

## WFP EVALUATION

# Study Brief: Baseline Study of the USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program Award in Rwanda from 2025 to 2029

## CONTEXT

Rwanda has made significant progress in human development and poverty reduction, yet disparities remain, particularly in rural and food-insecure districts. Poverty is more pronounced in rural areas, and while the national food insecurity rate is 17 percent, districts targeted by the FY24 McGovern-Dole project experience higher food insecurity rates, ranging from 20 to 38 percent.<sup>1</sup> Education access has improved, with a 95 percent net enrollment rate in primary school, though educational quality remains uneven.<sup>2</sup>

In response to these challenges, the Government of Rwanda launched the National School Feeding Policy and Strategy in 2019 to institutionalize school meals as a tool for addressing education and nutrition. By 2024, the program had scaled nationally to over 4.4 million students.<sup>3</sup> However, financial sustainability remains a constraint, with the Government facing an estimated annual funding gap of USD 84 million despite increases in the national school feeding budget.<sup>4</sup>

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

WFP and its partners are implementing a final, five-year United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program Award in Rwanda from 2025 to 2029. The USD 28 million FY24 project builds on the progress made under the FY15 and FY20 projects. In addition to providing commodities for school feeding, the project includes technical assistance to build government capacity to coordinate, implement and monitor school feeding, literacy, WASH and nutrition activities. The FY24 project will focus heavily on sustainability and the full transition of all project schools into the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) by 2029; it will also generate evidence to optimize operational efficiencies and strengthen advocacy for sustainable financing.

Activities will be implemented in 72 schools: 32 schools across the three districts continuing from the FY20 project – Burera, Kayanza and Gasabo – and 40 new schools from two highly food insecure districts that have not yet benefited from McGovern-Dole assistance – Ngororero and Nyamasheke.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES AND USERS

The WFP Rwanda Country Office commissioned the baseline study to serve the dual purposes of accountability and learning. The baseline objectives were to assess the relevance and coherence of the FY24 project design and to provide a situational analysis in all project districts prior to project implementation, which will allow for the assessment of the project's progress and impact at midterm and endline.

The main users of the baseline study are WFP at national, regional and corporate levels, USDA and other donors, governmental and non-governmental partners, and the communities and schools the project is intended to serve.

## STUDY DESIGN

The baseline study is the first of three assessments (i.e., baseline study and midterm and final evaluations). It applied a participatory and mixed-methods approach. Primary data were collected from a representative sample of 23 project schools. Data collection methods included a school survey, an Early Grade Reading Assessment, a student survey, and qualitative fieldwork (61 key informant interviews and 9 focus group discussions).

## KEY FINDINGS

**Question 1: How relevant is the project design in contributing to a sustainable, effective implementation of the NSFP vis-à-vis the Government's readiness and capacities to manage the NSFP?**

The FY24 project design is appropriately aligned to government priorities and ambitions for a high-quality NSFP and targets important gaps in institutional coordination, monitoring and evaluation systems, district-level resourcing and community engagement. To meet the Government's goals for the NSFP, the FY24 design increases the focus on the quality of school feeding implementation, including nutritional quality and safety of meals.

<sup>1</sup> [WFP. 2024. Rwanda CFSVA.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Republic of Rwanda. 2025. Rwanda Education Statistical Yearbook 2023/2024.

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Rwanda. MINEDUC. 2024. School Census.

<sup>4</sup> [Government of Rwanda. 2023. Rwanda National School Feeding Programme Financing Strategy.](#)

The FY24 project will address capacity gaps by promoting market transparency and improving procurement readiness through government-led technical training and linkage sessions. The FY24 project design emphasizes support for the new procurement guidelines, including further refining of the procurement model. However, the design does not yet specify how WFP will support government decision-making to evaluate and select among different procurement models (i.e., local versus centralized modalities).

**Question 2: How coherent are the proposed activities with existing policies and strategies of the Government of Rwanda?**

FY24 project activities are highly aligned with national strategies in education, health and nutrition, and align generally with district development plans and initiatives. While district performance contracts (*imihigo*) do not yet include specific school feeding indicators, the project plans to support districts to integrate these into their *imihigo*. Stakeholders believe this will significantly increase district ownership, community engagement and parents' contributions to school meal.

Both the McGovern-Dole project and the NSFP are increasingly aligned with sector leading practice through Rwanda's participation in the Global and East African regional chapter of the School Meals Coalition. Similarly, the project is well-aligned with coordinated United Nations programming goals outlined in the 2025-2029 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, contributing to social and economic transformation priorities.

The FY24 project demonstrates complementarity with other education, literacy and WASH initiatives in Rwanda. However, the suspension of USAID-funded literacy projects at the community level has left significant gaps in literacy and education support to project districts. Discussions on how the project would fill these gaps were ongoing at baseline.

**Question 3: How will the project's interventions, including capacity strengthening, be measured to determine if they have produced the anticipated results and outcomes?**

At baseline, the FY24 project design demonstrates a strong commitment to adopting a structured and participatory approach to monitoring institutional development and performance through the planned rollout of the Healthy Systems Approach for Better Education Results (Healthy SABER). The findings from the SABER baseline assessment will, in turn, inform the development of a targeted country capacity strengthening plan, which will serve as a roadmap for improving system performance and building institutional resilience.

The FY24 project's emphasis on quality is appropriate, but project and national guidelines do not yet include specific, tiered quality benchmarks to account for varied capacities across schools. The absence of such benchmarks makes it difficult to assess progress or provide structured feedback for improvement. Quality assurance mechanisms and clear procedures must also be defined for using monitoring data to enforce compliance and improve practice.

The FY24 project has established several mechanisms to support cost-effective and timely implementation, including a comprehensive Performance Monitoring Plan, a detailed risk register and foundational monitoring systems. However, monitoring systems can be further optimized by improving communication with partners on the timing and use of monitoring data, and by continuing to enhance knowledge management.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The FY24 McGovern-Dole project is well-aligned with the Government of Rwanda's policies and priorities, strengthening government capacity and enhancing the quality of the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) through improved nutrition, food safety, and monitoring systems. Frameworks like SABER and a robust Performance Monitoring Plan support performance management. Risks to literacy outcomes, sustainability challenges and the need for clearer quality benchmarks are areas for further attention.

Key programmatic lessons include the importance of validating the theory of change with government stakeholders to ensure relevance, alignment, and shared ownership; and improving district-disaggregated data collection to capture local variation. Establishing clear benchmarks for nutrition, food safety, and program quality, alongside time-bound risk mitigation and strengthened adaptive management, can enhance accountability and effectiveness. Proactively addressing sustainability risks related to financing, district coordinator roles and literacy support is essential to ensure the NSFP's long-term impact and government ownership.

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