



## WFP EVALUATION



SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES



## Summary Evaluation Report

# Mid-term evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole funded School Feeding project in the Republic of Congo 2018-2022

### INTRODUCTION

This is the summary of the evaluation report of the mid-term evaluation of the World Food Programme's (WFP) McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Project in the Republic of Congo. The McGovern-Dole project is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) under the project number FFE-679-2017/020-00. The project started under WFP's Country Project 200648 and was integrated into WFP's Country Strategic Project (CSP) 2019-2024 under Strategic Outcome 2 on social protection. The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Congo Country Office (CO) and covered the period from September 2018 to May 2022.

### SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Project is a school-based programme that focuses on literacy, health and

nutrition, which includes providing meals to primary schoolchildren.

The geographic scope and target population of the programme is implemented in seven departments namely, Pool, Plateaux, Cuvette, Bouenza, Lekoumou, Likouala and Sangha. The beneficiaries are primary school pupils from grades one to six. McGovern-Dole projects have two strategic objectives (SOs) which are:

1. SO1: "Improved literacy of school-age children"
2. SO2: "Increased use of improved health and dietary practices".

As stated in the project agreement between USDA and WFP, the McGovern-Dole project has five objectives:

1. Improve literacy of school-aged children
2. Increase use of health and dietary practices
3. Increased capacity of government institutions
4. Improved policy and regulatory framework
5. Increase government support and engagement of local organization and community groups



These objectives were pursued through eight activities, specifically capacity building, improving student enrolment, strengthen local agriculture, distribute food to provide school meals to pupils, improve WASH infrastructures in schools, enhance literacy among school children, promote improved nutrition, and improve food safety practices and infrastructures.

## **STAKEHOLDERS AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION**

This evaluation is a public resource intended to be used by WFP and external stakeholders to inform policy, improve programming, and guide future research and evaluation assignments.

External stakeholders include:

- Government of the Republic of Congo
- Ministries associated with the McGovern-Dole project<sup>1</sup>
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- USDA, FAS, ACTED<sup>2</sup>

## **EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

The purpose of the mid-term-evaluation (MTE) is to assess progress towards the achievement of intended

McGovern-Dole outputs and outcomes and assess whether the baseline recommendations have been actioned and integrated into project implementation and, if so, whether these baseline recommendations were successful in strengthening project implementation and achieving the intended results.

The MTE is the second part of a multi-year activity evaluation that includes baseline, mid-term, and endline evaluation exercises. The three inter-connected evaluative exercises use the McGovern-Dole Results Framework (RFs) and performance indicators as the basic pillars for performance measurement.

## **APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

The evaluation used a desk review, collection of quantitative data in schools using the same data collection tools as at the baseline, an assessment of the reading capacity of school children (PASEC)<sup>3</sup>, observation in the field and qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews. The use of various data collection methods allowed the triangulation of information to enhance the validity of the conclusions.



<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education (ministère de l'Enseignement primaire, secondaire et de l'Alphabétisation - MEPSA), the Ministry of Health (ministère de la Santé et de la Population - MSP), Ministry of Agriculture (ministère de la l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et de la Pêche - MAEP) and the Ministry of Social affaires (ministère des Affaires sociales et de l'Action humanitaire - MASAH).

<sup>2</sup> A French non-governmental organisation that works in international solidarity.

<sup>3</sup> Project for the Analysis of Education Systems (Project d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN - PASEC)  
<http://www.pasec.confemen.org/>

# KEY FINDINGS

## RELEVANCE

The evaluation found that the **design of the project is relevant to the challenges that the Republic of Congo is currently facing**, as health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and literacy are the main concerns throughout the country. Congo has low levels of literacy and numeracy and the nutrition and health needs in Congo are high.

**School feeding mainly serves a food security purpose, acting as a social safety net for poor households.** Both the baseline and midline evidence showed that the school meal is sometimes the only meal school children from poor households receive throughout the day. WFP managed to engage the Ministry of Education to target the poorest and most remote areas of the country. However, **using imported food runs counter to the government's policy which stipulates a preference for a home-grown school feeding model** that uses locally produced food to strengthen local agriculture and economy.

UNICEF's role in supporting literacy was to conduct training of school administrators in the departments targeted by the McGovern-Dole project. However, the agreement between FAS and WFP stipulated that the training was intended "to equip participants with key management tools to improve the day-to-day school operations and strengthen the school administrators' ability to run effective schools that attract qualified teachers." Although better school administration and management may improve school meal management, **this activity was included in the RF under support to literacy (MGD 1.1.5) and it is unlikely to have had any direct effect on improving literacy.**

## EFFECTIVENESS

The following section discusses the project's performance on key indicators.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

#### Improve literacy of school-aged children

##### Assessment of strategic objective 1 to improve literacy of school-aged children

Overall, activities implemented to enhance literacy of school-aged children could be executed more effectively. Activities to promote school enrolment had a positive effect, with the enrolment of children in McGovern-Dole supported schools increasing up until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when it decreased. However, besides the distribution of school materials to children, the activities that were originally intended to directly support the improvement of literacy of school aged children were not implemented as per the project agreement between FAS and WFP. As a result, their direct contribution to the achievement of the McGovern-Dole main strategic objective is limited.

**The first and main strategic objective of any McGovern-Dole project is to improve the literacy of school age children.** Specifically, the project should

improve the literacy of children so that by the end of two grades of primary schooling they are able to read and understand appropriate grade level text.

#### MGD 1.1. Improved quality of literacy instruction. Activity 6: Support improved literacy

The development of the guidelines by UNESCO, intended to be on improving literacy, instead focused on food security and nutrition and targeted adults, mothers and single mothers, rather than school-aged children.

UNESCO provided a training of trainer (ToT) in pedagogy and life skills on nutrition education to 160 selected teachers from McGovern-Dole funded schools. However, due to resource constraints, the planned follow-up training for teachers across all twelve departments in Congo, including those outside the McGovern-Dole target areas, was not conducted.

UNICEF conducted training for 584 school administrators: 160 in 2017/2018; 214 in 2018/2019 in Lekoumou and Plateaux; 110 in 2019/2020 in Plateaux and Cuvette; 100 in 2021 in Pool and Likouala. In total, nearly 557 administrators benefited from the training (95 percent of planned).<sup>4</sup> UNICEF also distributed school kits (consisting of a mathematics manual, slate, notebooks, etc) to approximately 78 percent of the target number of 69,642 schoolchildren. The school director survey revealed that less than 20 percent of the non-ORA<sup>5</sup> supported schools had any teaching materials.

Proper size meals could not be provided every school day, as the volume of food that was distributed was far less than the planned volumes. This might have reduced the impact of the school feeding component. The table below displays school feeding figures according to the SAPR.

Table 1: School feeding figures according to the SAPR

	October 2018 to March 2019	April to Sept 2019	October 2019 to March 2020	April to Sept 2020
St. Ind # 15 (meals distributed)	4 750 000	3 383 994	6 175 000	7 053 954
St. Ind # 16 (pupils benefiting from the project)	73 584		84,058*	
Number of meals theoretically available per pupil	65	46	73	84
Number of school days meals were provided**	111		157	

\*Highest number of pupils between both semesters was used here.

\*\*Calculated by the ET

<sup>4</sup> Past Performance Review, UNICEF.

<sup>5</sup> ORA stands for 'Observe, React, and Act'. ORA schools give indigenous children the opportunity to follow a three-year school project that

eventually enables them to integrate into the public system at the beginning of the third year of primary school.



## Assessment of strategic objective 2 to increase use of health and dietary practices

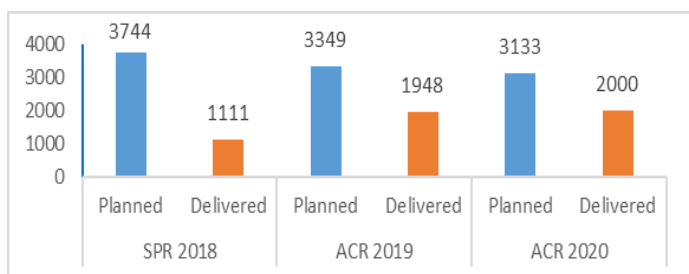
The evaluation found mixed results for activities aimed at increasing the use of health and dietary practices. WFP's involvement in nutrition activities was limited due to the lack of participation from the CO nutritionist. Training materials intended for school children were more suitable for adults or older learners and did not adequately cover dietary diversity. Teachers indicated that the topics were already part of their curriculum, with no new information from the McGovern-Dole project. Additionally, the number of teachers trained by UNICEF in nutrition and health was not monitored, and most teachers reported not receiving any training.

### MGD 1.2. Improved attentiveness

#### Activity 4: Food distribution

Improved attentiveness is included in the McGovern-Dole reference framework as hunger is likely to affect pupils' attentiveness negatively. Food distribution is therefore one of the activities contributing to SO1.

Figure 1: Food delivered (MT) compared to planned volume (Country office targets)



Overall, the country office distributed 49.5 percent of the planned food volume for the period 2018 to 2020. The country office cited several reasons for this low volume, including the closure of schools for two months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, interviews relayed that the primary reason for this shortfall is poor commodity management.

To assess the effectiveness of this activity, it is important to understand the consistent availability of food for pupils throughout both the school day and the school year. Since the school meal in Congo is served during the lunch hour and not as breakfast, it is important to understand whether children have eaten breakfast before going to school. The MTE found that, when compared to baseline, **the percentage of children coming to school with an empty stomach had increased from 50.1 percent at baseline to 56 percent at midline.**

With about 60 percent of the children coming to school hungry, the school meal is important to reduce hunger and enable children to concentrate in class. Results from the surveyed teachers surveyed indicate an improved perception of student attentiveness at midline in both ORA and non-ORA schools. In contrast, perceived **inattentiveness in non-intervention schools increased from 27.2 to 31.2 percent.**

### MGD 1.3 Improved student attendance.

#### Activity 2: Improve pupil enrolment

Under the partnership agreements with ACTED and UNICEF, WFP implemented several activities to ensure children were enrolled in school and did not discontinue their education. These included raising community awareness of the importance of education through channels at school, community, and department levels.

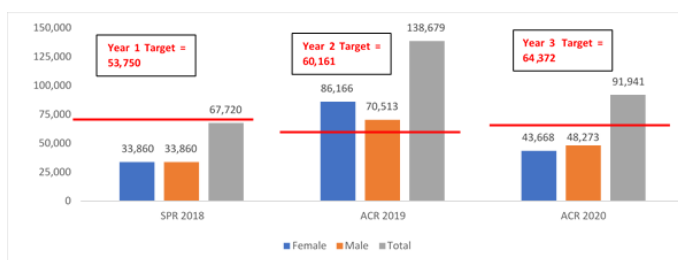




UNICEF was responsible for the radio programmes.

**The number of pupils enrolled (beneficiaries) exceeded the target numbers for the years 2019 and 2020** (an increase of 130.5 percent and 42.8 percent respectively), compared to reaching only 67.3 percent of planned in 2018. Figure 2 also shows the numbers of children disaggregated by sex. In 2018, equal numbers of girls and boys were reached, while in 2019, girls were more represented than boys, and in 2020 fewer girls were reached. The evaluation team could not identify the underlying causes for these findings.

Figure 2: School enrolment according to the ACRs (Country office targets)



Sources: SPR 2018 and ACRs 2019 & 2020

During COVID-19, the pandemic was the most significant external factor that affected the project outcomes, through movement restrictions, school closures and stay at home measures implemented from March through to May 2020.

Due to the government measures, and with the agreement of the USDA McGovern-Dole project, WFP transitioned from on-site distribution to take-home rations (THR). According to the ACR 2020, 57,031 pupils (30,105 boys and 26,926 girls) received three months' worth of dry rations (April, May, June 2020). **Overall, 87 percent of the planned beneficiaries received THR.**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

### Increase use of health and dietary practices

**SO2 is achieved through six different health and nutrition activities.**

**MGD 2.1. Improved knowledge of health and hygiene practices. Activity 5: Promote improved health**

At the community level, ACTED provided community-based training on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)-related topics.

In quantitative survey on coverage of health, hygiene, and nutrition topics in school, the proportion of school children who reported receiving training on the topics was lower than the proportion of teachers who reported that these topics were covered in school. **Non-intervention schools recorded slightly higher coverage levels than intervention schools.**

There was also a discrepancy in coverage levels in supported ORA schools between girls and boys, where 55% of girls reported receiving education on these topics as opposed to 18% of boys, reflecting the possible influence of social norms dictating roles and expected knowledge for girls vs. boys.

## EFFICIENCY

To select target schools for the project, WFP had a successful collaboration with the Ministry of Education, thus targeting results were more readily accepted by

authorities and enabled government buy-in when additional geographical areas were targeted, reinforcing the project's sustainability.

In addition, transportation is a major challenge in Congo. Local roads have been deteriorating over the last years, and not enough is done by the Government to repair or maintain them. There are limited companies that can supply vehicles for delivering small quantities (under 500 kg) to remote areas with poor road conditions, leading to delivery delays.

As the primary school feeding actor in Congo, WFP managed to leverage USDA's support not only to implement the McGovern-Dole project but also to engage other partners in school feeding activities, secure additional funding and develop complementary activities directly linked to the McGovern-Dole project.

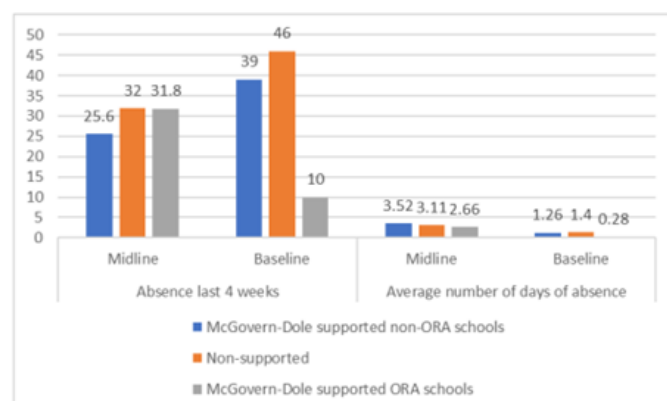
It was not possible to conduct cost efficiency calculations due to variations in annual data reporting, and community contributions were not systematically captured.

## IMPACT

Evaluation findings indicate that the McGovern-Dole project had not yet made substantial progress at midline in improving the nutritional situation of school children overall. Nutrition curriculum developed by UNESCO did not target school-aged children. Most surveyed teachers reported that they were not trained, and most surveyed students reported that they had not received information on health and hygiene in schools.

Implementing partners succeeded in building and rehabilitating WASH facilities included in the project design. However, further investments would be needed to address infrastructure needs in all target schools.

**There was a reduction in the proportion of students reporting absences in the past four weeks** (see Figure 3). However, illness was the predominant reason for recorded absences and reported more frequently at midline than at baseline, suggesting that pupils continue to face health related challenges.





**The key activities intended to support improved literacy curriculum were not implemented.** These include the development of a project for teaching literacy, production and distribution of teaching and learning materials, and training of teachers to use the new materials to enable teachers to effectively teach literacy.

The PASEC2019<sup>6</sup> framework uses a skills scale which determines a threshold for sufficient literacy proficiency, which determines the level of reading skills deemed essential for pursuing primary school education without difficulty.

This approach is in line with USDA's indicator measurement requirements.<sup>7</sup> Table 2 and 3 show the results from the baseline and midline reading tests. The lack of substantial differences between supported and non-supported schools suggest that activities designed to improve attentiveness and enrollment need to be complemented by changes in literacy instruction to increase literacy proficiency among students.

Table 2: Breakdown of literacy proficiency according to sex

Student's gender		Percentage(%) of students per proficiency levels				
		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Male		19.8%	16.2%	8.1%	8.1%	2.6%
Female		19.7%	17.3%	7.3%	3.4%	2.9%
Total		39.4%	33.5%	15.4%	6.3%	5.4%

Table 3: Breakdown of literacy proficiency according to school type (PASEC2019)

School type	Percentage(%) of students per proficiency levels				
	0	1	2	3	4
McGovern-Dole supported non-ORA schools	18.8	18.8	5.7	1.9	0.8
McGovern-Dole supported ORA schools	4.5	4.0	5.0	3.3	1.1
Non-supported schools	16.1	11.5	15.4	6.0	5.0
Total(%)	39.4	33.5	15.4	6.3	5.4

## SUSTAINABILITY

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in most capacity building activities being suspended, slowing progress of these efforts. The Directorate of School Feeding (DSF) still needs more capacity strengthening, not only on the national level, but also at the departmental level.

**Findings indicate that community contributions to school canteens fell short of expectations.** While firewood and water are regularly provided, vegetables and fruits, crucial for dietary diversity, are not. However, the suitability of this requirement should be reviewed, considering that poor communities, which were targeted, have limited capacity to provide such resources.



<sup>6</sup> PASEC2019 Qualité des systèmes éducatifs en Afrique subsaharienne francophone, Performances et Environnement de l'enseignement-apprentissage au primaire, CONFEMEM, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Proportion of learners who attain the specified threshold at the end of two grades of primary schooling, the beginning of the third year of primary schooling, or the equivalent levels of accelerated learning projects.



**The project also expected that local residents would contribute as cooks for no remuneration, which seemed unrealistic, as the residents were in need of paid employment.**

Interviews with cooks and school feeding committees revealed that cooks, who are almost exclusively women, became demotivated due to lack of payment, leading to frequent rotation. This demotivation mirrors findings from the 2019-joint mission report looking at women's empowerment, which noted similar issues with delayed payments in Food-Assistance-for-Assets (FFA) projects. The issue of remuneration for cooks is recurrent across several school feeding projects and is directly linked to gender equality and protection issues where food assistance should do no harm to the safety, dignity and integrity of the women, men, girls, and boys receiving it, and is provided in ways that respect their rights.

## Gender Equity and Women Empowerment

The project missed several opportunities to help transform cooks' lives, most of whom are women. Evidence shows that the majority of cooks never received training and are not paid, despite being critical for project implementation. Some cooks reported receiving one glass of rice each day after work.

The project has actively encouraged community committees to put women into leadership positions. The evaluation found that the percentage of female presidents on school feeding committees has substantially increased, from 26.1% at baseline to 36.1% at midline.

## FACTORS AFFECTING RESULTS

### CHALLENGES

**Insufficient coordination** amongst WFP and external partners working within the school feeding sector (e.g. World Bank, DAS) restricted the achievement of SO1 as some activities suggested by RF under the results stream on improving the quality of literacy instruction, were not implemented.

**The curriculum developed for health and nutrition training was not tailored to primary schools' needs.**

Training approaches by UNESCO and UNICEF were not coordinated. Lacking involvement of the nutritionist at the WFP country office led to reduced messaging on health and nutrition.

Fuel-efficient stoves were installed in schools, however these were too small to handle the large volumes of food required for school meals.

Cost efficiency calculations for the school feeding component were limited due to variations in annual data reporting.

The ACR is inadequate to report on PMP indicators as indicators do not consistently match, and documents do not consistently use the same reporting month (fiscal year vs. calendar year).

There was a lack of sex disaggregated data across the project and cooks, who were mostly female, were not remunerated.

### OPPORTUNITIES

**Enrolment increased until the COVID-19 pandemic** which resulted in school closures. There were positive results from health-related activities, with UNICEF and ACTED both actively supporting the construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructures, including kitchens, storerooms, and latrines. UNICEF started to include menstrual hygiene in the WASH training and considered this issue in latrine construction by ensuring the availability of disposal facilities for girls.

WFP's M&E unit deployed a school feeding dashboard. Targeting of schools was efficiently carried out through collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The project enabled WFP to build national capacity in school feeding and allowed to achieve its ambitions for school feeding in the country.

WFP leveraged USDA's support not only to implement the McGovern-Dole project but also to engage other partners in school feeding activities.

On the health and nutrition objective, several of the activities are likely to contribute to a more conducive learning environment for students. **The percentage of students reporting absence in the past four weeks decreased by over 30 percent between baseline and midline.**





## LESSONS LEARNED

WFP's expertise in food distribution and close ties with the government provide strong support for the school feeding component of the programme. However, more attention needs to be paid to ensure stakeholder understanding of the project logic to guarantee activities are designed and implemented in line with the objectives of the results framework.

While the McGovern-Dole projects have many strengths, there are opportunities for better alignment with WFP policies. The evaluation highlighted two key areas for improvement:

1. McGovern-Dole projects currently prioritize imported food, whereas WFP's policy and the Government promote home-grown school feeding (HGSF).
2. Although the McGovern-Dole programme encourages the remuneration of cooks, the programme in the Republic of Congo relies on volunteer cooks, thus perpetuating historical social roles as the majority of cooks are women. Women's work should be recognized and remunerated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** WFP should work with implementing partners to develop clear definitions of PMP indicators and a common methodology for monitoring and reporting, to enhance tracking of progress and the project evaluation.

**Recommendation 2:** WFP should prioritise capacity-building exercises that were postponed due to COVID-19, i.e. activities targeted at building the human and physical capacity of SFSs (provision of motorbikes) and setting up a server for data storage at national level.

**Recommendation 3:** WFP Congo should ensure that there is a complete infrastructure inventory of all McGovern-Dole assisted schools before the end of the project to allow realistic planning needed for a healthy environment at the school premises.

**Recommendation 4:** WFP Congo, with support from Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (RBJ), should

develop clear guidance on curriculum promoting dietary diversity, including defining the concept of food groups as an indicator for dietary adequacy. There is need to establish a working group which will put dietary diversity at the centre of its discussions.

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 5:** WFP should ensure that an action plan is developed so that the project activities also contribute to the objective of improving the literacy of school-age children.

**Recommendation 6:** WFP RBJ, with support from WFP HQ as necessary, should discuss with USDA the most appropriate ways to support school feeding in the region, with an emphasis on the growing interest in the home-grown school feeding model, which transfers cash to schools for local food purchase.

**Recommendation 7:** WFP Congo, with support from RBJ, UNICEF and other partners as appropriate, should ensure that approaches aimed to advance women's and girls' empowerment and address inequalities between girls and boys, are an integral part of the primary school curriculum. The module has been developed already and is waiting to be rolled out. The same holds true for a curriculum on food and nutrition. The current needs to be adapted to the needs of primary schools.

### LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Variations in data collection processes for performance monitoring plan (PMP) indicators and reporting during the project cycle created challenges for providing a summative analysis. PMP indicators would benefit from clarification on data collection methods and consistency in reporting methodology. To assess project achievements, the evaluation team based the analysis on the final version of the indicator tracking table (ITT) provided by the country office as well as the semi-annual performance reports (SAPRs) produced by the WFP CO and submitted to USDA. Nonetheless, the evaluation team identified areas of inconsistency that posed challenges in comprehending the project's achievements.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international team members had to conduct interviews remotely due to travel restrictions. To strengthen the local team,





## ACRONYMS

ACR	Annual Country Report
CO	Country Office
DSF	Directorate of School Feeding
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service
FFA	Food-Assistance-for-Assets
FY	Fiscal Year
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
NSFD	National School Feeding Directorate
ORA	Observe, React and Act
PASEC	Project d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
RBJ	Regional Bureau of Johannesburg
RF	Results Framework
SAPR	Semi-Annual Performance Report
St Ind	Standard indicator
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization



### Reference:

Full evaluation reports and the Management Response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/republic-congo-mid-term-evaluation-mcgobern-dole-funded-school-feeding-programme-2018>. For more information, please contact the Office of Evaluation at [wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org](mailto:wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org)

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