



World Food Programme

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Summary of Evaluation Evidence on School Feeding Programmes (2018-2023)

Prepared by CLEAR - Anglophone Africa for WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa

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Foreword

The profound changes besieging education due to post-pandemic recovery, climate change, and conflicts will leave indelible marks on the life-course of currently schooling population and future generations. Together with governments, civil society, and communities, the World Food Programme (WFP) has incessantly championed and will continue to advocate for school feeding for all, thus envisioning a dynamic Southern Africa region where all children go to school with no fear of hunger but with prospects to thrive in their developmental growth and learning trajectories.

African governments have largely endorsed Home-Grown School Meals programmes as an important *“strategy to improve education, boost local economies and smallholder agriculture and advance the Sustainable Development Goals”* ([FAO and WFP, 2018](#)). The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Food and Nutrition Strategy (2015-2025) also highlights the promotion of school nutrition programmes in primary schools to enhance sustainable social protection. WFP is working with the governments in the Southern Africa region to ensure school meals programmes are scaled up to reach the most vulnerable children and achieve several benefits through multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper originates from the WFP (Evaluation) Evidence Symposium held in September 2023 in Lilongwe, Malawi, focusing on *“School meals dynamics - successes, lessons and opportunities to accelerate quality*



integrated school-based programmes in the Southern Africa WFP-supported countries”. WFP leadership salutes the high-octane commitment of colleagues and partners to evidence-informed programmes. It is only with evidence that governments and school feeding partners can implement cross-sectoral impactful school feeding interventions.

This paper on school feeding in Southern Africa takes stock of evidence, showcasing achievements and areas for improvement with the ambition to let the evidence light of the region shine and guide our school feeding programmes. WFP calls on the readers to be Evidence Champions, paving the way for the dissemination of what works and finding innovative solutions for what does not work in this transformational journey for school feeding.

Lola Castro, Acting Regional Director
WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa





Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

Investing in children's human capital development is undoubtedly one of the most fruitful and efficient investments that countries can undertake. Lack of investments in a well-nourished, healthy, and educated population hampers growth and economic development. Low-income countries in Africa account for 25 out of the 30 countries with the lowest ranking in the World Bank Human Capital Index and for many of them, underinvestment in human capital leads to a loss of economic potential in the long term.¹ In countries afflicted by food insecurity, starvation, and malnutrition, student enrolment, retention, and completion rates are significantly diminished.² Under these conditions, countries that do not allocate resources towards developing their human capital are constrained in their ability to compete in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Countries should, therefore, prioritise the health and nourishment of school-age children, as this facilitates enhanced learning, enables them to reach their full potential as adults and ensures the development of human capital and well-being. In the same vein, while investing in the human capital development of children in the first 8000 days, school-based programmes can bring about economic benefits in poorer communities by reducing poverty and boosting income for households and communities.³

WFP collaborates with governments and other partners in the Southern Africa region and globally to scale up school feeding programmes (SFPs), supporting the most vulnerable children.⁴ Its multifaceted support ensures that school meals contribute to learning outcomes, health, nutrition, and local socio-economic development. Over the years, SFPs have become tools for achieving the SDGs of universal primary education, hunger reduction, gender equality, and poverty reduction.⁵ Thus, with sufficient financing and collaboration with Southern African governments, WFP strives to work with partners to establish and strengthen SFPs.

1.2 CONTEXT OF SUMMARY OF EVALUATION EVIDENCE (SEE)

WFP has identified the relationship between health and education as a key enabler to guarantee sustainable development globally, particularly in low-income countries. Four WFP policies, namely the School Feeding Policy (2009), the Gender Policy (2009), the Humanitarian Protection Policy (2012), and the Nutrition Policy (2012), were put in place to guide the comprehensive implementation of the SFPs in low-income countries, including the Southern African region.

1. WFP. (2020). A chance for every schoolchild: Partnering to scale up School Health and Nutrition for Human Capital. WFP School Feeding Strategy, 2020 - 2030

2. SADC (2021). Regional school nutrition guidelines for SADC Member States

3. Bundy, D.A.P.; de Silva, N.; Horton, S.; Jamison, D.T.; Patton, G.C. (2018). Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies. Washington, DC: World Bank

4. African Union Biennial Report on Home-Grown School Feeding (2019-2020)

5. School Meals Programmes have the potential to contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 2 (on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture) and SDG 4 (on quality education); SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); SDG 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all); SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries). WFP. 2023. School Based Programmes Investing in Children and Communities through School Health and Nutrition. Executive Brief. Available at: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000146368/download/>

SFPs, designed to reduce hunger and nutrient deficiencies, are also expected to improve class attendance, performance, and cognitive vigilance among children in poor communities. They play an important role in improving nutrition among children while serving as a social safety net for children who are most vulnerable to malnutrition.

There have been strides in rolling out SFPs in the Southern Africa region over the years, with 1.7 million children directly receiving school meals from WFP.⁶ While some SADC countries have established or had programmes in the past, the models of implementation and array of interventions offered may differ significantly. Despite these variations, the overarching aim remains consistent: to enhance student learning and educational outcomes.⁷ In recent times, there has been a move from only prioritising improving academic performance but also increasingly extending the scope of SFPs to encompass broader multi-sectoral benefits, including agriculture, health, nutrition, and social protection. As time goes on, it will be even more important to emulate the experiences of Latin American countries, where some SFPs are embedded into national social protection systems and are essential components of national food and nutrition security policies.⁸

The general success of SFPs is premised on the acceptance by most governments that they are a form of investment, particularly in human capital development and the development of local economies. Since low-income countries are prone to hunger and high food insecurity, the SFPs are directly responsive to the persistent hunger recognised as an obstacle to school enrolment and class attendance, which can have long-lasting effects on the development of human capital.

Thus, it is essential to take stock of the evidence on what works and does not work regarding the importance of SFPs in enhancing educational, health, and nutrition outcomes and local economic sustainability in the Southern Africa region.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SEE



The aim of this SEE was to explore the pivotal role of school meals in fostering health and nutrition, enhancing learning outcomes, and contributing to the creation, strengthening, and sustainability of local markets.

The objectives of the SEE were to:

- i. Uncover what works, where, how, for whom and under what conditions.
- ii. Identify what does not work, where, how, for whom and under what conditions.
- iii. Identify and discuss promising practices and challenges, including evidence gaps for school meal interventions.



6. State of the World's School Feeding, 2022

7. SADC (2021). Regional school nutrition guidelines for SADC Member States

8. Colón-Ramos U, Monge-Rojas R, Weil JG, et al. (2022). Lessons Learned for Emergency Feeding During Modifications to 11 School Feeding Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*. 43(1):84-103. doi:10.1177/03795721211062371

2 Methodological approach of the SEE



A total of 50 evaluation reports were provided for consideration and possible inclusion in the summary.

The evaluations included Country Strategic Plan Evaluations, Policy Evaluations, Strategy Evaluations, Decentralized Evaluations of school feeding and relevant components completed between 2018 and 2023, mostly focusing on School Feeding Programmes and other WFP relevant activities.

The selected reports also had to provide evidence on the contribution of school feeding to several variables, including the following: school enrollment; class attentiveness; school attendance; grade completion; literacy; numeracy; nutritional diversity; short-term hunger; micro-nutrients; stunting; psycho-social outcomes; gender equity; job creation; livelihoods and several other health, nutrition, and socio-economic outcomes.

The geographic focus of the SEE is Southern Africa. This summary applied the approach and methods set out in WFP's technical note on Summaries of Evaluation Evidence. From 50 WFP evaluation reports, 15 independent evaluations and 1 synthesis⁹ from or covering one or more countries in Southern Africa were selected and included in the final body of evidence used in the SEE (Appendix 1).



Summary Objectives

After careful screening only the evaluation reports which directly or partially addressed the objectives of this summary of evaluative evidence were included.



WFP independent evaluations

15 evaluations plus 1 Synthesis which included evidence on school feeding and relevant development outcomes.

A team of independent experts systematically extracted evidence from the evaluations using thematic analysis and an analytical framework reflecting key areas of interest identified at the framing stage. The experts further analysed and clustered evidence to surface patterns and key trends, and produced this SEE report on what works, or does not work, for whom, where, and under what conditions in SFPs.

9. DR Congo; Eswatini NSFP; Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SP4SDG; Namibia NSFP; Republic of Congo 1 MGD 2018-2022; Regional MDA Evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe; Zambia HGSF; Zambia MTE

3 What is working?

This section reviews findings and lessons learned from the evaluative evidence to examine the role school SFP play in ensuring better learning and educational outcomes, promoting health and nutrition, and contributing to sustainable local markets.

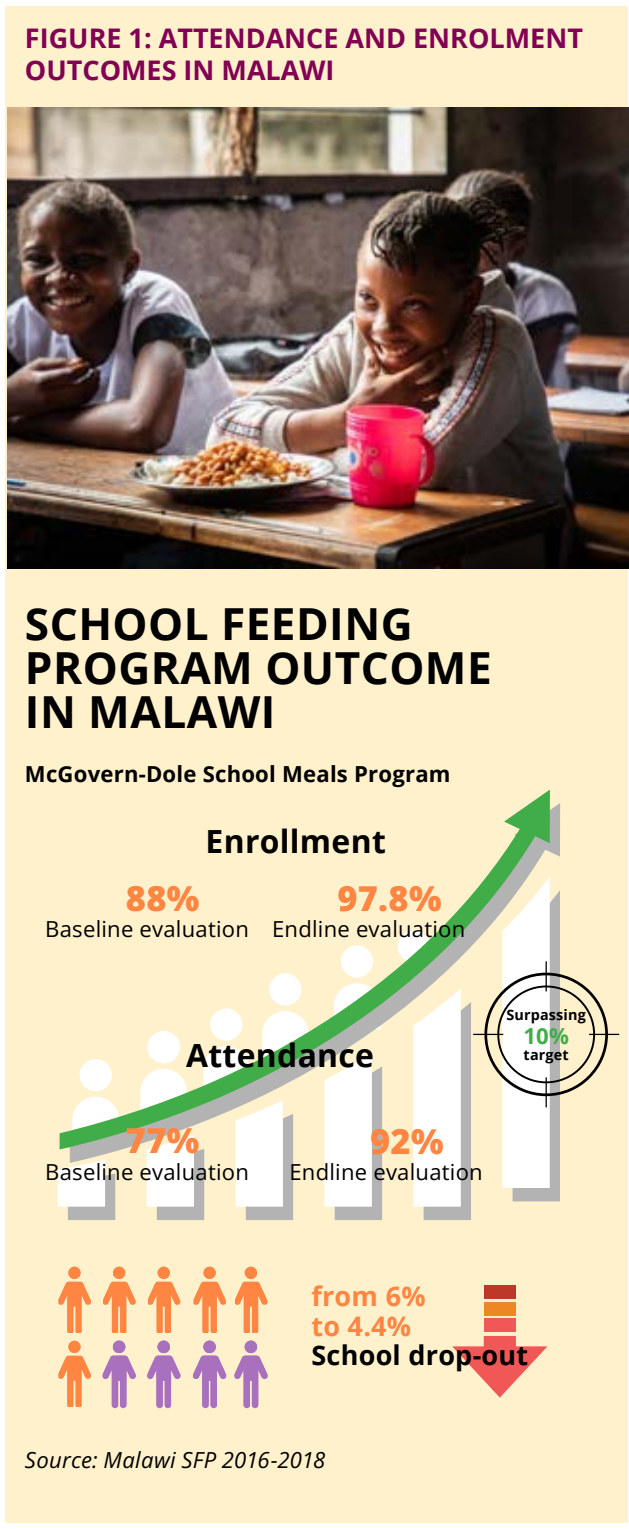
The specific source(s) of evaluative evidence are referred to in footnotes throughout the text, and the detailed record is provided in the Annex 1.

Question 1: What works, in terms of how school meals improve learning outcomes, promote health and nutrition, and contribute to sustainable local markets?

3.1 SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES AND ENHANCED LEARNING OUTCOMES

School SFP are positively associated with increased enrolment and attendance rates.

- a. SFPs are widely accepted as incentives for impoverished parents to enrol their children in school and ensure regular attendance. Ten¹⁰ out of the sixteen evaluations reported on the increased enrolment in schools where meals were provided to learners.¹¹ In three¹² evaluation reports, it was noted that school meals made a positive contribution to school attendance.
- b. School Feeding in Emergencies (SFIE) have also demonstrated a positive effect on enrolment and attendance.¹³ Evidence shows that school feeding has more particularly positive contributions to school enrolment and learner attendance in the Southern African region.¹⁴ An example is illustrated in Figure 1.



10. Eswatini; Lesotho; Malawi SP4SDG; Malawi JPGE1; Malawi SFP 2013-2015; Malawi SFP 2016-2018; Namibia; Republic of Congo MGD; DR Congo SF-E; Synthesis: DR Congo, Lebanon, Niger & Syria; Zambia MTE
 11. Malawi JPGE1; DR Congo SF-E; Synthesis: DR Congo, Lebanon, Niger & Syria;
 12. Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SP4SDG; Malawi JPGE1
 13. Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria
 14. Malawi SP4SDG; Namibia NSFP; Malawi JPGE1; Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SFP 2016-2018; Zambia MTE



- c. In Malawi, SFPs reportedly reduced absenteeism by 5 percent.¹⁵ Ultimately, providing school meals did not significantly increase grade completion rates.
- d. Gender differences in school attendance were explored, and it was found that factors like gender roles, responsibilities, and customary laws influence school attendance, especially for girls.¹⁶ The Zambia Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) evaluation found that these factors contributed to the relatively low school attendance for adolescents, especially girls.¹⁷
- e. Evaluation evidence shows a variety of outcomes in relation to the promotion and dropout rates between girls and boys. In some cases, girls have higher promotion¹⁸ rates than boys. In Lesotho, girls showed higher dropout rates than boys (to seek employment or to provide household support).¹⁹
- f. In other instances, there are no significant statistical differences between genders.²⁰ The following direct quote from DRC shows that the evidence is inconclusive: *“There was almost unanimous consensus that school feeding had strong positive effects on enrolment, dropout rates and school attendance. Roughly half of respondents considered that these positive effects were the same for girls as for boys, and one third believed that they were stronger for girls.”*²¹

In some circumstances, school meals are used as an incentive to enrol underage children, particularly in locations with a scarcity of Early Child Development (ECD) Centres. In Malawi

in particular,²² the provision of school meals has witnessed a growing pattern of under-age enrolment due to inadequate ECD Centres.²³ While not intended to increase enrolments, evidence shows that sometimes school meals have had the effect of drawing learners from neighbouring schools. In the case of Namibia, some schools were reportedly serving food to more learners than officially registered, for instance learners in the ECD centres within or next to the school compounds.²⁴

Provision of school meals contribute marginally to learner attentiveness. Three evaluation reports indicate a positive relationship between school feeding and an increase in class attentiveness, yet only marginally.²⁵ For instance, in Malawi, at baseline, teachers reported that 82 percent of children were attentive, and by endline a small improvement to 83.9 percent was found, and the target of 97% was not achieved.²⁶

SFPs contributed to improved literacy (and in some cases numeracy).²⁷ Three of the evaluations refer to the relationship between SFP and literacy, with scant mention of the effect on numeracy.²⁸ There is evidence that school feeding has a positive impact on literacy rates, which could be related to school meals’ potential to improve enrolment and attendance.²⁹

15. Malawi SFP 2016-2018

16. DR Congo SF-E; Zambia MTE; Eswatini NSFP

17. Zambia HGSF

18. Namibia NSFP; Lesotho NSFP

19. Lesotho NSFP

20. Malawi JPGE2; Malawi SFP 2013-2015

21. DR Congo SF-E

22. Malawi SMP 2016-2018

23. At the Symposium held in Malawi, one participant from the DRC, mentioned that school age children take their younger siblings to school, so that they can at least have a meal. While this was not the case in the evaluations which were reviewed, it demonstrates the extent to which SMPs are contributing at local level to alleviating hunger.

24. Namibia NSFP

25. Republic of Congo MDG 2018-2022; Malawi SMP 2016-2018; Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria

26. Malawi SMP 2013-2015

27. Malawi SMP 2016-2018; Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022

28. Malawi SMP 2013-2015; Malawi SMP 2016-2018; Republic of Congo MDG 2018-2022

29. Malawi 2016-2018; Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022

Evidence shows that academic performance relies on complementary factors beyond SFPs. It is important to note that supplementary activities, in addition to school meals, have been crucial in raising literacy rates, such as the capacity building of “book captains”.³⁰ Notable among these is the quality and performance of teaching staff and a conducive schooling environment.



Some evidence shows that HGSP can lead to the development of agricultural value chains. Seven evaluation reports revealed that communities in areas where the WFP implements its programmes benefit in several ways by being part of the value chain.³³ Evidence from a report on four countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), local procurement of SFIE commodities has contributed positively to the local economies.³⁴ Box 1 below summarises some of the benefits to local economies articulated in the evaluation synthesis.

Box 1: Local purchasing for SFIE and its benefits to local economies

In summary, local purchasing by WFP for SFIE has led to the following outcomes for DRC:

- › during the pilot phase of the HGSP from 2017 to 2019, WFP purchased a total of 2,600 metric tonnes (MT) of commodities from four different farmer organisations which resulted in smallholder farmers and their communities’ receiving payments and salaries.

Source: WFP (2022)³⁵

3.2 SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL MARKETS

One of WFP’s five goals for SFPs is to foster connections between school SFPs and local agricultural production. This benefits not only the children receiving the meals, but also the growth of local markets, the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, traders, caterers, and local food processing industries.³¹ Referred to as home-grown school feeding (HGSP), these initiatives aim to improve the nutrition status of schoolchildren while simultaneously boosting local economies.³² Evidence on the ways in which HGSP contributes to sustainability of local markets is provided below.



30. Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria; Malawi JPGE1

31. World Food Programme. (2013). School Feeding Policy Promoting innovation to achieve national ownership.

32. World Food Programme. (2013). School Feeding Policy Promoting innovation to achieve national ownership.

33. Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SP4SDG; Malawi JPGE1; Malawi SMP 2016-2018; Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria; Tanzania CSPE; Zambia HGSP

34. Synthesis: Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria

35. Synthesis: Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria

The use of local businesses and banks in cash distribution provides employment opportunities to various actors in the supply chain.

For example, in the case of Zambia, one of the SFiE programmes has transitioned into HGSF thus stimulating local economic activity and agricultural production, by providing predictable demand and markets for agricultural produce for households that often face constraints in accessing markets.³⁶ This has been achieved through the WFP's Purchase for Progress (P4P) platform, which supports the procurement of commodities that make up the school meals. In so doing, P4P promotes the development of agricultural markets for farmers to sell food surpluses at a fair price and increase their incomes. Farmers were provided with e-vouchers to purchase bicycles to facilitate movement and to purchase conservation agriculture inputs, equipment, and mechanisation services.³⁷

The re-launch of purchasing locally, as a strategy in Lesotho's National School Feeding Programme has resulted in increased local procurement of produce, for example, through the procurement of beans from local suppliers and nationally produced maize meal from Lesotho Mills.³⁸ The same programme encouraged the local purchase of perishable goods through contracts with national and district suppliers, such as 28,000 eggs and 2.5 MT of vegetables per week.

There is traction in market development activities because of SFP, but success varies from context to context, and there is no conclusive evidence of this occurring at significant scale. Three evaluations provide evidence of what is working well in this regard.³⁹

The Thematic Evaluation of WFP's Contribution to Market Development and Food Systems in Southern Africa, across six countries (Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe) found that market development activities (MDA)⁴⁰ managed to improve the assortment and quality of food produced for the SFP.

In Malawi most local farmers appreciated the support of WFP in terms of linking them to the HGSF initiative. The farmers indicated that they were able to access the WFP guaranteed market and acquired skills which enabled them to produce quality products. While WFP supports retailers financially, this also generates a market with demand and competition which subsequently stimulates retailer growth.

In the same multi-country evaluation, evidence shows that, the link between increased growth in business and performance and WFP support was perceived by retailers in Lesotho and Zimbabwe to be direct. In Mozambique, on the other hand, most retailers reported the link to be indirect.



36. Zambia HGSF

37. Zambia HGSF

38. Based on the performance in the first phase, local procurement was then projected to support 1,500 farmers, at least 30 percent of them women, and support 9 farmers' associations (3,000 farmers) in the next phase.

39. Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe; Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria; Tanzania CSPE

40. WFP headquarters defines an MDA as any activity that could improve the availability, assortment and the quality of services offered by the retailers. It has a link to supply chain activities that in turn impact the local retail markets.

Box 2: Advantages of relying on local producers⁴¹

- › Shorter delivery time and contribution to local economy.
- › Easier quality assurance of food safety processes.
- › Ability to change specifications (e.g., change in thickness of boxes for better storage).
- › Greater flexibility in responding to shifting needs (e.g., when additional beneficiaries were added in the middle of the year).
- › Improved cost-efficiency: local procurement and Food Supply Agreements (FSAs) allowed for a 15 percent drop in the price of locally procured date bars.
- › Greater sustainability through training and technical assistance provided to local suppliers.



School Feeding Programmes (in particular Home-Grown School Feeding) contribute to job creation. Four evaluation reports show that SFPs lead to creation of employment for local communities. The forms of employment include long term and short-term jobs such as caterers.⁴⁴

In Lesotho, the evaluation of three modes of delivery indicated that the school meals programme resulted in direct employment of cooks and caterers.⁴⁵

School Feeding Programmes increase household capacity to cope. Evidence has shown that by transferring resources through HGFS, families can cope with income shortfalls. The MDA⁴⁶ evaluation findings showed that by transferring resources to households, SF can make modest contributions to the capacity of families to cope with income shortfalls. SFIE interventions can help reduce incidents of child labour, especially when WFP uses cash-based transfers to support students. The synthesis report on SFIE which focused on four countries including Democratic Republic of Congo found that as cases of child labour remained prominent.

SFPs have led to empowerment of women.

- a. SFPs are perceived to have led to the empowerment of women and seven evaluation reports showed stakeholders reported a positive link between SFPs and women's empowerment.⁴²
- b. The evaluation of the McGovern-Dole project in the Republic of Congo reveals a significant increase in women's representation in leadership roles. The appointment of more female presidents to school feeding committees has exceeded the project's initial goal. However, enduring obstacles such as insufficient training and inadequate compensation or non-remuneration remained.⁴³

41. Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria

42. Zambia CSPE; Tanzania CSPE; Malawi FFA; Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022; Malawi JPGE1; Malawi SMP2013-2015; Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe;

43. Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022

44. Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe; Lesotho NSFP, Namibia NSFP, Zambia CSPE

45. Lesotho NSFP

46. Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe



3.3 FOSTERING HEALTH AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES THROUGH SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES

Evaluations have shown benefits of school feeding on health and nutrition in several ways, namely, (i) solving short-term hunger (some children eat their first meal of the day at school); (ii) dietary diversity because of the inclusion of locally grown diverse food; (iii) positive effects on health and hygiene knowledge; and (iv) positive effects on children's physical health and reduced incidence of diseases, partly attributable to the fortification of school meals with micronutrients.

SFP is widely acknowledged as crucial in reducing short-term hunger among students.

Three evaluation reports demonstrated that school feeding is largely accepted as key in reducing short-term hunger and stimulating learner attentiveness in class. However, there are key issues raised in the evaluation evidence around the sufficiency of nutritional content and delivery of school meals.⁴⁷

SFPs have led to marginal improvements in the promotion of useful methods of food

storage. The end-line evaluation for Namibia highlighted that there was slight improvement in food preparation and storage as compared to baseline. There was relative change in knowledge: at baseline, 20% of the cooks passed the food preparation and storage test while, at end-line there was an increase of 2 percentage points (to 22%).⁴⁸ A report on the Democratic Republic of Congo reported that WFP's collaboration with key partners led to improved conditions of kitchen and food storage facilities as compared to baseline.⁴⁹

SFPs play a role in supporting governments' social protection programmes, particularly as additional support measures to address extreme hunger and food insecurity. SFPs play an important role as a supplementary measure in supporting governments' local social protection programmes. This was more prominently identified during the Covid-19 pandemic but may continue to provide additional support for addressing extreme hunger and food insecurity. This was seen, for example, in the improvement of dietary diversity among economically disadvantaged students in the Republic of Congo.

47. Malawi SMP2016-2018; Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022; Zambia HGSP

48. Namibia NSFP

49. DR Congo SF-E

4 What is not working?

This section addresses the following question:

Question 2: What is not working in terms of how school feeding programmes promote health and nutrition, improve learning results, and contribute to sustainable local market development?

In answering the above question, this section highlights the areas that can be considered as not working according to the evaluation evidence.



4.1 CHALLENGES IN EVALUATING THE COMPREHENSIVE IMPACT OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.

Challenges in evaluation design and data quality limit the ability to measure the relationship between SFPs and educational outcomes. In the reports assessed, the statistical significance of SFP influencing increases in enrolment rates is not evident.⁵⁰ Challenges related to data quality have further complicated the assessment of the impact of school meals on enrolment and attendance.⁵¹ This is particularly evident in Eswatini, where the absence of specific targets for enrolment and attendance has led to inconclusive findings regarding the influence of school meals on these aspects.⁵² The Eswatini report concludes that *"...in the absence of targets, the outcome indicators on increased enrolment and attendance do not allow for meaningful conclusion about changes and to specifically link these changes to school feeding"*.⁵³

Measuring attentiveness is challenging, and targets may be unrealistic as demonstrated in four reports. For example, in Malawi, it was noted that attributing inattention solely to hunger is complicated by various factors such as boredom, lack of teaching materials, and high student-to-teacher ratios.⁵⁴



50. Malawi SMP 2016-2018

51. Eswatini NSFP

52. Eswatini NSFP

53. Eswatini NSFP. P2

54. Malawi SMP 2016-2018



4.2 SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES AND ITS CHALLENGES IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL MARKET DEVELOPMENT

There is evidence pointing to implementation challenges in scaling up local purchases and the importance of context to the success of HGSF approaches. Three evaluation reports discussed challenges in scaling up local purchases.⁵⁵ During the implementation of the programme in Lesotho, there was a challenge related to the static payment by government which led to a 40% decline in relative value. This lowered the chance for chefs and caterers to invest in assets or small businesses, raised the danger of debt that community members incur while participating in the SFP, and limited their capacity to buy food from local producers.

- a. In the same evaluation in Lesotho, challenges were observed in establishing local purchase agreements in some districts possibly due to being early-stage pilots that covered limited community councils.
- b. There is little evidence that local purchases for school feeding had a significant impact on the livelihood opportunities and incomes of men and women food producers in rural areas.

- c. The reports reviewed show that SFPs largely take on hybrid models that integrate traditional and HGSF approaches. Proving differences in models is often challenging due to interventions transitioning from traditional to small testing of HGSF approaches over the implementation periods.⁵⁶ In Southern Africa,⁵⁷ HGSF programmes are supported by government policies which recognise benefits of school feeding beyond academic performance. Three⁵⁸ of the reports reviewed show that HGSF was being implemented at smaller scales through pilots geared towards generating lessons for upscaling.

Emerging evidence shows that participation in different WFP programs is not going far enough to ensure gender equality and transformation.

- a. Evidence from three evaluations show that transformation is not being achieved at the scale and pace required to achieve gender equity through SFPs, especially HGSF initiatives.⁵⁹ In some cases, women have less control over assets than men due to cultural factors. Asymmetries of power between male and female farmers in dual households also leaves women with relatively limited decision-making ability. This limits their control over agricultural assets, inputs, products, and capacity-building opportunities, resulting in low agricultural production. The evidence also shows that women's plots are often less productive than those operated by men, and that they have less access to credit than men.
- b. The Evaluation of the Country Strategic Plan in Tanzania identified gender-transformative actions for each programme area. However, the actions were not achieved due to lack of farmers' awareness on gender equality and lack of gender analysis/disaggregation considered during the design phase.⁶⁰

55. Lesotho NSFP; Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022; Namibia NSFP

56. Eswatini NSFP; Malawi SFP 2016-2018; Namibia NSFP; Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria

57. Eswatini NSFP; Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SFP 2016-2018; Namibia NSFP; Zambia HGSF

58. Eswatini NSFP; Malawi JPGE1; Namibia NSFP

59. Eswatini NSFP; Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania & Zimbabwe; Zambia HGSF

60. Tanzania CSPE



c. The evaluation of Eswatini revealed a lack of provisions for socio-economically disadvantaged populations who own enterprises and live with HIV/AIDS. There was no evidence pointing to deliberate efforts to mainstream gender or align roles and activities to uphold gender-based values.⁶¹

Transportation plays a crucial role in SFPs, facilitating food movement from the point of production to schools for meal preparation.

WFP outsources most of its transportation of food commodities to private companies. However, few companies can supply vehicles for delivering small quantities (under 500 kg) to remote areas with poor road conditions as evidenced in Malawi and Democratic Republic of Congo, where reports show that roads have been deteriorating over the last years.⁶²

4.3 SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME'S SHORTCOMINGS IN FOSTERING HEALTH AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES

While evaluations revealed evidence of favourable health outcomes because of school meal programmes, **challenges in monitoring and under-reporting of SFP outcomes impair WFP's ability to identify its contribution to health outcomes and strengthening its own learning around what works, for whom, where, and under what conditions as it relates to SFPs.**

The reports reviewed show that SFPs largely take on hybrid models that integrate traditional and homegrown school feeding approaches, but no evaluation was conducted to determine their effects to outcomes and impact of interest.

The methodological challenges in measuring the benefits of SFP on children's nutrition are evident due to inadequate data tracking, as seen in Eswatini, and in a lack of formal connections between the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) and other social assistance programmes as evidenced in Namibia. In Eswatini, nutrition indicators were not systematically monitored, impeding accurate assessment. Similarly, the NSFP is primarily viewed as an educational programme in Namibia, making it difficult to gauge its broader impacts on health and livelihoods.⁶³

Quality of food and exposure to other sanitation risks at schools risked undermining the nutrition benefits of the feeding programmes.

Evidence shows that school meals face quality issues compromising their nutrition benefits.⁶⁴ In Lesotho, despite supporting a large percentage of primary and preschool children, food quality and sanitation risks at schools undermine the programme's effectiveness. Meanwhile, in Mozambique, inadequate procurement and funding result in insufficient meal sizes and irregular provision across schools.

61. Eswatini NSFP

62. DR Congo SF-E; Malawi SFP 2016-2018

63. Namibia NSFP; Eswatini NSFP

64. Lesotho NSFP

5 Lessons learned

Several lessons regarding the provision of meals and educational outcomes emerged from the evaluation evidence. These lessons include the following:

- The benefits of school meals on health, nutrition, and educational outcomes such as attendance, literacy, and numeracy, are indisputable. Benefits such as reducing short-term hunger, as well as positive effects on children's physical health and reduced incidence of diseases, such as attendance, literacy, and numeracy, are sufficiently robust to indicate that SFPs are critical to human capital development and well-being.
- To achieve positive learning outcomes, contextual and systemic variables that impact the SFP designs need to include a comprehensive and integrated package of interventions to maximise the achievement of results. The complexity of the challenge requires a multifaceted approach to designing and implementing SFPs so that contextual and systemic variables that impact educational outcomes are taken into consideration.
- Contextual considerations, such as country educational policies, must be examined before attributing increases in school enrolment to SFPs. In Malawi, the fee-free primary education policy introduced in 1994 contributed to increases in learner enrolment, not necessarily to the provision of school meals.⁶⁵ The same can be said about Eswatini and Lesotho, where an enabling policy through the provision of fee-free primary education has attracted increased enrolment rates.⁶⁶



65. Malawi SFP 2013-2015

66. Eswatini NSFP; Lesotho NSFP,

- › Despite the existence of an education policy as an enabler for attracting increased enrolment, systematic challenges such as the shortage of skilled teachers could have detrimental effects on the quality of teaching and learning. A variety of factors, key drivers and contextual enablers operate in tandem with School Meal Programmes in contributing to educational outcomes such as enrolment and attendance.⁶⁷ As enrolment certainly may be affected by other factors such as perceptions about education and socio-economic factors,⁶⁸ school meals provision is regarded as a contributory rather than a causal factor to enrolment.⁶⁹
- › More work is needed in facilitating equitable programme design and achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment in the implementation of SFPs and the achievement of outcomes. There is need to not perpetuate gender inequality with the reliance on women’s free labour as cooks. Although typically positioned as “community contribution” the vast majority of cooks are unpaid and women in the region.
- › Not enough is known about the benefits of HGSF approaches vis-a-vis the importation of food to territories for the implementation of SFPs, and there are contradicting experiences relating to the ability of HGSF initiatives to develop local value chains, sustainable local markets, and support sustainable livelihoods. For example, whereas in some cases, local farmers may have better access to the WFP-guaranteed market and acquire skills in so doing, generating market demand, competition and retailer growth, there are potential unintended negative changes in the marketplace competition that need to be considered when designing the school feeding intervention.
- › A coordinated approach is necessary to avoid negative impacts (such as the loss of production surplus). SFPs should, therefore, consider educating farmers about the various aspects of demand and supply and bring together different cooperatives/groups from various areas to plan and coordinate vegetable production appropriately. More nuanced evidence relating to specific aspects of market demand and supply is needed to identify the impact of HGSF approaches, and how to scale their impact.
- › One of the overarching lessons is the crucial need for comprehensive and empirical data to substantiate any claims or observations regarding the impact of school meals on nutrition outcomes. Current reports are somewhat limited and lack detailed evidence, making it imperative for future evaluations to include more rigorous evaluation designs and methods to enable WFP to identify its contribution to wider social and educational development outcomes.



67. Malawi SFP2016-2018

68. Lesotho NSFP; Malawi SP4SDG; Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria

69. Lesotho NSFP

Lessons Learnt

Provision of Meals and Learning Outcomes



1. Malawi SFP 2016-2018

2. Lesotho NSFP

3. Lesotho NSFP, Synthesis, Malawi SP4SDG



6 Conclusion

This SEE on several evaluations of School Feeding Programmes has demonstrated the role that school meals play in improving educational outcomes, fostering good health and nutrition, and supporting sustainable local markets. However, more evidence is needed to comprehensively answer questions around “where, how, for whom, and under what conditions” these play a role, especially when evaluation questions were not designed to answer as such.

There is evidence of the contribution of school feeding to improving educational outcomes such as enrolment, attendance, and attentiveness in schools. The evaluations have also provided insights into some of the challenges in measuring the influence of school feeding on positive outcomes, especially in areas around literacy. Collecting, analysing, and reporting on the effect of school feeding on the correlation between SFPs and educational outcomes such as literacy and numeracy is key. Furthermore, there are challenges in attributing student performance to

SFPs as there are several complementary factors that play a role in student performance such as teacher attendance and the quality and delivery of teaching and learning.

Although more evidence is needed to confirm the positive correlation between SFPs, job creation and local market development, there is some evidence that there are benefits that have accrued to local communities in this regard. The importance of SFPs in supporting livelihoods through the development of markets, smallholder farmers, traders, caterers, and local food processing industries cannot be underestimated. The non-remunerated, voluntary work of cooks especially women constitute a risk of WFP maintaining or exploiting existing gender inequalities. More evidence is also needed on the contribution of SFPs to encouraging the formalisation of smallholder farming, enhancing access to credit/loans and the effect of this in further contributing to the sustainability of local businesses.

Appendix 1

List of evaluation reports included in the Summary of Evaluation Evidence

N°	Title of the evaluation	Evaluation type	Year	Country (used as reference code)
1	Evaluation of National School Feeding Programme in Eswatini	Decentralised	2019	Eswatini NSFP
2	Evaluation of the National School Feeding Programme in Lesotho, in consultation with the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training 2007-2017	Decentralised	2018	Lesotho NSFP
3	Evaluation of the Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) in the Context of Malawi	Decentralised	2021	Malawi FFA
4	Final Evaluation of the SDG Joint Fund Project Social Protection for the Sustainable Development Goals in Malawi	Joint evaluation	2021	Malawi SP4SDG
5	Evaluation of the School Meals Programme in Malawi with financial support from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2016 to 2018	Decentralised	2019	Malawi SMP 2016-2018
6	Evaluation of the Joint Programme for Girls Education (JPGE) with financial support from the Norwegian Government (July 2014 – October 2017)	Decentralised	2019	Malawi JPGE1
7	Final Evaluation of the School Meals Programme in Malawi with support from United States Department of Agriculture, and the Governments of Brazil and the United Kingdom 2013 to 2015	Decentralised	2018	Malawi SMP 2013-2015
8	Evaluation of Namibia National School Feeding Programme	Decentralised	2020	Namibia NSFP
9	Mid-Term Evaluation of the WFP McGovern-Dole Funded School Feeding Project in the Republic of Congo 2018-2022a	Impact	2022	Republic of Congo MGD 2018-2022
10	Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria: DRC Report	Decentralised	2020	DRC SF-E
11	Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria	Decentralised	2020	Synthesis: DRC, Lebanon, Niger & Syria
12	WFP Contribution to Market Development and Food Systems in Southern Africa: A Thematic Decentralized Evaluation.	Decentralised	2021	Regional MDA evaluation: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe
13	Evaluation of Tanzania WFP Country Strategic Plan, 2017-2021	Joint evaluation	2022	Tanzania CSPE
14	Impact evaluation of the Home-Grown School Feeding and Conservation Agriculture Scale-up programmes in Zambia	Impact	2021	Zambia HGSF
15	Decentralized Evaluation Mid-Term Evaluation of Zambia Country Programme	Decentralized	2018	Zambia MTE
16	Evaluation of Zambia WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023	CSP Evaluation	2023	Zambia CSPE

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Photo page 9: WFP/Vincent Tremeau

Photo page 10: WFP/Vincent Tremeau

Photo page 11: WFP/Sitraka Niaina

Photo page 11: WFP/Deborah Nguyen

Photo page 12: WFP/Arlette Bashizi

Photo page 13: WFP/Barbara Mendes

Photo page 14: WFP/Gabriela Vivacqua

Photo page 15: WFP/Lena von Zabern

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