's capacity to leverage existing social protection programmes to scale up support, preventing the most vulnerable households from resorting to negative coping strategies, such as the selling of assets or going into debt, in turn accentuating their hardships further (UNICEF, 2022: 7). However, funding has been a major hindrance to the timely release of benefits to targeted beneficiaries of the LEAP programme, for instance, some of which have taken almost two years to be disbursed (UNICEF, 2022:7). While the operational continuity of LEAP was ensured, its reach and efficacy were still hindered by insufficient resources, which in turn saw government and resource partners discussing how the limited funding could best reach those deemed especially vulnerable in the face of the pandemic (Scott and Ammoun, 2021:13). Still, concerns remained around whether the LEAP programme was reaching the poorest and most vulnerable households with the limited resources it had at its disposal (Abdulai and Ibrahim, 2021:6).

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact in Ghana also prompted WFP to adapt its support strategies and enhance existing partnerships with the MOGCSP and the Government. This involved providing financial assistance to help generate evidence and data to inform future interventions at the service of populations identified by the Ghana National Household Registry (GNHR), as well as establishing the Accra COVID-19 Hub with the Government to bolster the Government's preparedness and response. This response underscored WFP's role and importance in the social protection sphere beyond school feeding alone, which had up to that point been a major focus of WFP's support to the social protection system in the country (WFP, 2020b: 9). Beyond addressing immediate needs, WFP's response to COVID-19 in Ghana also served to illuminate the organization's role in bridging the gap between saving and changing lives (WFP, 2020b: 9).

3. WFP's objectives and role












In 2005 WFP shifted to a five-year development portfolio and, since 2016, it has been gradually moving from a primarily operational role to also that of an enabler, decreasing direct food assistance operations and increasing its support for capacity strengthening and policy advisory (WFP, 2018b: 8). This was, for instance, reflected in WFP's Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2019–2023 for Ghana. In line with its CSPs, WFP has been contributing to the wider aim for Ghana to pursue “efficient, equitable, resilient and inclusive food systems that contribute to the reduction of stunting and micronutrient deficiencies, achieved through technical and policy support for scaling up nutrition-sensitive and gender-responsive social protection programming and public–private [sector] partnerships” (WFP, 2018b: 2). The CSP 2019–2023 was informed by the zero-hunger strategic review and evaluations, and is aligned with government policies, particularly the ‘Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017–2024)’, ‘Planting for Food and Jobs, and One District, One Warehouse’ (WFP, 2018b:2). The Zero-Hunger Strategic Review specifically identified weak linkages between agriculture, nutrition, and social protection at both the production and consumption levels (WFP, 2018b:6).

Within the 2019-2023 CSP, Strategic Outcome (SO) 3 specifically aimed to strengthen the capacities of national and local institutions that manage social protection programmes, alongside with improved beneficiary targeting capabilities, while SO4 focused on aspects of social protection in relation to nutrition and school feeding programmes (WFP, 2018b: 2). In 2020, WFP revised the CSP 2019-2023 to include a new Strategic Outcome (SO5), introducing

a crisis response focus. This revision enabled WFP in Ghana to respond to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential influx of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, due to upcoming national elections, and from Burkina Faso, because of the deepening conflict and fragility in the Sahel (WFP, 2020c:2).

As such, WFP's role in Ghana has increasingly evolved to that of an enabling actor, in alignment with Ghana's vision of self-reliance, while maintaining a minor two-fold humanitarian footprint also focused on assisting the government's emergency response activities. In addition, WFP has also been piloting initiatives in targeted areas to strengthen policy formulation and social cohesion efforts (WFP, 2021a:7). The organization's overarching collaborating partner in Ghana for all social protection initiatives, including school feeding, has been the MOGCSP (WFP, 2021a). The recently developed CSP 2024-2028, which is now in effect, has been developed by WFP in consultation with a range of national and local stakeholders.

Table 2: WFP strategic outcomes and activities for CSP 2019–2023

Main relevant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)	WFP Ghana strategic outcomes	Focus area	Activities	WFP social protection building blocks (BBs)
SDG 2: zero hunger	1. Vulnerable populations, including children and women of reproductive age in high burden regions, have improved nutritious status in line with National targets by 2025.	Root causes	Cash and vouchers for nutritious foods for vulnerable groups.	
SDG 2: zero hunger	2 Targeted populations and communities in Ghana benefit from more efficient, inclusive, and resilient food systems that support nutrition value chains by 2030.	Resilience building	Technical support for food chain services and food security.	
SDG 17: partnerships for the Goals	3. Local and national institutions have enhanced capacity to target and manage food security, nutrition, and social protection programmes by 2030.	Root causes	Technical support for the national school meals programme. Shocks, early-warning and risk management, food safety and quality support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Governance, capacity and coordination  Platforms and infrastructure  Planning and financing  Assessments and analysis
SDG 17: partnerships for the Goals	4. Government efforts to achieve zero hunger by 2030 are supported by advocacy and coherent policy frameworks.	Root causes	Advocate for the promulgation and enforcement of policies and legislation on school feeding, gender equality, etc. Institutional capacity strengthening activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Policy and Legislation  Governance, capacity and coordination  Assessments and analysis  Design of programme parameters
SDG 2: zero hunger	5. Crisis-affected populations are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs during and in the aftermath of shocks.	Response to crises	Emergency cash-based transfers and in-kind food. Support to SRSP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Advocacy  Design of programme parameters  Benefit delivery

Source: Developed from WFP, 2022; 2021a; 2021b; 2020c; 2018b

4. Activities and results

FROM DIRECT IMPLEMENTATION TO ADVISORY SUPPORT AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY DIALOGUE

Ghana's social protection system has undergone continuous development over the years, bolstered by political backing and the establishment of a National Social Protection Policy (NSSP) (KII). What is now imperative is the coordination and sustained support for the NSSP's continued operation through multi-sectoral collaboration and service integration (KII). However, with Ghana's reduction in overseas development assistance due to its status as a lower-middle-income country and WFP's planned phase-out of implementation and direct delivery functions by 2035, there is a pressing need for WFP to further build on its role as a facilitator and enabler (WFP Ghana, 2021:95).

Since 2018, WFP's role in Ghana has undergone significant transformation, transitioning from direct food delivery to a focus on capacity strengthening within the broader social protection system (KII). Ensuring that Ghana pursues national ownership of key social protection programmes was flagged in a decentralized evaluation of WFP's Enhanced Nutrition and Value Chains Project, which was implemented between March 2016 and June 2021 (WFP Ghana, 2021:45).

DIVERSIFICATION OF RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS

Aligned with Ghana's aim to lower its dependence on external assistance, WFP has been working with the Government to secure opportunities for multi-year funding from non-traditional donors, such as International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as well as the private sector in recognition of the importance of fostering public-private partnerships. This reaffirms WFP's facilitating, convening and advisory role in Ghana (WFP, 2021a: 10). In recent years, there has been notable growth in private sector partnerships involving both international and local institutions collaborating with WFP in Ghana (WFP, 2021a:9). This strategic shift towards diversifying financial support in Ghana has been in alignment with effecting policy changes that prioritize long-term, sustainable development solutions. Moreover, the involvement of the private sector in the school feeding program, both to increase WFP's resource portfolio and sustain programmatic impact through the adoption of market-based approaches, has been established as a key element of focus within the new country strategic plan (2024-2028) (KII).

LEVERAGING WFP'S CONVENING AND COORDINATION ROLES FOR ENHANCED SOCIAL PROTECTION TARGETING, COVERAGE, AND DELIVERY

WFP holds the chairmanship of the Social Protection Development Partners Forum and co-chairs the Social Protection Sector Working Group alongside the Government, which has facilitated the integration and the exchange of information (KII), especially during the COVID-19 response (WFP, 2021a: 22). The Development Partners Forum, in particular, plays a pivotal role as a platform for enhancing coordination and collaboration among various social protection initiatives primarily supported by resource partners (KII).

Furthermore, WFP supports the Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection (MOGCSP) through active participation in technical forums, including the Social Protection Sector Working Group. Its contributions to advocacy papers and strategic plans, including those formulated for the national Covid-19 social protection response, have been instrumental in setting the direction of social protection priorities in tandem with government and donor partners (WFP, 2020b: 18).

Moreover, WFP's funding support for data collection and generation efforts for the Ghana National Household Registry has helped refine national targeting strategies, enabling a more effective COVID-19 response (WFP, 2020b:18). Through technical assistance initiatives, WFP has enhanced the targeting of government food and nutrition security programs by bolstering government capacities in food security analysis and mapping, and advocating for increased nutrition-sensitivity in social protection schemes. Additionally, WFP has demonstrated the efficacy of combining cash transfers with vouchers for specialized nutritious foods to support vulnerable groups at risk of malnutrition (WFP, 2018b:11).

NUTRITION-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION: GHANA'S SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME

WFP has been supporting the school feeding programme through a wide range of areas – from providing operational support and the delivery of school meals to conducting strategic advocacy and dialogue with government partners in order to help inform national legislation efforts, facilitate investments, and support the institutionalization of school feeding (WFP, 2018b: 11).

WFP is currently working with the Government to expand coverage of the school feeding programme while at the same time ensuring minimum levels of nutrition in the school meals currently delivered. By working towards a more nutrition-sensitive school feeding programme, WFP has identified opportunities to foster linkages between schools in need of nutritious ingredients for meals and local smallholder farmers who produce fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, milk, and other items. These linkages ensure that school meals are prepared with locally sourced, fresh, and nutritious ingredients while simultaneously supporting income-generating opportunities for local farmers who, by selling to schools, could expect consistent demand for fresh produce from local schools.

ASSESSING CAPACITIES AND GENERATING EVIDENCE

Since 2015, WFP has conducted a suite of assessments to inform and guide Ghana's school feeding programme. For instance, a 2015 assessment of the systems approach for better education results (SABER) and a 2016 operational assessment of the school feeding programme, while praising institutional and coordination mechanisms, also cited weak implementation. They also recommended improvements in the nutritional quality of school meals, community involvement, linkages with smallholder farmers and better monitoring and evaluation capacities (WFP, 2018b: 9). The 2017 school meals nutrition survey indicated that, while the coverage of the school feeding programme increased – from 1.7 million at the end of 2017 to 2.8 million at the end of 2018 – the nutritional quality of the meals remained low (WFP, 2018a: 10). It is also worth noting that the school feeding programme in Ghana currently covers about 58 per cent of primary school children in public schools (KII).

In 2021, WFP helped pilot a digitalized monitoring and reporting system with visualization capacity for the school feeding programme, which resulted in being a prominent strategic advocacy effort. This was aimed at enabling timely decision making, increasing transparency, and providing crucial programme data to support advocacy efforts for increased investment in the programme (WFP, 2021a: 3, 17). The reports from schools participating in this pilot initiative will be analysed to record any efficiency gains identified to advocate for extending the pilot to all schools, as well as improve monitoring. It is noteworthy that the disaggregated data on cooking activities and meals served generated through this pilot has already led to adjusted resources allocated to schools to better account for their school meal needs. Additionally, the cost-benefit analysis of the national school feeding programme, conducted in collaboration with the MOGCSP, continues to serve as a crucial tool for advocacy and policy dialogue, particularly for increased budget allocation for the program (WFP, 2018a:3).

ADDING NUTRITIONAL VALUE TO SCHOOL MEALS

Since WFP's handover of the direct implementation of school feeding programme to the Government in 2016, maintaining the recommended nutritional quality of school meals has been a challenge (WFP, 2019: 6). There have been improvements to this end, as shown in the 2021 annual joint monitoring of school feeding schools, which was undertaken in collaboration with government partners. The exercise found that progress on nutrition uptake in schools was good and that Covid-19 did not negatively affect school attendance when schools reopened (WFP, 2021a:17).

Against the backdrop of the need to continue improving the nutritional value of school meals, the Government has shown increased commitment towards allocating additional resources to this end, increasing the previous 1 GHS per day (since 2016) allocation to 1.50 GHS per child per day (KII). Although the additional allocation of resources is welcome, the increase remains low vis-a-vis the nutritional needs of schoolchildren receiving school meals, with the latest Fill the Nutrient Gap Analysis (FNG) projecting about GHS 3 alone per child, per day. What's more, the increased amount also remains too low considering the rise in the cost of living in Ghana, including due to inflation of food price over the course of recent years (KII). This has been a main concern of the programme, as it means the food served in schools is not always plentiful or of very high quality (KII). WFP is advocating for a further increase in funding to improve this quality in alignment with the findings of the FNG analysis (KII).

Central to improving the nutritious value of school meals and their quality has been the training of trainers related to school feeding, supported by WFP. Over the last five years these have included capacity strengthening around nutrition, food safety, hygiene, menu planning, monitoring and handy measures for preparing nutritious meals (WFP, 2018a: 10; WFP, 2019: 11). In 2019, extensive training was provided to some 8,000 school



feeding caterers and head cooks in innovative ways of cooking nutritious meals (WFP, 2019: 11). A joint monitoring exercise undertaken by school feeding stakeholders revealed that appropriate and context-specific school menus were in place, and that children ate better and more nutritious meals in 2019. The joint monitoring exercise was part of a follow-up nutrition assessment of the school feeding programme, two years after WFP handed over the programme to the Government (WFP, 2019: 11). This has since become an annual exercise undertaken with key government partners (KII). Additionally, WFP has also supported school- caterers optimize the nutritional value of school meals by supporting the introduction of nutrient-dense foods, including fortified rice. An ongoing pilot is supporting schools in highly food-insecure districts access locally produced fortified rice by providing local rice millers with technical and logistical support. The intervention is also prioritizing behavioural change activities aimed at demystifying norms and perceptions around consumption of certain locally available nutritious foods including parboiled unpolished rice.

LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS TO INFORM THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL FEEDING IN GHANA

To demonstrate the returns of investment of school feeding WFP, in collaboration with Mastercard, supported the National School Feeding Secretariat to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the national school feeding programme in 2018. Results revealed that every GHS 1 (US\$ 0.18) invested in the national school feeding programme stands to yield GHS 3.3 (US\$ 0.59) along the life cycle of a child benefiting from the programme (WFP, 2019: 3). The returns stand to be even higher if some of the bottlenecks of the programme were addressed, including, among others, low nutritional quality of school meals due to insufficient per-meal transfer values and low monitoring system capacities that include manual record keeping of meals cooked and children reached. The home-grown component of the programme that links school feeding to agriculture was also strengthened (WFP, 2019: 13).

In 2021, WFP also collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) to support the School of Public Health with developing food-based dietary guidelines for Ghana, as well as school health and nutrition guidelines. This collaboration is expected to improve operational effectiveness of school meals under the Ghana school feeding programme (WFP, 2021a: 20) In the same year, WFP supported the Ghana School Feeding Programme by piloting a digitalization of its monitoring system to complement the national digitalization drive (WFP, 2021a: 3).

TOWARDS COUNTRY OWNERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME AND EMBEDDING SCHOOL FEEDING INTO LAW

WFP has been working closely with the MOGCSP, including as part of many activities embedded in the CSP 2019–2023, that focuses on school feeding and the development of school feeding-specific legislation initiatives, which goes hand in hand with the School Feeding Policy Review, as well as evidence gathering to support nutrition-sensitive social protection (WFP, 2018b: 15-16). After the handover of the school meals programme to the Government in 2016, school feeding has become one of the Government’s leading social protection initiatives, accounting for over 80 percent of the MOGCSP’s budget specifically allocated to social protection (WFP, 2019: 11).

In 2019, cost-benefit analysis findings were widely disseminated under the leadership of the MOGCSP and presented to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Gender, Children and Social Protection for deliberation. As part of processes towards legislation on school feeding to enhance sustainability of funding sources, the draft bill received its first reading in parliament in 2019, prior to legal deliberation and finalization (WFP, 2019: 3). The bill’s progress stalled during Covid-19, but it is currently going to Cabinet again for approval and then, if successful, will go to Parliament (KII). Ongoing advocacy efforts with Parliament since 2019, including links to the legislative process on school feeding and the school feeding bill (if approved), are poised to significantly strengthen the sustainability of funding sources for the program (KII).

With COVID-19 related lockdowns and closure of schools revealing gaps in the school feeding programme, particularly its adaptability to respond to shocks, WFP has been supporting efforts for new linkages with local smallholders and the viability to procure local nutritious ingredients for school meals. WFP sees opportunities in responding to the additional provisions required in ongoing legislation initiatives for school feeding to also review the School Feeding Policy, which WFP co-funded in 2015, and which would further inform School Feeding Bill in the future based on a tentative timeline of 2024-2025.

EXPANDING SOCIAL SAFETY NETS AND SCHOOL FEEDING IN PARALLEL

WFP continue working with the government to expand the school feeding programme while also working to strengthen and enhance the country’s flagship social safety net programme (LEAP). This is an opportunity worth building on, as it would ensure that the most vulnerable households are able to receive different types of social protection coverage in response to unique needs of different members of a same household. The combination of different programmes will help address the multifaceted vulnerabilities that the most vulnerable oftentimes face.

Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) programme

DIGITALIZATION AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION

In 2021, the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the need for increased use of digital platforms, including for cash transfers. To this end, WFP, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, partnered with the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research to conduct a gender assessment that provided insights into the challenges women beneficiaries face under the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme (WFP, 2021a: 9). Findings suggest that, while most of the LEAP beneficiaries are women, the ultimate decision-making power rested with men. Worth noting is that women faced more challenges in opening bank accounts due to insufficient funds and lower levels of education, both limiting their access to digital financial services. This work also provided WFP the opportunity to leverage additional catalytic funding to support the pilot LEAP reassessment exercise, enabling implementation of the phasing-out strategy of the LEAP programme to improve enrolment of more vulnerable people (KII).

Insights from the gender assessment have also helped inform future program designs (WFP, 2021a: 9; KII). Building on these findings, including the lower use and access to mobile technologies among women and the potential behind income-

generating activities pursued by at least one member of a LEAP recipient household, WFP has tapped into private expertise to further explore the utilization of mobile money technology to empower women and has initiated training programs for LEAP beneficiaries (KII). These trainings have included a WFP partnership with the MoGCSP and Strategic Impact Advisors to support 600 LEAP female-headed households to deliver digital financial literacy and productive inclusion and livelihood training, complemented with seed capital to pursue and invest in income-generating activities. Digital financial inclusion and productive inclusion driven by seed capital support for female LEAP beneficiaries are therefore seen as central to operationalizing a LEAP exit strategy.

EXTENDING SOCIAL PROTECTION TO PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

Another example of the importance of generating evidence is the 2020/21 assessment of HIV social protection in Ghana, which was carried out by the Ghana AIDS Commission, with funding from WFP and in collaboration with stakeholders and partners in the AIDS response (WFP, 2021a: 20). The objective of the assessment was to determine whether national social protection schemes and health services in Ghana address the unique vulnerabilities and needs of households including persons living with, at risk of, and affected by HIV. The study identified the barriers that prevent vulnerable groups from accessing services. The primary finding of the assessment was that the social protection and health services in Ghana “are only somewhat HIV-sensitive” and need to be improved (WFP, 2021a: 20). Recommendations have fed into the National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS (WFP, 2020b: 21).



5. Lessons Learned

BUILDING UP SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS TO MAKE THEM MORE NUTRITION-SENSITIVE

Through initiatives like school feeding programmes and targeted cash transfers, Ghana aims to address nutritional deficiencies, enhance educational opportunities, and empower vulnerable populations. While hurdles related to funding constraints and programme coordination persist, the collaborative efforts of the government and WFP underscore a commitment to fostering resilient, inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive approaches, ultimately steering Ghana towards a more secure and prosperous future. School feeding programmes that can build on minimum levels of coverage by social cash transfers embedded in national social safety net programmes, stand to further build household resilience to future shocks, while enabling them to safeguard their consumption of sufficient and nutritious foods, even in times of hardship.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

WFP's success in effectively supporting the national school feeding programme has been in part due its strong partnerships and collaborations, including with the National School Feeding Programme Secretariat, Partnership for Child Development, Food and Drugs Authority, Ghana Health Service, National Disaster Management Organization, Ghana AIDS Commission, the National Development Planning Commission, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (WFP, 2018a; 2019). Training of trainers has been jointly designed and facilitated by stakeholders to ensure national relevance and buy-in, and institutional memory across the different authorities, at the national and community levels (WFP, 2018a: 11).

Implementing nutrition-sensitive social protection initiatives in Ghana has underscored the essential role of collaboration and partnerships in the success of school feeding and social protection programmes. Using an evidence-driven approach has not only informed programme design but also bolstered advocacy efforts. The importance of generating evidence, particularly in times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, has been highlighted for informed decision making and policy adjustments. Throughout this evolution, WFP has evolved from being a direct implementer to a facilitator, bringing together various stakeholders and contributing to the advancement of Ghana's national social protection system.

EVIDENCE GENERATION FOR PROGRAMME DESIGN AND ADVOCACY

With WFP's focus in Ghana shifting towards capacity strengthening and technical assistance aligned with national priorities (WFP, 2021a), the importance of evidence generation has grown. WFP has made significant investments in evidence gathering and generation within Ghana (KII). For instance, WFP conducts a comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis every five years, providing invaluable insights to aid WFP and its partners in targeting and implementation strategies (KII). It's crucial to acknowledge that capacity strengthening, policy development, and legislation are processes that require time (KII), as evidenced by the progression and subsequent stalling of the school feeding bill in Parliament (WFP, 2019: KII).

WFP's commitment to enhancing nutrition-sensitive social protection in Ghana is underscored by its investment in various assessments and analyses over the years. These initiatives have not only informed WFP's support but have also bolstered its capacity to advocate on critical issues, thus reinforcing its role as a convenor and facilitator of evidence-based policy discussions aligned with government priorities (KII). A range of assessments and analyses, such as the 2015 systems approach for better education results assessment, the 2016 operational assessment of the school feeding programme, the 2017 school meals nutrition survey, and the 2020/21 assessment of HIV-sensitive social protection, have contributed significantly to this endeavour (WFP, 2018b; 2018a; 2021a).

HARMONIZATION AND WORK WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

The effectiveness of WFP's capacity strengthening initiatives, advocacy endeavours, and sustainability efforts is dependent on alignment with the Government and the utilization of their established systems (KII; WFP, 2021a). Within this context, advocating for the harmonization of social protection with nutrition at the policy level has been a central focus of WFP in recent years (KII).

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Annex: Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interview (KII) 1, WFP Staff (2023). Interview by Roz Price conducted on 20 January 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Ghana.

Key Informant Interview (KII) 2, WFP Staff (2023). Interview by Roz Price conducted on 27 January 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Ghana.

Key Informant Interview (KII) 3, WFP Staff (2023). Interview by Roz Price conducted on 27 January 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in Ghana.



World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

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