

# Thematic Evaluation of School Feeding in Emergencies

## About School Feeding in Emergencies

Recently, development organizations working with different mandates have joined efforts to promote quality education for those in situations of emergencies, chronic crisis and early reconstruction, under the umbrella term 'Education in Emergencies.'<sup>1</sup>

WFP's food support to education is part of this effort and encompasses various modalities, from the provision of a snack or a meal at school to take-home rations to encourage schooling, all falling under WFP's Food for Education (FFE), which WFP often refers to as 'school feeding.'<sup>2</sup>

## Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation aimed to draw lessons from WFP's experience in implementing school feeding in the various emergency contexts in which it operates, so as to improve future implementation. It also sought to identify aspects of school feeding in emergencies on which further guidance is needed and to inform an eventual policy paper on FFE.

Field studies, desk research and a survey questionnaire formed the basis of the evaluation. Being a thematic evaluation, its scope called for findings to be brought to a corporate level, which constitute the core findings and conclusions in this brief.

## Key Findings and Conclusions

### Objectives of school feeding

The objectives behind all FFE programmes are directed towards improving educational outcomes through improved access to education and by alleviating short-term hunger, which enables students to concentrate and learn better.

The evaluation highlighted that, in some contexts and particularly in protracted crises, educational and nutritional needs may be seen as equally critical. The rationale to consider educational needs as a relevant priority in emergency situations should then be made clear within WFP, even if the nutritional needs of the general population are largely unmet.

The evaluation noted an apparent disconnect between the objectives stated in project documents and those actually pursued on the ground. This could be the result of the fact that projects are seldom designed on the basis of a rigorous

assessment of local contexts and that educational indicators are rarely included in the needs assessment surveys. In addition, no priority is given to developing field staff technical expertise and programme design capacities.

### Measuring the effects of school feeding

In contexts where children may not eat before school, one of the widely acknowledged effects of a mid-morning snack or lunch is that children remain in school longer, rather than leaving to find food before the end of the school day.

The opportunity for school feeding to act as an incentive to attract children to school was seen to be limited in emergency contexts, where the lack of infrastructure or teachers and the existence of school fees are common impediments to schooling, which the provision of food is not able to address alone. In this light, the evaluation noted that the lack of analysis of the main barriers to education often led WFP to develop unsuitable strategies. Shortcomings in the design of some school feeding projects were seen a major factor limiting effectiveness: the analysis of context and needs should determine the choice of response (meal, snack, take-home ration) as well as other implementation considerations such as the timing of feeding or the selection of commodities.

School feeding should not be prioritized to address children's nutritional needs if it is being implemented in isolation from other nutritional or health related programmes. Moreover, WFP has to systematically demonstrate that even marginal improvements of food intake can effectively improve students' ability to learn.

The evaluation also identified a number of indirect effects of school feeding: increased community participation stimulated through the involvement of community members in managing the project; psycho-social benefits of socialization generated by the meal; and subsequent stabilization of the schools or of community environments.

<sup>1</sup> There is an understanding that this term is a shorthand that refers to a range of formal and non-formal education activities in acute emergencies (natural and man-made), chronic crises and early reconstruction contexts.

<sup>2</sup> This evaluation also uses the term "school feeding" in this wider sense, i.e. comprising all types of modalities (cooked meals, snacks or take-home rations).

### Strengths and challenges of each modality

A freshly cooked meal appeared the most appropriate modality to: significantly improve nutrition and alleviate micro-nutrient deficiencies; increase daily retention by addressing short-term hunger; and foster community participation and social cohesion around a shared meal. However, it requires heavy investments in infrastructure, as well as commitment by community and teachers, who prepare, manage and distribute the food. The evaluation noted that minimum conditions related to the introduction of school canteens – e.g. water, hygiene and sanitation at schools – are unevenly applied from one country to the next. It was critical of WFP for not supporting the gradual acquisition of necessary minimum infrastructure conditions in eligible communities. The evaluation also highlighted the risk of excluding the most vulnerable schools from assistance on the basis that they cannot comply with minimum standards or are located in least accessible areas.

A dry snack can contribute to alleviating short-term hunger, with minimal preparation time and infrastructure needed and thus allowing for timely distribution of food.

Take-home rations serve as an incentive for school enrolment and attendance. They require no preparation and can contribute to improved household food security.

### Complementary activities and partnerships

The evaluation highlighted the importance for school feeding projects to be developed within the wider education sector strategy and with educational or health-related inputs of all 'strategic partners.' The evaluation valued initiatives such as the joint WFP-UNICEF "Essential learning package" aiming to support education and nutrition, health and hygiene activities in complementary programming. At the same time, the evaluation was critical about the often low degree of collaboration between both agencies.

Because of the differing comparative advantages of partners, the choice of implementation mechanism is critical for each of WFP's ESF projects. A closer relationship with government partners increases the chances of future handover. Working with NGOs can allow complementary resources to be channelled into the project and reduce WFP's costs. The evaluation found that WFP's relations with its partners carries a potential that remains largely untapped, often due to WFP's apparent lack of trust in their capacities.

### Challenges to ESF implementation

Tight security conditions and time pressure often prevent staff from being able to collect sufficient quality data in the field, which is seen as a constraint to needs assessments and monitoring. The lack of educational indicators in the standard WFP assessment surveys also prevents the appropriate data to be generated for targeting criteria beyond purely nutritional considerations.

Targeting decisions also often fail to consider the logistical challenges and related costs of supplying the selected schools, which results in the exclusion of the most remote and vulnerable schools.

Other internal challenges include: limited technical guidance and support and appropriate capacity building; and limited decision-making at the field level with respect to project design. External constraints include low management and administrative capacity in government agencies and at school level, and low management capacity or absence of implementing partners.

Ultimately, there is no definitive line between school feeding as implemented in emergency or development contexts; both contexts may have many similar challenges. WFP should recognize that in addition to specific emergency-related challenges, constraints present in development situations will almost inevitably be exacerbated in emergencies.

## Main Recommendations

The evaluation formulated the following recommendations:

### Establish a process for context-specific ESF project design and implementation

- WFP should require a country-specific implementation plan to support ESF programming, whose objectives, activities and implementation options are based on the needs identified, including educational needs. The choice of implementation modalities, targeting criteria and minimum school standards should be determined in relation to the objectives and the context, and ensure that WFP can reach schools in the most food-insecure and vulnerable areas. Where minimum conditions for ESF do not exist, WFP should prioritize actions to ensure that infrastructure will be put in place.
- WFP should explore ways to improve ESF monitoring systems and to improve feedback from the field as a prerequisite for project adjustments and improvements.
- WFP should design training tools for ESF and place experts to improve the use of technical guidance in the design and implementation of ESF in the field.

### Maximize opportunities for strategic partnerships

- WFP should have a strategy to ensure that complementary activities are provided, considering in particular the potential of strategic partnerships, and appreciating the role of ESF in relation to other interventions in terms of educational objectives.

### Strengthen the nutrition-education link

- WFP should recognize the potential of the nutritional benefits of ESF and optimize it where severe food insecurity and malnutrition among school children hamper learning. The proposed food basket has to be sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure that ESF makes a meaningful contribution to children's nutritional requirements, especially if they are not addressed by any other support.

**Reference: Full and summary reports of the School Feeding in Emergencies evaluation are available at: [www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation](http://www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation)**

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