

# Evaluation of the Bhutan Country Programme

## WFP Assistance to Bhutan

**WFP began its assistance to Bhutan in the mid-1970s. The first 25 years of assistance focused on school feeding, maternal child health, and assistance to members of the national work force who build and maintain Bhutan's major roads. The first Country Programme (CP) was approved for a five year period, 2002–2007, and consists of three activities: improving rural children's access to schools (80 percent of planned resources); improving road workers' access to education and health resources (13 percent); and improving rural households' access to agricultural services (7 percent). The CP is valued at some US\$15.2 million and aims to provide 37,175 tons of food during the five-year period.**

## Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation took place in September–October 2005 and focused on output- and outcome-level results achieved by the CP to date. As a "first generation" CP, its general compliance with WFP's corporate CP approach was assessed, including its relevance to national priorities and those of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

The scope of the evaluation included an examination of coherence, relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the CP, with a particular emphasis on its major activity, school feeding.

## Key Findings and Conclusions

The CP is coherent with both the Royal Government of Bhutan's 9th Five Year Development Plan and the current UNDAF (2002–2007) for Bhutan.

### Activity 1: School Feeding

School feeding (SF) was found to be effective, contributing to the achievement of the joint WFP-Government objectives of improved school enrolment and attendance. Recent surveys show that where SF is provided, both enrolment and attendance have increased. Without SF, it could be expected that greater numbers of children would not attend school, particularly when boarding was required.

At the time of the evaluation, nearly 200 schools received food for day students for 225 days a year, and for boarders for 287 days a year. A total of 41,289 students received school meals in 2005 (out of a total student population in Classes PP-XII of 147,151 – i.e. 28 percent). The evaluation found the SF food basket to be nutritionally adequate and acceptable to

most school children. Over half of the day students' nutritional requirements, and 80 to 90 percent of boarders' nutritional requirements, were met by WFP food, at a cost of US\$0.12 to 0.15 per meal.

The evaluation noted several missed opportunities to link SF with both academic and practical learning at school. School staff, parents and students require information to appreciate the importance of diversifying their diet and consuming sufficient quantities of micronutrient-rich vegetables. School gardens varied considerably from one school to another, with only some providing a regular supply of nutritious vegetables.

Despite difficult access to many remote schools, monitoring of SF was commendable. A new school monitoring form was developed in mid-2004 to facilitate interviews and school inspections, and updated guidelines were distributed to partners at all levels for data collection. Monitoring analyses took place in 2004 and 2005, with the most recent exercise including 86 percent of all schools assisted.

Although non-food resources from other UN agencies and bilateral donors were substantial (including kitchen and store improvement and construction; the installation of girls' latrines, water sources, school gardens and fuel-efficient stoves; and dormitory construction), the evaluation observed a lack of proper maintenance of some buildings, fixtures and equipment.

### Activity 2: Assistance to Road Workers

From 1976 to mid-2004, the Government and WFP collaborated to improve the living conditions of the national highway road workers, known as the National Work Force (NWF). Collaboration took the form of providing subsidized food rations and creating a counterpart fund to be used for various welfare activities. As foreseen at the beginning of the CP, Activity 2 was phased out

in June 2004. However, the Country Office (CO) continues to monitor the use of the counterpart fund.

In close collaboration with relevant national authorities, the CO undertook a final evaluation of the activity in September 2004. Since Activity 2 had already ended at the time of the present evaluation, no specific assessment was made. During the evaluation, some beneficiaries were visited and meetings held with government counterparts, and subsequent findings noted. NWF salaries had not been increased to compensate for the loss of subsidized food rations. As a result, some workers may subsequently have difficulties obtaining basic food supplies at reasonable prices in towns near to their camps, although counterpart fund were used in part to subsidize the transport of food.

### Activity 3: Improving Access to Agricultural Services

After completing six farm roads through WFP support in 2004, the Government and WFP shifted resources to power tiller tracks and mule tracks to improve access to remote villages and farm lands. The government initiated a pilot project using Food For Work (FFW) to construct power tiller tracks in late 2004, and also began the construction of mule tracks in Mongar and Zhemgang districts. A pilot project for agricultural land rehabilitation was also initiated in Trashigang district.

FFW was found to be an appropriate approach for the upgrading of mule tracks, as village workers were willing to work for food during the farming off-season, and mule tracks lend themselves to the use of casual labour.

However, the evaluation found that some mule tracks visited did not follow recommended technical specifications. Further efforts were needed by the government to ensure that mule tracks have appropriate hillside water run-off ditches and transverse earth culverts to reduce erosion and lessen future maintenance work.

## Recommendations

### Activity 1:

The evaluation recommended that WFP Bhutan encourage a gradual increase in contributions to SF by the government and parents/communities, based upon an agreed-upon, step-by-step phase-out plan for WFP support to SF.

During the remainder of the CP, SF should focus increasingly on providing meals to school children from food-insecure, rural communities at the primary school level and gradually reduce support to SF at other levels. Regarding future interventions, the evaluation recommended a (possibly final) expansion of current support to SF under a single project approach. This could be achieved through:

- ▶ a simplified food basket at the start of the next phase in order to ease the assumption of responsibility for residual food provision by the national authorities in the medium term for primary school boarders;
- ▶ a gradual take-over by the government of part of the WFP simplified food basket;
- ▶ a gradual withdrawal from middle and higher secondary schools.

### Activity 2:

In order to ensure the well-being of the former beneficiaries of Activity 2, and in view of the considerable length of time that WFP assistance was provided to the NWF, WFP should undertake a CO-managed follow-up survey of the living conditions of the NWF workers and their families before the end of the current CP. The results should be shared with the government and concerned donors, for follow-up action, as needed. At the Executive Board discussions on the evaluation, it was suggested that an impact study of WFP's long-term assistance to the NWF should also be envisaged.

### Activity 3:

Technical guidance for mule track construction needs to be improved. Construction specifications should be written into a simple field manual for work gang supervisors. Efforts are also needed to ensure, to the extent possible, that mule tracks are constructed within the normal gradient guideline of 6–7 percent and should only rarely exceed the maximum of 10 percent (e.g. to avoid negative ecological impact).

**Reference: Full and summary reports of the Bhutan Country Programme evaluation are available at:**  
<http://www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation>

**For more information please contact the WFP Office of Evaluation at: [HQ.Evaluation@wfp.org](mailto:HQ.Evaluation@wfp.org)**