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SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

School feeding

Fuelling learning. Building futures

Evidence shows that every US\$1 invested in school meals yields a US\$9 return through improved health, learning outcomes, and long-term productivity. For over two decades, WFP has partnered with the Government of Bangladesh to deliver school feeding programmes to children in the country's most vulnerable areas, helping turn classrooms into spaces of opportunity and prosperity.

Bangladesh's school feeding journey with WFP began in 2001, following devastating floods in the south-western region. As part of the emergency response, WFP provided children attending school with small packets of fortified biscuits. What began as an emergency intervention quickly proved its long-term value for education, health, and community development.

As the programme expanded, its impact became clear. Joint assessments by WFP and the Government found that children who received school meals were healthier and more likely to stay in school. Enrolment rose by 17 percent, attendance increased by over 8 percent, and dropout rates declined. Children in supported schools

also had lower rates of anaemia, undernutrition, and parasitic infections compared to their peers.

Between 2013 and 2020, WFP partnered with the Government and local communities to pilot school meals in Bamna and Lama in southern Bangladesh and Islampur in the north. These regions, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, were selected for their high poverty levels, food insecurity, and geographic challenges, offering diverse contexts to test the model.

Pre-primary and primary schoolchildren received a nutritious *khichuri* meal made from fortified rice, pulses, oil, eggs, and locally grown vegetables. The initiative improved children's nutrition, school participation, and strengthened local economies by sourcing fresh ingredients from nearby farmers and engaging local women in meal preparation, creating livelihood opportunities within the community.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, classroom learning, and the hot meals programme were both suspended. WFP provided technical support to the Government to develop home delivery guidelines, which enabled at-

home biscuit distributions to serve Bangladeshi children across the country.

In 2019, the Government endorsed the National School Meals Policy, setting a clear goal: school meals should meet 30 percent of the calories and half of the nutrients children need each day. By 2022, the national programme had reached over 3 million children. The benefits extended beyond nutrition and education. In the poorest households, studies showed that school feeding reduced food expenses by 4.4 percent and helped increase annual income by 4 percent, reinforcing its role as an effective safety net.

Building on this momentum, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education began redesigning the programme to meet evolving needs. A new weekly combined menu, including fortified biscuits, UHT milk, eggs, buns, and seasonal fruits, was approved in March 2025. This new generation of school feeding programme with a budget of over BDT 5,452 crore (USD 450.6 million approx.) is expected to reach 3.1 million children in 150 sub-districts over the next three years. WFP continues to provide technical guidance, monitoring support, and assistance in resource mobilisation.

Another milestone was achieved when Bangladesh joined the global School Meals Coalition in 2023, pledging to improve and expand its school feeding efforts. With WFP's continued support and advocacy, the Government now plans to reach all remaining subdistricts – either by including school meals in the national primary education programme or through a dedicated project.

WFP's progress in school feeding has been made possible through long-standing donor partnerships. Since 2006, the USDA's McGovern-Dole Programme has played a key role. Under the new five-year grant (2024–2029), valued at USD 27 million, over 31,000 children in 149 schools in Madhabpur, Sylhet will benefit, along with strengthened support for literacy, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), and agricultural education. WFP will also provide technical support at both national and local levels in Sylhet to help the government expand and institutionalize school feeding across the country.

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In Cox's Bazar, WFP provides daily fortified biscuits to 52,000 children in government primary schools across Ukhiya, Kutubdia, and Teknaf. These efforts are complemented by initiatives in literacy, health, and agriculture – with a strong emphasis on women's leadership in school management to foster community ownership. In the Rohingya refugee camps, WFP provides daily fortified biscuits to all school-going children, some 250,000 across 4,000 learning centres, ensuring vital nutrition in one of the world's most challenging humanitarian settings. These are made possible thanks to generous contributions from donors including Australia, Germany, and the United States. Plans are underway to introduce additional interventions, including vegetable gardening, deworming, and hygiene education, to support broader development for Rohingya children.



3M

CHILDREN

**By 2022, the national
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three years**



3.1M

CHILDREN

Bangladesh's National School Feeding Programme is one of the country's largest social safety nets for children. From a small packet of biscuits in a flood-hit classroom to a nationally led programme serving millions, the story of school feeding in Bangladesh is one of steady progress, strong partnerships, and shared commitment.

Today, while over 10 million primary schoolchildren still await access to daily school meals, the path is clearer than ever. With strong government leadership, a robust national policy, and decades of experience to build on, the foundations are firmly in place. With sustained partnership and investment, school feeding can reach every child - ensuring they are nourished, in school, and empowered to shape a brighter future.