

MCGOVERN-DOLE FOOD FOR EDUCATION PROGRAM IN SIERRA LEONE

All Pikin For Learn Phase IV Baseline Evaluation Summary

SUMMARY

Project Background

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is implementing the fourth phase of the McGovern-Dole Food for Education project All Pikin for Learn (APFL) in Sierra Leone. The project aims to reduce hunger while improving literacy and primary education, especially for girls. Since 2008, CRS has rolled out APFL, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in chiefdoms within the Koinadugu and Falaba districts. The project aligns with the education strategy of the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) by seeking to improve the quality and relevance of education, encourage the completion of primary education for vulnerable and marginalized children, and increase community involvement in education. It is designed to achieve these goals by providing school meals, training teachers and school administrators, improving water and sanitation facilities, providing school infrastructure, and building skills and knowledge within the communities.

In 2018, USDA approved APFL for four additional years of implementation, expanding its reach to 69,731 primary school pupils in the Koinadugu and Falaba districts from 32,684 pupils in the previous phase. Phase IV of the project builds on the progress and lessons learned throughout Phases I, II, and III. It prioritizes activities that leverage gains achieved from prior McGovern-Dole investments to achieve sustainability and graduation by the end of the project.

Methodology

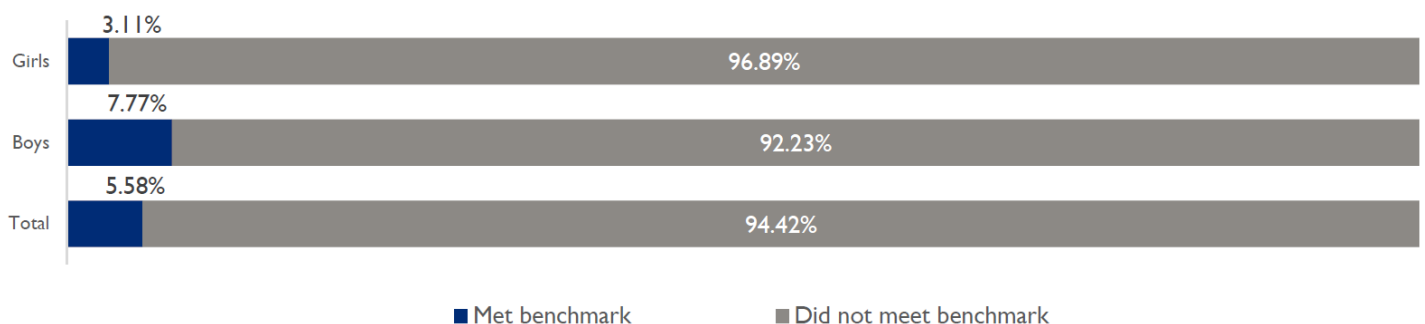
The external evaluation of APFL IV is a four-year study. Baseline data collection took place June 2019 and included 70 sample schools across 15 chiefdoms where the project is intervening – 43 schools continuing from Phase III of APFL and 27 new schools. Additionally, 12 FGD collected the critical perspectives of community members, leaders, and parents.

FINDINGS

Strategic Objectives

The baseline literacy assessment of surveyed APFL IV class 2 pupils revealed low literacy levels— 5.58 percent met the project’s reading comprehension benchmark. Pupils’ results against the benchmark are presented in Figure 1.

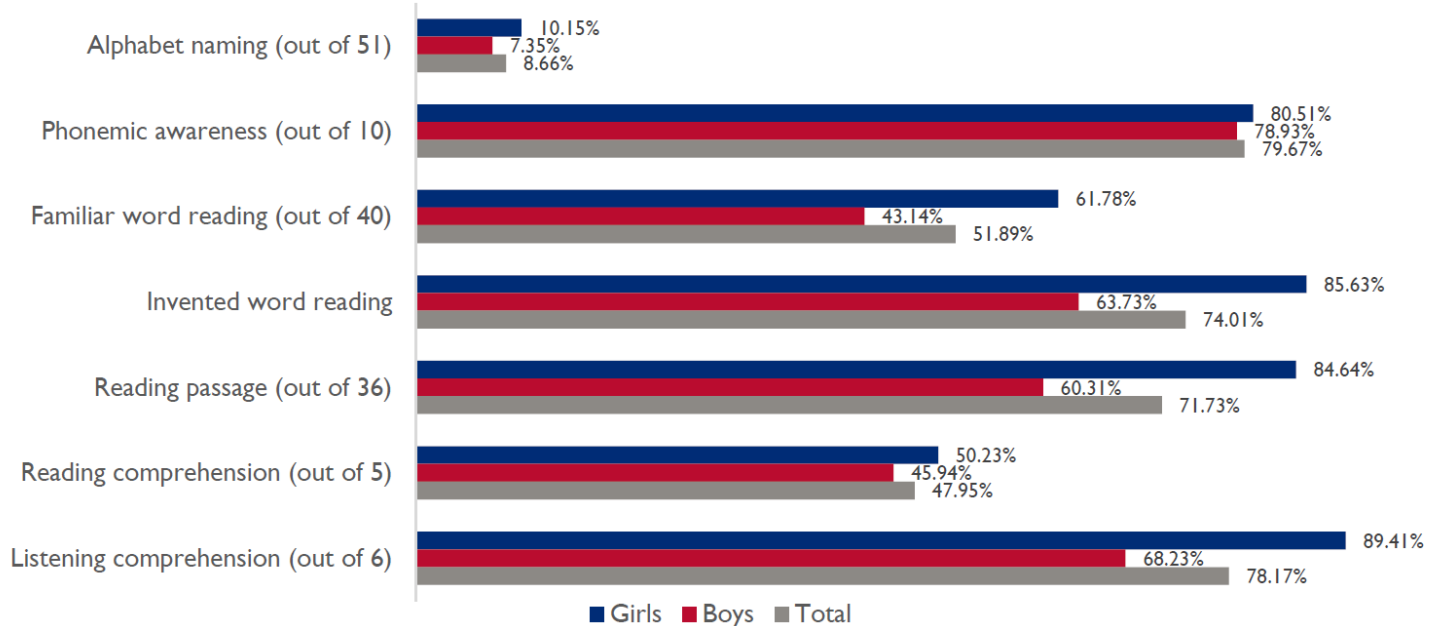
Figure 1: Percentage of Pupils Reaching Literacy Threshold by Sex



Note: Girls (n=334); Boys (n=348); Total (N=682)

Pupils performed best on the alphabet naming subtask; however, the majority of pupils performed poorly on each of the other subtasks. The proportions of pupils who did not answer a single item correct across subtasks—known as zero scores—are presented in Figure 2. In general, boys outperformed girls.

Figure 2: Percentage of Pupils Receiving Zero Scores by Sex



Note: Girls (n=334); Boys (n=348); Total (N=682)

Teachers play a critical role in pupils' learning and are, therefore, instrumental in meeting APFL's project goals. There is a clear need for rigorous teacher training and coaching on effective teaching techniques. Fewer than half of teachers are certified; therefore, CRS's teacher training and certification efforts will help fill a critical gap in Koinadugu's and Falaba's workforce. According to surveys, positive mentorships between teachers and head teachers could be an impactful activity.

Supporting the feeding program will be critical for the APFL IV project. Only 6.12 percent of head teachers reported being able to provide a school meal on the day of the baseline data collection visit. This indicates that without CRS support, provision of meals at schools will be limited. Additionally, with less than half of pupils reporting that they are reaching the minimum acceptable diet, keeping the school feeding programs well stocked will be essential for pupils' nutrition.

Relevance

Qualitative data from the community FGDs and the stakeholder KIIs indicate that the holistic approach and design of APFL IV is responsive to the most prominent needs of children in their community, specifically feeding support, improving teacher quality, water wells and latrines, and improving school building infrastructure. Of these needs, school feeding support was cited the most often in FGDs and echoed prominently in stakeholder KIIs. Overall, community members are appreciative of APFL's programming and want to see the project succeed.

Effectiveness

Participants in both the community FGDs and stakeholder KIIs view the project's overall design as appropriate—if not critical—to the context of their communities. However, stakeholders and community members alike expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the project if all implementation aspects are not strictly adhered to and monitored; specific areas of concern include teacher training, food provision, and community sensitization. Additionally, participants drew attention to gender considerations within the project that should be examined and addressed.

Sustainability and Impact

CRS's coordination with partners will be critical to ensuring that APFL's activities are sustainable beyond the life of the project. There are opportunities to include all partners—from community members and school support groups at the local level through the NSFS at the national level—in each APFL activity. Indeed, the NSFS is eager to learn from CRS's successes as it prepares to take on the responsibility for school feeding activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Closely monitor project implementation.

Close monitoring of the implementation of activities will ensure fidelity to the project design, alleviate community concerns around theft or ineffectiveness, increase CRS's responsiveness to challenges that arise, and allow the project team to link specific interventions with outcomes observed during the midline and endline evaluations.

Examine existing student and teacher English language abilities.

Student performance on the listening comprehension subtask may indicate that students have a limited ability to understand spoken English. The project may want to consider undertaking more targeted research into the reasons for this gap in comprehension. Specifically, this may mean a deeper investment in coaching for basic skills for literacy instruction for early grade teachers.

Tailor APFL IV interventions to individual school and community needs.

The project should adapt its approach in different schools and communities based on previous level of support from APFL, as well as current needs and priorities. More targeted interventions will lead to greater impact as well as encourage stronger community buy-in and ownership, thus promoting future sustainability. CRS should leverage existing resources and potential partnerships with other entities working within the communities to be more efficient.

Address gender considerations within the programming.

CRS should examine and address gender considerations in all aspects of APFL IV programming. Baseline findings show that boys outperform girls on the literacy assessment; furthermore, community members shared concerns that challenges around gender are prevalent in targeted communities. CRS should consider completing a thorough gender and social inclusion analysis to ensure that the project's design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation accounts for existing gender disparities and that the interventions designed to remove or reduce such disparities are appropriate for the community context.

Build the capacity of the National School Feeding Secretariat.

Considering the APFL IV goal of transitioning the school feeding program to the GoSL, CRS should play a role in building the capacity of the nascent NSFS. This could include frequent collaboration and communication between the two groups, as well as CRS-led trainings. Potential trainings could focus on building the capacity of monitoring-and-evaluation teams to oversee implementation of the school feeding program as well as address the program's administrative and logistical components.

Integrate transition strategy and communication from start-up for sustainable impact.

Clear communication and expectations setting around CRS's transition from the region must be central to the early discussions with communities, partners, and the GoSL. CRS should develop a transition strategy for APFL IV in partnership with relevant stakeholders. Such a strategy should clearly articulate transitions and phase-out approaches for each activity, identify responsible parties to continue implementation after APFL IV ends, delineate direct and indirect costs, establish monitoring and oversight guidelines, and set clear timelines.