



World Food Programme

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Republic of Congo: Summary of Evaluation Evidence and Insights on School Feeding

INTRODUCTION

This report presents a summary of the key findings and recommendations on school feeding based on three evaluations commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) in the Republic of Congo. The main purpose of the summary report is to promote learning from evaluations and inform design and implementation decisions on the school feeding activities in Congo. The summary report was drafted by the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (RBJ) Evaluation Unit and is targeted at the WFP Congo country office (CO), RBJ staff, and other stakeholders, and it can be used as follows:

- To promote learning and collective reflections to improve WFP's operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- To draw evidence from the evaluation findings and insights to inform the design and implementation of school feeding programmes.
- To reflect on whether the highlighted key factors affecting results (both positively and negatively) are persisting and establish ways to address or mitigate their effect.
- For sharing with national actors such as the government and key stakeholders with a view to strengthening the sustainability of the programme and government ownership.

SCOPE AND PROGRAMME FEATURES

This report summarizes evaluation findings and recommendations on school feeding from three evaluations briefly described below:

1 [Mid-term evaluation of the Republic of Congo Country Programme 200648 \(2015-2017\)](#): This evaluation was conducted in 2017 to draw lessons from the implementation of the country programme and inform the strategic direction of the WFP Congo country strategic plan (CSP). The programme focused on school feeding, social safety net, nutrition, and technical support to the government on risk and disaster management.

2 [Baseline evaluation of the McGovern Dole school feeding Programme in the Republic of Congo \(2018-2022\)](#):

The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme baseline evaluation was conducted in 2018 to assess the situation before the commencement of the programme, the feasibility of the targets set out in the WFP performance monitoring plan, and to establish whether the targets required adjusting.

3 [Mid-term evaluation of the McGovern-Dole school feeding Programme in the Republic of Congo \(2018-2022\)](#):

The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition mid-term evaluation assessed the progress towards the achievement of intended outputs and outcomes; whether the baseline recommendations were actioned and integrated into programme implementation and, if so, establish whether the recommendations were successful in strengthening programme implementation.

APPROACH AND METHODS

A qualitative content analysis was used to summarize evidence from the three evaluation reports. Text from the evaluation reports was extracted into an Excel framework and coded using predetermined categories focusing on the key findings, factors affecting results, and recommendations on school feeding. The quality of the summary was ensured through a three-stage review by members of the WFP RBJ Evaluation Unit, Congo CO and the HQ Office of Evaluation. The summary was guided by [three questions](#):

1. What are the key evaluation findings on school feeding?
2. What factors affected (positively or negatively) the implementation and achievement of school feeding results?
3. What are the key evaluation recommendations and actions thereof for school feeding?

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS ON SCHOOL FEEDING

RELEVANCE

1. **The consultative process in the design and selection of beneficiaries for the Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017)'s school feeding enabled WFP to target the most vulnerable populations.** The targeting of schools in consultation with the government departments, United Nations (UN) Agencies, communities, and associations on People living with HIV/AIDS helped the Country Programme to focus on rural schools affected by poverty and lack of access to education. Similarly, the McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation reported that the selection of schools in collaboration with the Ministry of Education helped target the poorest and most remote areas.

2. **Two evaluations found that considerable progress was made to ensure indigenous children have access to education.** The Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation highlighted that school feeding paid particular attention to indigenous children whose way of life was not always compatible with the national school system and who had the least access to education. Similarly, the mid-term evaluation commended the McGovern-Dole programme for targeting specific schools for the indigenous and most vulnerable populations in Congo.

3. **One evaluation found a direct effect of school feeding activities, especially school canteens, on access to education.** This finding was unanimously expressed in the Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation findings from document reviews, interviews and focus group discussions. The finding was also supported by teachers and inspectors who reported an immediate drop in attendance during the disruptions in school feeding activities. Similarly, government officials, parents and the WFP data showed that the direct effects of school feeding on attendance, retention and dropouts were very positive.

4. **The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation found the school feeding relevant to food security needs and serves as a social safety net in Congo.** The evaluation highlighted that the McGovern-Dole programme is relevant to the main concerns in Congo which are related to health, literacy, nutrition, water, and sanitation. It also revealed that school feeding helped children from poor households where in some instances, school meals were the only meal the children would have throughout the day.

5. **The McGovern-Dole programme is not linked to local production objectives.** While the McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation applauded WFP's efforts to build the National School Feeding Directorate's national and departmental capacity, it reported that the use of imported food is opposed to the government's preferred model for a home-grown school feeding programme. This finding correlated with the McGovern-Dole programme baseline, which showed that the programme was not implementing any specific objective

linked to local production, which calls for defining norms and standards for diverse food consumption to promote local consumption in school meals.

EFFICIENCY

6. **Two evaluations reported delays in the delivery of food supplies to schools.** The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation reported that WFP experienced transportation challenges due to difficulties in finding transporters with vehicles to deliver small quantities of food to remote areas with poor roads, resulting in delays in providing food to schools at the right time. Similarly, the Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation reported delays in food deliveries due to funding issues, inadequate storage facilities at schools, inaccessibility of schools and challenges with the contracted food transporters. **Evidence on efficiency was, however, extremely limited and only available on timeliness.**

EFFECTIVENESS

7. **Three evaluations reported that the effectiveness of the MDG school feeding programme was affected by the failure to implement all the planned activities, limited school infrastructure and inconsistencies in food groups.** The sample of Country Programme (2015–2017) schools visited by the evaluation team lacked cooking equipment and their infrastructure (latrines, water points, hand washing stations, storage and kitchen facilities) was in poor condition, despite the selection criteria for schools to participate in the programme including a lockable food storage facility, infrastructure for cooking, and separate toilets for girls and boys. Similar to the McGovern-Dole baseline, the mid-term evaluation reported that the UNESCO curriculum did not promote adequate food groups to improve dietary diversity and its nutrition guidelines were for secondary and adult education and not primary school children. It was also reported that no actions were taken to address inconsistencies in food group use, create a unified understanding of adequate dietary intake, and measure dietary diversity as recommended at baseline.

8. **The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation found little community contribution to the school feeding baskets, resulting in reduced dietary diversity.** According to the McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation focus group discussions, parents' contributions of vegetables, leafy greens, and fruits were limited. The mid-term evaluation attributed this to poverty in the targeted communities which might have affected the parents' ability to contribute to school meals.

9. **The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation reported literacy spending was lower than planned making it impossible for the programme to have a meaningful contribution to literacy outcomes without changes in the quality of literacy instructions.** The mid-term evaluation reported that WFP had not contracted out or implemented activities to improve the quality of the literacy curriculum as specified in the Foreign Assistance Service and WFP agreement. The mid-term evaluation also reported that

improving school-aged children's literacy had a limited contribution to McGovern-Dole's main strategic goal.

10. According to the McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation, **school meals are important to reducing hunger and enabling children to concentrate in class, considering that 60% of the children were going to school on an empty stomach.** The effectiveness of the McGovern-Dole activities to improve attentiveness in class through school meals was, however, affected by the limited meal sizes due to poor commodity management and logistical challenges. These challenges resulted in lower food volumes being distributed to schools than planned.

IMPACT

11. **The McGovern-Dole health-related activities had limited measurements of results.** Both UNICEF and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) actively supported the construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructure, including kitchens, storerooms, latrines, water stations, and handwashing kits. However, the non-implementation of the baseline recommendations to create a complete inventory of schools' infrastructure limited the mid-term evaluation's ability to have a full picture of the infrastructure at McGovern-Dole-supported schools.

12. **There were no school feeding indicators to assess the other beneficial impacts obtained due to access to education.** The Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation noted that there was no follow-up done by WFP and the government to students who benefited from the school canteens even though it is conceivable that they are better prepared to continue to secondary school.

SUSTAINABILITY

13. **Evaluations highlighted some ways in which sustainability could be improved in school feeding in Congo:**

- a. Procure food locally;
- b. Use food from national and regional markets;
- c. Select schools in consultation with the Ministry of Education; and
- d. Encourage government investment in the programmes financially and politically.

14. **To improve the sustainability of the School Feeding programmes, it is crucial to be realistic.** The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation highlighted that programme design needs to be realistic in its expectations on:-

- a. community contributions,
- b. provision of cooks from the poorest communities for no remuneration considering people are looking for employment, and
- c. handover/transitions to a nationally owned school meals programme at the end of the programme, given

slowed progress in implementing capacity-building activities due to COVID-19.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

15. **Collaboration with the government and partnerships with NGOs brought a multidimensional approach and a wide range of skills** that helped WFP and the government to gain strong experience in school feeding, according to the Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation.

16. **The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation reported that the limited WFP involvement in coordinating nutrition, health, and gender activities to support the increased use of health and dietary practices led to insufficient coordination among partners.** This evaluation reported a lack of a coordinated approach to the development of nutrition messages with an emphasis on dietary diversification, including the pieces of training provided by UNESCO and UNICEF.

17. **The school feeding impact can be enhanced through the synergy of various players working on similar or complementary activities.** The Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation noted a lack of sufficient coordination among the UN agencies and other partners to have an effective multi-sector impact as envisaged by the National School Feeding Policy. In addition, there was a lack of framework for dialogue to promote synergy to achieve a common goal.

18. **Tight coordination with the relevant external actors providing complimentary activities is essential to the achievement of McGovern-Dole SO1 and to ensure efficient and effective monitoring of indicators, and avoid overlaps.** Upon examining the indicators in the PMP, the McGovern-Dole baseline evaluation noted that several fundamental activities were conducted through parallel activities by external contributors, particularly the World Bank and the Education Sector Support Project (PRAASED), hence the emphasis on strong collaboration and coordination.

19. The McGovern-Dole baseline highlighted that **the impact of increased use of health and dietary practices can only be achieved through harmonisation and coordination between partners and if all the McGovern-Dole-supported schools have benefited from nutrition education.** The McGovern-Dole baseline emphasised the importance of ensuring that by the end of the programme, all McGovern-Dole-supported schools have improved infrastructure for safe access to water and improved latrines, with an inventory of the infrastructure to monitor the improvements either due to assistance or from other partner interventions.

GENDER

20. **The disaggregation of data to monitor equal participation to ensure boys and girls equally benefit from the programme enables WFP to easily identify the unexpected programme effects on gender disparity and act accordingly**, according to the McGovern-Dole baseline. The Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation applauded the WFP school feeding programmes for their commendable efforts to ensure equality between girls and boys.

21. The Country Programme 200648 (2015–2017) evaluation found that **school feeding approaches focused more on the inclusion of women in decision-making positions in school canteen management committees than on gender transformative change**. The extent to which the nature of positions assumed by women in school feeding committees allows them to effectively influence decision-making needs to be assessed and analysed. The McGovern-Dole baseline evaluation found that the efforts to promote the inclusion of women in decision-making positions in school feeding committees in the WFP school feeding programmes through systematic sensitisation were not complemented by indicators to measure how much women were integrated. In addition, the McGovern-Dole monitoring, and evaluation (M&E) plan is expected to track indicators of equal participation, while indicators of empowerment and decision-making that relate to the WFP Gender Policy objectives were not mainstreamed into the McGovern-Dole programme.

22. **Valuing and remunerating women's contributions:** The McGovern-Dole baseline and mid-term evaluation raised concerns about the lack of remuneration and the high workload of predominantly female cooks. It was also reported that school feeding committees expressed concern that WFP Congo does not compensate women who prepare food at assisted schools, either in cash or in kind. The McGovern-Dole baseline evaluation also reported that mandating women to cook for free in school feeding programmes is counter to women's empowerment because it adds to their daily workload without benefit, diminishes the value of their extra effort, and undervalues the work they do in schools, communities, and households. The McGovern-Dole baseline and the mid-term evaluations highlighted that WFP's work on school feeding can help empower women and recognize their work in society through remuneration.

MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E)

23. **The McGovern-Dole programme design was fragmented into individual partner interventions with different logical frameworks and monitoring systems, instead of an integrated results framework and performance monitoring plan (PMP)**. The McGovern-Dole baseline evaluation found that programme partners had not

fully integrated PMP indicators for which they and WFP were accountable to ensure systematic monitoring. Each partner was expected to use their own corporate M&E system to monitor and report their activities. According to the McGovern-Dole baseline, a strong and harmonised M&E system is required to coordinate the diversity of McGovern-Dole activities and partners involved in the programme.

24. **A more specified approach to developing indicators is needed and beneficiaries and activities should be properly identified for the indicators to be properly used in M&E**. The McGovern-Dole baseline findings revealed that the lack of specific indicators was a direct consequence of the differences in interpretation of the McGovern-Dole theory among the implementing partners. The McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation reported that WFP did not sufficiently define key indicators to accurately report, the PMP indicators did not always match, and documents did not use the same reporting period (fiscal year versus calendar year).

NEGATIVE FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME RESULTS

- **Lack of funding resources** resulted in the withdrawal of WFP programmes from some departments. Budget constraints also led to the retargeting of departments based on the location of WFP warehouses instead of vulnerability, to save on transport costs. Furthermore, the lack of funding affected the implementation of the planned local purchases, fortification, and capacity building activities (Country Programme 200648 mid-term evaluation).
- **Poor commodity management** resulted in some schools not always receiving their intended food allocation (McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation).
- **Logistical challenges** due to the difficulties in sourcing companies with small vehicles resulted in late distributions of food to schools due to the bad road access to the most remote areas (McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation).
- **COVID-19 pandemic** led to the closure of schools for two months in 2020 and affected the distribution of the planned food volumes to schools. The suspension of most capacity building activities also slowed the progress of WFP's efforts towards sustainability (McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation).
- **Lack of coordination among partners** affected the effectiveness of literacy, nutrition and health activities (McGovern-Dole mid-term evaluation).

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS ON SCHOOL FEEDING

Recommendations on government ownership

1. Continue advocating for the government's political and financial commitments to and involvement in school feeding to promote its sustainability (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).
2. Use evidence, results of school feeding and good practices and the economic opportunities of the McGovern-Dole programme as a basis for advocacy (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).

Recommendations on programme design

3. Develop an action plan for the McGovern-Dole programme to contribute to improving the quality of literacy education (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).
4. Work closely with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to determine the best way to support the transition of the McGovern-Dole programme to the government-preferred model (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).
5. Intensify the linkages between local production and school canteens to promote community ownership of the school feeding programme and strengthen the economic and development potential of the country (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).

Recommendations on partnerships

6. Strengthen partnerships and foster synergies on school feeding to optimize skills and provide holistic support to the implementation of the National School Feeding Policy in a coordinated and complimentary manner (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).
7. Enhance coordination with partners and stakeholders in the education sector to promote a common understanding of the McGovern-Dole programme objectives and outcomes (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).
8. Ensure tight collaboration between the McGovern-Dole and the PRAASED World Bank programme to enhance complementarities and avoid overlaps (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).

Recommendations on Monitoring and Evaluation

9. Develop specific indicators that monitor the extent to which the programme promotes participation of women in school feeding committee decision-making positions and measure women's empowerment and protection issues (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).

10. Develop impact indicators to enable WFP and its partners to have a concrete vision of the benefits of school feeding on education over the medium and long term (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).
11. Adopt indicators such as quality of education, academic success etc, to provide a broader picture of access to education (*Country Programme 200648, 2015-2017 mid-term evaluation*).
12. Modify indicators through further disaggregation or redefinition to better match the activity they intend to measure (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).
13. Work with schools, implementing partners, and USDA through the Foreign Assistance Service to clearly define standards for monitoring the McGovern-Dole programme so that implementation progress can be better established, and the effectiveness of the programme better evaluated (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).
14. Develop a complete infrastructure inventory of all McGovern-Dole assisted schools before the end of the programme to enable realistic planning for the infrastructure components required for a healthy school environment (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).

Recommendations on Nutrition

15. Develop clear guidance on the curriculum for promoting dietary diversity. This includes defining the concept of food groups as an indicator of dietary adequacy and establishing a working group that will put dietary diversity at the centre of its discussions (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).
16. Apply the Congolese Food-Based Dietary Guidelines to prevent inconsistencies in the use of food groups and promote a unified measurement of activities and indicators linked to nutrition (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).
17. Harmonize key messages on improved use of health and diet diversity practices among implementing partners for use in schools, health centres and agriculture extension (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 Baseline*).

Recommendations on Gender

18. Place more emphasis on women's empowerment and gender sensitization (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).
19. Ensure that gender transformative approaches are an integral part of the primary school curriculum using the module developed by the Ministry of Women (*McGovern-Dole 2018-2022 mid-term evaluation*).

ACRONYMS

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
CO	Country Office
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PMP	Performance monitoring plan
RBJ	Regional Bureau Johannesburg
SO	Strategic Objective
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	World Food Programme

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Summary Produced by: Lindiwe Kwidini and Tania Mazonde (Regional Bureau for Southern Africa RBJ Evaluation Unit)