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School Meals Programme in the Philippines

Bringing hot, nutritious meals to children

The Philippines, a middle-income country, has made progress in advancing food and nutrition security through strong national leadership, strategic investments, and collaborative partnerships. In 2021, it became the first Asian country to join the Global School Meals Coalition (GSMC), demonstrating its commitment to delivering nutritious, locally sourced, iron-fortified, nutritious meals to reach all school-aged children by 2030.

However, the Philippines is still facing the “triple burden” of malnutrition—undernutrition (stunting and wasting), overnutrition (overweight and obesity), and micronutrient deficiency. These challenges hinder children’s ability to learn and thrive, resulting in a learning crisis where 9 out of 10 children are unable to read and understand the age-appropriate text.¹ The national learning poverty rate in the country (91 percent) is much higher than the average for East Asia and Pacific region (35 percent).²

Children require optimal nutrition to think, learn, and acquire skills that will fully develop their potential. Cognizant of this, the Philippines is scaling up its national school meals programme, with support from the World Food Programme (WFP). School meals play an important role in strengthening food systems, particularly when adopting the Home-grown School Feeding (HGSF) model. HGSF is an innovative approach of providing school meals, which promotes nutrition and learning for schoolchildren, while connecting with



More than **5,000 schoolchildren** provided with school meals sourced from **1,800 smallholder farmers** in SY 2024-2025

local value chain actors for food procurement. HGSF ensures the daily provision of nutritious, hot meals prepared through various methods, including cooking in a school kitchen, central kitchen, or catering services. A fundamental programme principle is the integration of local value chain actors in procurement, ensuring that meals include locally sourced ingredients such as rice, meat, and vegetables. By i) supporting the education of children and addressing nutrition challenges, and ii) creating market opportunities for local smallholder farmers, the HGSF is one of the most cost-effective and impactful strategies for implementing the Government’s school meals programme while supporting local agricultural production and creating circular economies. Transitioning from school feeding to HGSF helps to maximize the return on investment in education by also contributing to longer-term poverty reduction.

By expanding the national school meals programme through HGSF, WFP is supporting the Philippine Government in fulfilling its commitments to the GSMC, including **reaching universal school meals coverage by 2030**.

¹ Learning poverty in the Philippines is 56 percentage points higher than the average in East Asia and Pacific region.

² The World Bank. [Philippines Learning Poverty Brief](#).

Scaling up Home-grown School Feeding

HGSF involves multiple sectors, including education, agriculture, and health, and requires strong intersectoral coordination and partnership. This reflects the transition from primarily an education intervention to a larger package of investments designed to strengthen the nexus between nutrition and agriculture.

WFP supported the Philippine Government in modelling HGSF for School Year (SY) 2024-2025, and the initiative is scaling up further for the SY 2025-2026. The HGSF model entails two approaches: one led by the Department of Education (DepEd) and local government units in Luzon and another by the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE) together with local government units in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). WFP's support includes the following key areas:³



Policy environment

Evidence-based advocacy to assist the Government in strengthening the policy framework for an enhanced school meals programme. This includes contributing to the review and amendment of laws, policies, and strategies, as well as regulations concerning food safety and quality standards, and procurement, among others.



Sustainable financing

Supporting the Government in conducting cost-benefit analyses to assess the **value for money** of the national school meals programme under different expansion scenarios, highlighting potential benefits in education, health, agriculture, and social protection. Additionally, assisting in exploring financing options and convening partners to inform a phased scale-up of the programme and to further attract investments for long-term sustainability and impact.



Capacity strengthening for coordinated programme implementation for governments at national and sub-national levels

Providing technical assistance for the improved implementation of school meals programmes, including identifying and addressing capacity gaps on infrastructure and tools, as well as human resources. In addition, WFP supports the Government with the multi-sectoral coordination of the school meals programme.



Programme design and implementation

In collaboration with DepEd and MBHTE, WFP designs and models enhanced modalities, such as the HGSF, to maximize the impact of government investments. This includes optimizing approaches for universal or geographic-based coverage, developing context-specific school menus, and procurement strategies. Additionally, WFP contributes to the development of processes for monitoring and assessing the results of the school meals programme.



Community roles - Reaching beyond schools

HGSF promotes creation of job opportunities and stable income for farmer cooperatives, caterers, and stakeholders, contributing to the local economy. Communities should participate in i) designing the programme, in particular, the prioritization of food to be served, and ii) resourcing and monitoring the programme. Close oversight and feedback from communities are crucial for enhancing the implementation.



³ These areas are identified by SABER-School Feeding (SABER-SF), a useful approach developed by the World Bank along with WFP to assess the school feeding policy situation and systems in any country to identify the gaps and plan appropriate capacity development plans and/or road maps with the government and other stakeholders. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/26517>

In addition, WFP is also contributing to:



Knowledge and experience sharing (South-South and Triangular Cooperation)

This entails peer-to-peer study visits and learning exchanges, developing partnerships, and multisectoral coordination on education, nutrition, and agriculture.



Support to smallholder farmers (context-specific HGSF model)

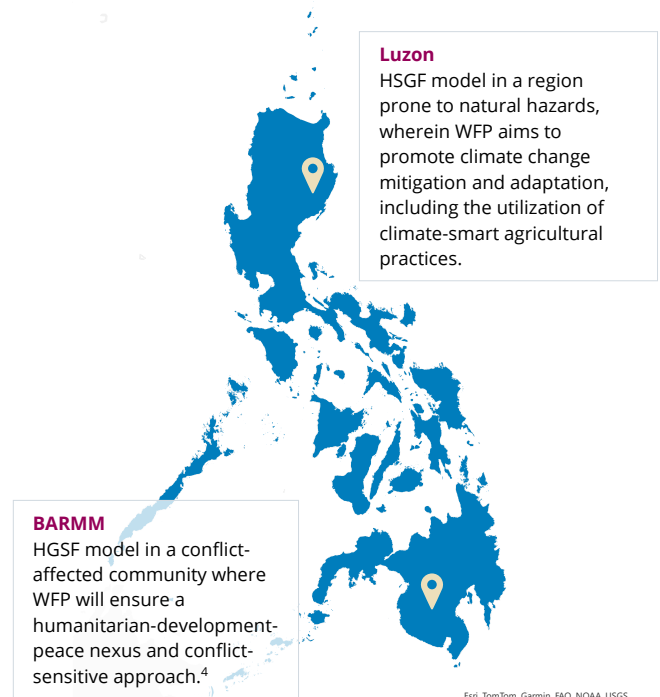
Together with key government ministries, WFP will provide technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of smallholder farmers on climate-smart, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and local procurement. Moreover, WFP will continue to support farmer cooperatives by providing training and facilitating direct linkages with institutional buyers, mainly social institutions such as schools and other government programmes. This is for smallholder farmers to cultivate crops based on demand trends and ensure fair price negotiation without heavy reliance on the middlemen/traders.



Forging Partnerships with the Government to Model HGSF

WFP works with the National Feeding Program Working Group, and in BARMM, with the newly established HGSF Technical Working Group.

Two locations were selected for context-specific HGSF models:



The HGSF model is a partnership between the Philippine Government (national and sub-national levels) and WFP. In both locations, the programme is funded and implemented by the Government, with WFP's support.



In consultation with the Government and based on the vulnerability of local communities, 10 local governments and 28 elementary schools in Maguindanao Province (BARMM), and 3 elementary schools in Luzon were identified to model the HGSF. WFP provides technical assistance by developing activities to strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders, including, *inter alia*, local governments, schools, farmers, and food suppliers.

The core objective of the HGSF initiative is to support the development of a robust national system that strengthens government efforts to manage decentralised school feeding. WFP is directly assisting the Government in designing and testing context-specific approaches. This includes i) setting standards and establishing processes for local food purchases, ii) developing customized school menus, and iii) providing human resources for planning, implementing, and monitoring the programme.

⁴ The humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach supports the region in addressing immediate humanitarian needs, and promote peace and development by improving food security, nutrition, agricultural productivity and livelihoods.

Additionally, WFP is assisting with the fortification of rice (which will be donated to the model schools) to enhance the Government's capabilities. During SY 2024-2025, schools targeted by the HGFSF initiatives in BARMM and Isabela provided daily, nutritious school meals to over 5,000 schoolchildren from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Table 1. Phased HGFSF Expansion

Targets	SY 2024-2025	SY 2025-2026
 Schoolchildren		
BARMM	3,000	10,000
Luzon	3,000	6,000
Total	6,000	16,000
 Smallholder farmers and their families		
BARMM	2,500	25,000
Luzon	2,500	5,000
Total	5,000	30,000



16,000 schoolchildren to be reached and 6,000 smallholder farmers to be integrated into the HGFSF implementation

Phase 1

In SY 2024-2025, WFP distributed fortified rice and developed activities to strengthen the capacity of schools and local governments in implementing HGFSF. Local governments allocated resources for school kitchen construction and daily provisions of proteins, fruits and vegetables. The HGFSF activities reached more than i) 5,000 learners in BARMM and Isabela, and linked ii) 1,800 local smallholder farmers to supply food for the school meals, improving their household income to benefit 9,000 people.

Phase 2

In 2025, the HGFSF will be scaled up to reach 16,000 learners (10,000 in BARMM and 6,000 in Luzon) with daily school meals while also engaging up to 6,000 smallholder farmers as food suppliers.

This scale-up will test the effectiveness of context-specific models and generate evidence on the outcomes of HGFSF modality for its eventual scale up at the national level. The HGFSF models will support the Government to fulfil their commitments with GSMC and guide the expansion of this programme towards universalization of school meals in the Philippines.



“ A child’s education and health constitute more than their well-being, but also the future of a country.

