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Management Response to the Recommendations of the Decentralised Evaluation of the Mid-Term Evaluation of USDA McGovern Dole Grant for WFP School Feeding in Laos (DE/LACO/2021/034) from 2021 to 2025

Latest update date: 18/10/2024

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BACKGROUND

This document presents the WFP management response to the recommendations from the evaluation entitled “Decentralized Evaluation of the Mid-term Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grant for WFP School Feeding in Laos (DE/LACO/2021/034) from 2021 To 2025” on School Feeding in Laos. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess all the activities outlined within the project award including areas with Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and literacy activities, and all types of beneficiaries including educators, cooks and storekeepers, smallholder farmers, and school-aged children and their parents/caregivers, as well as national and subnational governance structures. The evaluation serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informed WFP CO Lao PDR and its partners whether targeted beneficiaries have received services as expected and if the project met its stated goals and objectives in line with the results frameworks and assumptions, and in contrast to the baseline findings. The evaluation generated evidence on the long-term outcomes and the extent to which change occurred since baseline. In terms of learning, the evaluation determined the reasons why certain results were or were not achieved, identified good practices, and provided lessons to form a platform for evidence-based policy dialogue internally at WFP and nationally with the government of Lao PDR, notably regarding the implementation of the various school feeding activities and their handover and incorporation in a nationally owned and community-driven school feeding program).

The evaluation made a total of 9 key recommendations with 17 actions. The response presented below sets out whether WFP agrees, partially agrees, or disagrees with the evaluation recommendations and sub-recommendations. It presents the planned (or taken) actions, responsibilities, and timelines.

Recommendations and sub-recommendations [one recommendation/sub-rec per row, deadlines in brackets]	Recommendation and sub-recommendation lead office ¹	Management response ²	Actions	Action lead office ³	Action deadline (Indicate month and year)	Status ⁴
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025)</p> <p>1. Continue to strengthen the Technical Working Group for School Meals to foster inter-ministerial collaboration.</p> <p>Utilize this existing forum with key school feeding stakeholders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Share project and operational lessons on school feeding (see Recommendation 6 for more detail) ➢ Provide a technical support function to school meals implementation. • Develop a workplan for capacity strengthening activities, drawing priority focus areas listed in the SABER-SF assessment. • Focus on developing evidence to inform targeted advocacy that meets stakeholder needs, i.e., school meals, student literacy, nutrition, local procurement options and financing for the national School Lunch Program. • Update the working group governance by raising the scheduled meeting of the working group to once a quarter and expanding participation by inviting 	SO1 Team	Agreed	<p>1. To meet the objectives for the school lunch programme WFP will maintain its role, providing financial and technical support, to support facilitation of the technical working group for the School Lunch Programmes. WFP will continue to seek opportunities for broaden engagement with government departments and ministries, leveraging existing coordination fora to promote inter-ministerial collaboration and knowledge sharing. Additionally, WFP is providing ongoing technical support to the School Lunch Programme in Lao PDR, aligning with the post-SABER action plan which was developed in coordination with and approved by Lao government's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and other partners in March 2024. The plan outlines prioritized capacity strengthening actions for 2024-2028, including refining the SLP model, developing a costed food basket, and initiating the development of SLP implementation guidelines. For 2025,</p>	WFP (Inclusive Education Promotion Center - MoES and WFP/CRS senior leadership)	September 2025	Ongoing

¹ Indicate the lead office, with any supporting offices in brackets

² Indicate whether each recommendation and sub-recommendation is 'Agreed', 'Partially agreed' or 'Not agreed'. Briefly justify partially or not agreed

³ Indicate the action lead, with any supporting offices in brackets

⁴ Indicate the current status of the action – Not started/ Ongoing/ Completed

<p>broader government stakeholders. An active and more inclusive working group with evidence-based and targeted messaging will strengthen engagement of high-level decision-makers towards scaling up the national School Lunch Program.</p>			<p>the plan focuses on developing a 5-year SLP strategy, start to develop an SLP M&E Framework, review the national school lunch policy.</p>			
			<p>2. While the high-level SLP Technical Working Group is currently chaired by the Vice Minister and therefore meets less frequently, WFP will actively promote inter-ministerial coordination and collaboration through existing fora. WFP will explore opportunities to expand participation and enhance the working groups effectiveness in advocating for the SLP.</p>	<p>WFP (Inclusive Education Promotion Center - MoES and WFP/CRS senior leadership as co-chairs of the Technical Working Group and WFP Regional Bureau)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	
<p>Priority: High Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025) 2. Strengthen the agricultural component and market linkage of the project by learning from similar initiatives within the WFP Lao PDR portfolio. Set the foundations for strong agriculture-focused work in future initiatives. There is an opportunity to strengthen the agriculture component, based on the implementation/lessons from wider SO agriculture initiatives that support school feeding. Within the remainder of the project, work with Government to establish an evidence-building plan, including an initial research scope that could explore the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining what a local procurement and cash-based model of school feeding 	<p>WFP Field Office in South</p>	<p>Partially agreed. While the current project has allocated limited resources to the agriculture component, we are committed to strengthening this area through smallholder farmer support and encouraging contributions to school lunches with food provided by local farmers (thus supporting the establishment of linkages between farmers and schools). However, for the</p>	<p>1. WFP is currently implementing other donor-funded projects that align with the School Lunch Programme recommendation's focus on strengthening the agricultural component and creating market linkages through the SLP. These projects support farmers, create connections with schools, and provide cash for SLP commodity procurement. MoES is prioritizing local procurement model to strengthen localization and sustainability. WFP recognizes the importance of evidence-based research and will work to find additional funds to support future agriculture-focused work. Other WFP projects are currently supporting the government's cash-based SLP model and providing assistance to local</p>	<p>WFP Lao PDR SO1 team (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>could look like for Lao PDR, including local, regional and national procurement options for a range of food items that also consider seasonality and regional variability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How best to build on the current function of the Village Education Development Committees as an entry point to strengthen linkages between farmers and schools towards school meals. • Identification of programming components that overlap between wider agriculture initiatives and the project. 		<p>schools under this project, there is no budgetary provision for schools to procure commodities from local markets and establish linkages with local food markets. Additionally, further research on this topic has not been budgeted for under this award. WFP is implementing cash-based school feeding programmes funded by other donors and will apply those lessons across our projects in the country.</p>	<p>farmers to focus on local procurement of various food items in line with the national SLP model. WFP will continue to actively work to share knowledge and lessons learned across our programmes to ensure effective implementation across Lao PDR.</p>			
			<p>2. Additionally, WFP will provide trainings for technical staff at MAF at the ministerial, provincial, and district levels through national capacity development activities. WFP will ensure that these trainings include components related to the agriculture support WFP is providing under this award and incorporate learnings from other projects. The distribution of farmer support packages and training for farmers on good agriculture practices will continue under the project. Feedback from beneficiaries will be used to adapt the trainings to better meet the needs of the farmers.</p>	WFP Lao PDR SO1 team	September 2025	
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025)</p> <p>3. Update Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for each activity component based on experience and reflections from implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that each activity component has an up-to-date SOPs/implementation plan, which includes to what extent each activity will be continued after the completion of the project. 	WFP Lao PDR SO1 team and FOs, CRS, and MoES	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>WFP Lao PDR agree with the recommendation as most of the activities under the project are implemented using up-to-date Standard Operational Procedures (SOP)s and work plan.</p>	<p>1. To ensure effective project implementation, each activity component has a work plan which is shared annually and updated regularly. This plan outlines specific activities and breakdown the timeline for activity implementation. Additionally, WFP has already taken action to ensure activities are maintained with many of the programmes continuing under the McGovern-Dole FY24 funded project</p>	SO1 team (in collaboration with MoES and CRS)	September 2025	Ongoing

<p>Implementation plans should be coherent with WFP guidance on the sector – i.e. utilize existing WFP strategies and approach guidelines to inform SOPs/implementation plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the coordination and collaboration of implementing partners, particularly on mutually implemented activities. Host consistent and documented meetings with key project staff from all three partners present. Ensure role clarity is established across partners (i.e. who is responsible for what project component and activity). 		<p>All SOPs are up to date and will be adjusted accordingly based on context, needs, capacities and lessons learned.</p>	<p>including government capacity strengthening, community empowerment, school meals, and health and hygiene promotion. The work plan will be updated accordingly to maintain continuity and address the evolving needs. WFP will continue to ensure adherence to the SoPS, WFP, and project guidance and best practices. Additionally, WFP will update all the established SOPs as needed to ensure proper project performance and implementation.</p>			
<p>Priority: Medium Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025) 4. Strengthen district-level capacity for monitoring and community engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate national and subnational planning processes to strengthen the District Community Facilitator role to provide more intense and tailored 	<p>WFP Field Offices, MoES counterparts at district and province levels,</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>2. WFP meets monthly with project partners which fosters collaboration, facilitates information sharing, and supports effective implementation. WFP works with our partners to ensure that their roles and responsibilities are clear and ensures that clarifications are made when needed. Additionally, WFP is working with the government and key stakeholder to further clarify their roles and responsibilities based on the post-SABER Action Plan which outlines the prioritized activities for 2024-2028.</p> <p>1.To ensure that the government can successfully support and monitor the national SLP WFP will continue to support the national and subnational government entities to ensure their roles are clear and they can perform key project functions. WFP field monitors (District Community Facilitators) regularly join MoES district staff on monitoring</p>	<p>SO1 team (in collaboration with MoES and CRS)</p> <p>WFP Lao PDR SO1 (and MOES)</p>	<p>Sep 2025</p> <p>September 2025</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>support to District Education and Sports Bureau staff, to enable direct exchange of technical capacity with Government counterparts in performing key project functions. Embed these roles and responsibilities into the upcoming transition plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Government to explore sustainable options (using Government funding) for technical capacity to be placed in a more permanent basis within the province and district offices (i.e. sub-national Government offices carrying out District Community Facilitator functions directly under the national School Lunch Program). 	<p>VEDCs, and CRS</p>		<p>visits throughout the school year. These visits enhance the government staff's understanding of their roles in monitoring the programme and the roles of key stakeholders, including VEDCs, principals, teachers, cooks, and storekeepers.</p> <p>Additionally, the Lao School Meals App trainings continue to include DESB to ensure they understand how to utilize the data and ensure that schools are entering information correctly.</p> <p>By strengthening the capacity of government staff and promoting collaboration among stakeholders, WFP aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NSLP.</p>			
			<p>2. Targeted trainings will take place before the end of the award, along with other key activities to strengthen the government's capacity for monitoring and community engagement. This includes VEDC refresher training which focuses on community-led support, school-to-school exchange visits focused on school management and community mobilization, high level visits for knowledge sharing for the SLP in Lao PDR, development of the implementation guidelines for the Prime Minister's Decree on Promoting the SLP, and the ToT trainings for the Lao School Meals Monitoring App developed by the government and WFP. The App is a sustainable monitoring mechanism which has strengthened the government's monitoring and can continue to be</p>	<p>WFP Lao PDR SO1 (and MOES)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	

			<p>utilized by all levels of the government now and post-transition. Lastly, as part of the post-SABER action planning the government has prioritised development of an M&E framework for the SLP in 2025, which will include what to monitor and who will be responsible within MoES. Monitoring of SLP and McGovern-Dole programmes will need to eventually align, ahead of handover.</p> <p>- Once the MoES develops an SLP monitoring and evaluation framework (with technical support from WFP), then WFP will support the MoES to train all relevant stakeholders.</p>			
<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025)</p> <p>5. Strengthen the monitoring system of the project, and ensure information is shared to the SLP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All performance tracking should include specific gender equality and women's empowerment targets that extend beyond indicators. Where possible and efficient, include person with disability information in the monitoring system, to enable learning for future initiatives. Use the Technical Working Group to regularly share and exchange data/information to support and inform Government school meals plans and strategies. Develop a systemic approach to track community contribution, including the quality, quantity, source, and frequency of all in-kind, cash and non-food items 	<p>WFP Field Offices, MoES counterparts at national, district and province levels, VEDCs, and CRS</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>1. Currently during the Technical Working Group meetings data and information is shared between all the key stakeholders to ensure that everyone can learn from each other and strengthen the government's programme. WFP will continue these meetings through the FY24 project. WFP will continue to work with the focal point in the country office to utilize the possible avenues to include persons with disabilities, gender equality, and women's empowerment, into the monitoring systems.</p>	<p>WFP (and MOES)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
			<p>2. WFP will work with the Sports and Education Statistics Center of MoES to develop a system to record community contributions by using the upgraded LSM app.</p>	<p>WFP (and MOES)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	

<p>contributions that support schools. Update the monitoring system of the project to track this data and use the information to inform Recommendation 6.</p>						
<p>Priority: Medium Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025) 6. Ensure key lessons and good practices on project processes and results are efficiently and effectively documented to shape future initiatives in school feeding and catalyze innovation in the national School Lunch Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document good practices in the identified key areas of learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ District-level capacity building across activity components ➢ School, community and district communication and engagement processes on school meals, literacy and WASH issues. ➢ The monitoring mechanisms of the project, with emphasis on District Community Facilitator engagement with the community to gather project data. • Identify gaps in project and community knowledge and work with Government to prioritize key questions for future research, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ What are the primary ways communities and households are contributing to school meals and how effective are Village Education Development Committees in creating/fostering these linkages? ➢ What are the main challenges in attaining educational outcomes (focus 	<p>SO1 Team</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>1. WFP is actively working with implementing partners to share lessons learned and best practices across project activities. WFP will continue to document this information to inform activities in the future and to support government capacity-strengthening efforts for the SLP.</p> <p>2. WFP will continue to work with stakeholders at the village, district, and provincial levels through our field offices to identify gaps in knowledge. WFP will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure they receive the proper trainings and information for project implementation and management.</p>	<p>WFP Lao PDR SO1 (and CRS, MoES, and RBB)</p> <p>WFP Lao PDR SO1 (and CRS, MoES, and RBB)</p>	<p>September 2025</p> <p>September 2025</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

<p>on ethno-linguistic minorities)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Which of the SABER-SF pathways offer the most return in terms of supporting capacity deficits of national School Lunch Program? ➤ What are the lessons and leading practice drawn from previous evaluations of school feeding initiatives? 						
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025)</p> <p>7. Document all modalities of capacity strengthening provided to Village Education Development Committees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify which inputs and activities targeted at Village Education Development Committees (VEDC) that are demonstrating good return and which have the potential for scale- up; prioritize efficiency - activities that have smaller investment and reach more groups. ➤ Create a ‘package of interventions’ that involve the most effective/efficient (along with clear indicators for measurement). Use this package as a minimum standard to ensure all Village Education Development Committees support is provided equally across communities, and in all ongoing and future initiatives. 	SO1 team	Agreed	WFP will update the existing VEDC training guidelines and keep record for all capacity strengthening support for VEDC.	PPO Community Engagement – SO1 team	September 2025	Ongoing

<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sep 2025)</p> <p>8. Work with project schools to develop a continuation plan for school meals under the national program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using District Community Facilitators, create a school plan for each project school on how best to continue meals once the project closes. This planning process should engage widely with all relevant community stakeholders to reflect current and anticipated needs and challenges. Part of this planning should include capacity building activities for schools, Village Education Development C• Committees and households on how to best use cash for school meals – with consideration to local market access and community contribution models. Utilize the upcoming Lao PDR School Lunch Programme Joint Action Plan 2024-2028 to set targets for schools’ capacity within these plans. 	SO1 Team	Partially agreed The schools under the FY20 project will continue to receive support through the end of the new McGovern-Dole 2024 project and therefore a continuation plan is no longer needed under this award.	1. As all the schools under this project will continue receiving support and school meals through the McGovern-Dole FY24 project WFP will look at creating a continuation plan for school lunches at the project schools once the FY24 project has started, taking into account the current country context at that time. Specifically, we will work with our DCFs to monitor the programme on the ground, during the project period, and ensure that all relevant local stakeholders receive the necessary support to contribute to the programme's long-term sustainability. By working closely with our DCFs, we are able to provide targeted guidance to local stakeholders, empowering them to play an active role in the programme's success.	SO1 (and Inclusive Education Promotion Center MoES)	September 2025	Not started
			2. WFP will continue to support school capacity strengthening including through strategic utilization of the upcoming Lao PDR School Lunch Programme Action plan.	SO1 (and Inclusive Education Promotion Center MoES)	September 2025	Ongoing
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall recommendation deadline: (Sept 2025)</p> <p>9. Set the scope of work for the endline evaluation to include methodological considerations proposed at midterm: (i) recalculate baseline values, (ii) align sampling approach, (iii) include a cost-analysis of the project.</p>	WFP CO M&E and SO1 Team	Agree.	1. WFP will ensure that all internal and external evaluation requirements are met for the endline evaluation consideration of recalculate baseline values using the baseline data collected.	SO1 (and RAM team)	September 2025	Not started
			2. Aligning sampling approach (comparing: improved vs unimproved roads, school feeding with and without WASH, Literacy)	SO1 (and RAM team)	September 2025	Not started

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the scoping of the endline evaluation Terms of Reference, include the following methodological and analytical requirements for the design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Revisit how the baseline indicators were calculated under the project' Results Framework. Recalculate indicator values, aligned with the midterm methodology, to ensure accurate measurement of longitudinal progress. ➤ Ensure the endline evaluation adopts the same sampling stratification as the midterm (i.e. school meals only; school meals, WASH; school meals, WASH, literacy; school meals, literacy), to understand differences between intervention packages. Explore the utility of a control group for quantitative endline activities. ➤ Conduct a cost-efficiency analysis for the project. 			<p>3. Conduct a cost-efficiency analysis for the project will be included in the scope of endline evaluation</p>	<p>SO1 (and RAM team)</p>	<p>September 2025</p>	<p>Not started</p>
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