

Activity Evaluation of USDA McGovern-Dole Grants (FFE-442-2019-013-00) for WFP School Feeding in Cambodia

01 November 2019 to 30 October 2023

Baseline Study

Executive Brief (2 pages)

This brief presents a summary of the findings from a baseline study of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) McGovern-Dole support to the World Food Programme School Feeding activities in Cambodia. The study was done between August and October 2020 and is the first of three phases; midline and endline evaluation rounds will take place in 2021 and 2023, respectively. This study was commissioned by the WFP Cambodia Country Office (CO).

Subject of the Evaluation

The 2019-2023 phase of the USDA McGovern-Dole Grant programme is a continuation of previous phases, implemented with USDA's support since 2010. The programme is implemented in three provinces of Cambodia: Kampong Chhnang, Siem Reap and Kampong Thom. The programme has two Strategic Objectives: To improve literacy (measured by early grade reading); and, To improve health and dietary practices.

The McGovern-Dole programme aims to include capacity building, food distribution, literacy, promotion of improved health and nutrition, and establishment of school gardens. A daily cooked breakfast will be provided to 151,700 primary and pre-primary children. The programme will gradually transition to local procurement of produce before being handed over to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), and is being implemented in parallel with the Local and Regional Procurement Programme, also supported by USDA.

To support the literacy component, teachers will be given training sessions and Grade 2 students will be provided non-fiction books on nutrition and healthy eating. The literacy component will be done in collaboration with World Education Inc (WEI) and USAID.

To promote better health and nutrition, WFP will work with partners to ensure that minimum standards of health and hygiene infrastructure exists in as many schools as possible. Technical knowledge including training materials and trained personnel will be met as well. Additionally, education and Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) materials will be made available. Vegetable seeds and training will be provided to select schools to support the development of school gardens.

Objectives and Purpose

The objectives of the overall evaluation are accountability (identifying the results and performance) and learning (factors that affects the results and identifying lessons for future studies). The purpose of the baseline study is to identify the current situation against which the next two phases of the evaluation will be compared.

The evaluation is designed to answer four main questions: How appropriate was the programme design? What are the results of the programme? How sustainable is it likely to be? Why and how has the programme achieved its results?

Summary of findings

Appropriateness: The programme design was considered appropriate for the needs of women, men, girls and boys, and aligned with Government priorities, as well as policies and activities of USDA, WFP, the United Nations and other partners. The programme is

well accepted by all stakeholders, who are all aware of the benefits for children, schools and communities. Indicators are suitable but there no indicators and activities specifically aimed at gender equality and inclusiveness. Not all stakeholders had a clear understanding of how schools were selected for this programme.

Results: Community acceptance of and participation in the school feeding programme is high. Teacher and student attendance is high, but literacy rates were far below expectations. While all programme schools have kitchens, more than half were not in a good condition and less than half were using energy-efficient stoves. Access to sources of clean water was available to most, but not all, of the schools. Not all latrines were functional in all schools and not all schools had a garden yet.

Sustainability: The Royal Government of Cambodia is highly invested in a national school-feeding programme, evidenced by a multisectoral school meals policy including budget allocations. During the period of the programme, 141 additional schools are expected to be handed over to the Government in line with WFP's new School Feeding Strategy 2020-2030. The original timeline of handover was noticeably short, and the COVID-19 pandemic has led to delays that will likely lead to the programme falling short of its targets. The CO has already adjusted the timeline from 2023 to 2025.

Why and how results were achieved: Interviews with stakeholders revealed that WFP has a strong relationship with the MoEYS, and there is a network of donors, United Nations and other organisations that leverage the school feeding programme. The Royal Government of Cambodia is highly committed to a national feeding programme, as evidenced by the existence of multisectoral school meals policy including budget allocations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Within the next six months, the WFP CO should develop a Theory of Change and joint workplan for the programme, including a monitoring workplan, in close collaboration with MoEYS and other relevant ministries and partners. This should include a transparent communication mechanism to regularly share challenges, experiences and lessons learnt with all levels.

Recommendation 2: Within the next 12 months, the WFP CO should design a coherent and structured capacity building plan based on thorough needs mapping, a review of the current situation, with clear key roles, responsibilities, time targets, and indicators that measure how capacity is improved and enhanced over time. Government capacity building in programme monitoring should be a priority. This will require the identification of a key focal point to lead the process.

Recommendation 3: Within the next six months, the WFP CO, the MoEYS and other ministries should consider incorporating specific indicators measuring the progress of the transition in the monitoring plan, to enable careful monitoring and adjustments during the transition process.

Recommendation 4: Within the next six months, the WFP CO, with USDA and in consultation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, should develop specific gender indicators to enable the integration of gender considerations into the programme's design and activities, and ensure that the programme contributes to gender equity and women's empowerment. The CO should ensure that these indicators measure the progress in transformative changes, for women and girls but also for men and boys.

Recommendation 5: Within the next 12 months, the WFP CO should assess whether the targeting of the schools can or should be adjusted. An assessment of the needs of each school will lead to effective and efficient programme implementation and help prepare the schools for the transition process to a nationally owned and implemented school feeding programme.