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LIVES

## WFP EVALUATION

# USDA McGovern-Dole Grant for Home-Grown School Feeding Project in Rwanda (2020-2025) Midterm Evaluation

## CONTEXT

While Rwanda ranks 165<sup>th</sup> out of 191 countries in the 2021 Human Development Index (HDI), Rwanda's HDI value increased from 0.286 to 0.534 from 1995 to 2021, an increase of 86.7 percent.<sup>[1]</sup> Rwanda is among the countries that have seen the highest rise in human development since 1994.<sup>[2]</sup>

However, some challenges remain. The country ranks slightly higher than average for low-income countries but lower than average for Sub-Saharan Africa on the World Bank Human Capital Index (2020), which reported that the future potential of children born in Rwanda is 62 percent below what they could achieve with better education and health; stunting and poor education quality are among the contributing factors.

Rwandan boys' and girls' academic opportunity and achievement are impacted by traditional gender dynamics in the home and at school. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018/2019-2023/2024) promotes equal access to education for girls, children from poor families, and people with disabilities. The Government education plan has a dedicated budget line to address girls' education barriers.

School closures due to COVID-19 severely impacted education, and while the net enrolment in primary school is on par with pre-pandemic rates, dropout rates have risen by 2 percent. The Government of Rwanda adopted the Comprehensive School Feeding Policy and Strategy in 2019, which is the framework for the National School Feeding Program (NSFP) now benefitting 4.1 million schoolchildren.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

Phase II of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) project, which began in October 2021, supports improved literacy in school-age children and increased health and dietary practices. The project implements school feeding, WASH, health and nutrition, education and infrastructure activities in 108 continuing Phase I pre- and primary schools in Karongi, Rutsiro, Nyamagabe, Nyaruguru districts ("Group 1") and 32 pre- and primary schools in Burera, Kayanza, and

Gasabo districts added in Phase II ("Group 2"). Its overarching objective is to strengthen government capacity to manage the NSFP.

The WFP Rwanda Country Office commissioned TANGO International, with local research partner Ihema Research Team Ltd, to conduct a midterm evaluation of Phase II of the project in order to guide the implementation and transition of McGovern-Dole-supported schools to the NSFP.

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The main objectives of this midterm evaluation are accountability and learning, specifically around processes related to the transition of 108 program schools into the NSFP. The evaluation assesses whether the project is on track to meet program objectives; reviews adherence to OECD-DAC criteria, the results framework, and the theory of change; and identifies mid-course corrections and operational lessons.

The primary users of the evaluation are WFP at national, regional, and corporate levels as well as donors, governmental and non-governmental partners, and the communities and schools the project is intended to serve.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### Relevance

The program is highly relevant to the needs of Group 1 and Group 2 schools. Its activities align with the objectives, strategies, and frameworks of the Rwandan government, USDA, United Nations, and WFP. As only 54 percent of P3 students met grade-level reading standards in 2022, project activities to improve student literacy address an important need.

### Effectiveness

The project has made significant progress toward outcome and output targets and is largely on track to achieve its objectives. It has reached life-of-project targets for 3 of the 10 McGovern-Dole outcome indicators and 13 of the 23 standard output indicators. By the end of P2, more than half of all students in McGovern-Dole-

<sup>[1]</sup> UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2022. [Human Development Report 2021-22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World](#). New York.

<sup>[2]</sup> United Nations Rwanda, 2021. Common Country Analysis, March 2021.

supported schools can read and understand grade-level text. Government officials, teachers, students, and other stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation associated improved student enrollment and attendance as well as increased student performance with school feeding. Indicators for access to water and sanitation infrastructure and hygiene training have improved since baseline. This includes the construction of disability-inclusive latrines and gender-sensitive sanitary rooms<sup>1</sup>.

Most schools have achieved nearly all HGSF readiness targets and every district has achieved over half of the 21 district readiness indicator targets. While districts lack resources to undertake some activities, district and government frameworks are beginning to assume transition activities.

## Efficiency

The evaluation found that activities were implemented in a timely manner and in line with McGovern-Dole project plans. The school feeding team is well staffed, the project monitoring system supports timely and adaptive management, and implementation is efficient due to strong partnerships with the Government.

WFP faces a budget shortfall of nearly USD 4.6 million for 2023-2025 and is actively applying and receiving additional funds. Some activities, such as the construction of WASH infrastructure in Group 1 schools, were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but despite constraints, WFP and partners used resources efficiently to prevent additional delays.

## Impact

Compared to both baseline and control schools, student literacy and the use of health and dietary practices have predominantly remained high or improved at midterm, though this result was not consistent across all indicators. While McGovern-Dole-supported schools outperformed control schools on some literacy benchmarks, control schools also performed well. School attendance and performance for adolescent girls was positively impacted by gender-specific programming such as sanitary rooms, which support girls' needs during menstruation and prevent absenteeism. Although few schools and cooperatives currently have formal contracts, WFP has strengthened the production and marketing capacity of smallholder farmers in order to supply the NSFP with school meal ingredients.

## Sustainability

Capacity-strengthening activities with agricultural cooperatives, school administration, teachers and community leaders, as well as initiatives to transition ownership to communities and WFP's support to the School Feeding, Financing Strategy, and Transition Plan are expected to sustain project outcomes after McGovern-Dole schools transition into the NSFP. In an effort to promote sustainability, Rwanda participates in the global School Meals Coalition and the National School Feeding Technical Working Group, which ensures the NSFP aligns with government policies and strategies. Due to current food prices in Rwanda, some schools reported concern that the NSFP budget allocation would be insufficient to provide diverse and nutritious daily meals, and schools emphasized the importance of parent contributions to fully fund school feeding. In order to operationalize Ministry of Education procurement guidelines, school administration requires capacity strengthening. WFP will retain district coordinators for the four districts transitioning into the NSFP through the end of 2024, but because they cannot monitor all schools, monitoring capacity must

be addressed – for example, by using the School Data Management System to track some indicators.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overall Assessment

The midterm evaluation found that the McGovern-Dole project is making positive progress in all five OECD-DAC criteria with opportunities to make adjustments over the remainder of the project.

**Recommendation 1.** Strengthen transition support for Group 1 schools, including post-transition accompaniment.

**Recommendation 2.** Continue to strengthen the monitoring system, setting targets and including gender equality and women's empowerment, country capacity strengthening and disability indicators.

**Recommendation 3.** Develop and implement a knowledge management and learning strategy to cover the HGSF project and the NSFP.

**Recommendation 4.** Organize an outcome-to-impact reflection process to update the theory of change and consider this evaluation's strategic recommendations.

**Recommendation 5.** Strengthen the focus on students living with disabilities to ensure their meaningful participation and inclusion in the NSFP and education opportunities.

**Recommendation 6.** Conduct small-scale qualitative research studies to probe more deeply into questions this evaluation has raised, to generate more detailed evidence that can inform adaptive management and sector learning.

**Recommendation 7.** Bolster district capacity strengthening for NSFP activities. Engage closely with national and local government decision-makers to explore options for scaling up the District School Feeding Coordinator model to the national level.

**Recommendation 8.** Organize an agile HGSF technical support function that can provide short-term high-quality technical consulting services to the NSFP. Replicate the demonstrated success of rapidly providing technical and financial support to the Government's short-term needs.

<sup>1</sup> These are also referred to as 'girls' rooms', for use by female students during their menstrual cycle and normally stocked with

sanitary products, resting place and pamphlets related to menstruation.