

Evaluation Brief



Gambia School Feeding Impact Evaluation

Context

In The Gambia, out of a total population of 1.7 million, 40 percent of the population is under 15. Approximately 63 percent of the rural and 57 percent of the urban population live in poverty¹ and many are leaving the rural areas to move to the cities. The agriculture sector, the prime sector of the economy, suffers a number of constraints to improve food security and reduce poverty. The 2008/9 food and fuel price and financial crises resulted in increases in cereal prices affecting both urban and rural areas.

In the Education Sector, major achievements were made over the past two decades through investments by the government, with donor support. These efforts have increased and stabilized gross and net enrolments and gender parity has been met. However, by 2008/09, a somewhat higher percentage of Gambians have no education (54 percent) compared to the average of all African countries (52 percent), and only 13 percent completed primary school, compared with 29 percent for Africa overall.

Gambia School Feeding (2001-2010)

During the review period, the school feeding programme aimed to reach on average 120,000 children per year and achieved around 113,000 children per year (93 percent) of which 50 percent were girls. These 113,000 children represent about 40 percent of all children enrolled in basic education schools in the Gambia. From 2001 through 2003, WFP provided meals in an average of 429 schools to students in Lower Basic Schools (grades 1-6) and in Basic Comprehensive Schools (grades 1-9) and, since 2004, madrassas and Early Childhood Development centres that met certain government standards have been added.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation is the third school feeding impact evaluation commissioned by the Office of Evaluation. It provides evidence of intended and unintended effects of the WFP school feeding programme in Gambia with a view to supporting programme design and informing school feeding policy.

It evaluates the outcomes and impact achieved on: (i) stated educational, gender and nutritional objectives; and (ii) objectives specified in WFP's new social safety net policy objectives. It identifies the status of and changes needed to contribute to Gambia's development objectives, which now, in education, are moving from increasing access to improving quality, and those of the current WFP Strategic Plan and 2009 School Feeding Policy.

The evaluation study used a mixed-methods approach, comparing participants in school feeding with non-school feeding groups. Data was gathered using questionnaires, key informant interviews, secondary materials, and qualitative interviews of various groups of community members using the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach.

The evaluation covered the period 2001-2010 and was carried out between April and December 2010 by a team of independent evaluators.

The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in June 2011.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Education

At national level, gross enrolment ratios (GER) stayed more or less constant over the last decade, declining marginally from 91 percent in 2003 to 88 percent in 2009 for grades 1-6 but different regions, of which 5 of a total of 6 were covered by school feeding, showed both increases and decreases over the period.² For net enrolment a longer trend analysis shows major improvements whereby it increased from 46 percent in 1991/92 to 94.9 percent in 2008/09, and gender parity was reached in 2004. Positive enrolment trends cannot be attributed solely to school feeding as a large number of other initiatives took place especially during the early part of the decade. The evaluation found large discrepancies between reported and observed attendance in both schools with and without school feeding and considered school-based data too unreliable to draw conclusions.

In 2009, Gambia's average completion rate is 7.6 years of schooling, compared with only 6.9 years for other low-income African countries. Almost 63 percent of students who enter grade 1 complete grade 6 but only 41 percent complete grade 9 (Basic Education). School feeding's contribution to improved learning could not be demonstrated, given the overall poor test results of students in the Gambian education system, which are attributed to factors other than school feeding.

Nutrition

There is clear evidence that the school meal contributes to students' minimum daily nutritional requirements when they are in school and are able to contribute (cash or in-kind), and there is some evidence from household respondents that students are more attentive and energetic because of the meal.

For the diet diversity measure, all students (both with and without school feeding) achieved a high average score of 6 out of a possible 12 food groups. However, the most vulnerable households' average score of 4.4 was significantly lower than the least vulnerable households (7.5). Two percent of school feeding students and 3 percent of non-school feeding students were having difficulty seeing at night, a measure of night blindness and a proxy indicator for Vitamin A deficiency. Greater numbers of students enrolled in schools with school feeding received deworming medication than did those without school meals (69 percent vs. 52 percent).

¹ Republic of The Gambia, 2010, Agriculture Sector Support Programme.

² Poor quality data collection, management and use at school level preclude drawing definitive conclusions on the impact of school feeding on enrolment, attendance and completion.

Value Transfer

WFP's School Feeding Policy recognizes the school meal as a value transfer to households, although this was not an expressed objective of the programme in the Gambia.

The value transfer represents an average 8.5 percent of food consumed per household per year. It increases to 12 percent for the most vulnerable households compared with 3 percent for the least vulnerable households. Average resource shortfalls and pipeline breaks reduce the value transfer to 9.6 percent for the most vulnerable and 2.4 percent for the least vulnerable households. The average education expenditure per annum for the most vulnerable households at D1,718 is almost the same as the value transfer for the school meal at D1,710 per household per year³. But 40 percent of households' most senior female respondents estimated that school feeding reduced the amount of food consumed, with the savings allowing some households to share food with more vulnerable ones or to save for the future.

Factors Influencing Results

The ability of school feeding to generate intended outcomes, and its impact, has been limited by a number of external factors. Most significant among these is the quality of education, which is seen both as the main draw for children to attend school but also one of the areas requiring improvement. The evaluation was not entirely conclusive on the extent to which poverty played an important role in the decision whether children attended school or not, although the percentage of out-of-school youth among the poorest quintile is highest. The extent to which food security, and with that safety net objectives, can be attained is affected by the fact that school holidays fall into the lean season when food insecurity is highest, meaning that children do not benefit from the school meal during the time when they and their families are most food insecure.

Among the factors that are within the control of the school feeding programme are recent allocations of funding and resources that provide the WFP Country Office (CO) with sufficient capacity: to update studies on food insecurity allowing for more precise geographical targeting; and, to develop the capacity of a range of actors in the school-feeding process and in using a more sophisticated monitoring system. WFP/CO has used its leadership of the Multi-Sector Working Group for the education sector to advocate for an increase in the number of actors contributing to various pieces of the Essential Package.

Conclusions

At national level, gross enrolment ratios stayed more or less constant between 2003 (91 percent) and 2009 (88 percent), but different regions with WFP-supported school feeding showed increasing and decreasing ratios. Net enrolment has improved overall, including for girls which reached parity in 2004. Positive enrolment trends cannot solely be attributed to school feeding as a large number of other initiatives took place, especially prior to 2004. School feeding's contribution to improved learning could not be demonstrated.

There is clear evidence that the school meal contributes to students' minimum daily nutritional requirements when they are in school and are able to contribute cash or in-kind. However, there is also substantial evidence to indicate that practices related to students' inability to make contributions and staff's meal consumption negatively influence participation in the school meal for some children.

The value transfer to households varies by level of household vulnerability and is influenced also by resource shortfalls and pipeline breaks. The value transfer through school meals is close to the households' cost of education. The value of the transfer is highest for those categorized as most vulnerable. Transition status standards are met to only a limited extent for a government run school feeding programme.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop, disseminate and implement a policy on children's contributions and the appropriateness and consequences of school staff eating from the school meal.

Recommendation 2: Develop a formal school feeding policy and strategy leading to eventual handover of the SFP to the Government, with specific dates, tasks and objectives.

Recommendation 3: Explore ways to transfer more authority to appropriate education units within the Ministry of Education.

Recommendation 4: Identify strategies for more precise targeting of the most vulnerable and most food-insecure. In addition to tighter geographic targeting based on food insecurity indicators consider other targeting options.

Recommendation 5: Advocate with NaNA and UNICEF and other agencies to collect data on children's anthropometric status, including Vitamin A deficiency and anaemia prevalence rates in school-aged children, to inform a possible revision of the school feeding ration composition.

Recommendation 6: Provide technical assistance and fund other appropriate activities to further develop the government's capacity in managing and implementing the ongoing school feeding programme.

Recommendation 7: WFP/CO should cooperate with and support the Early Childhood Development (ECD) unit in conducting a baseline study of ECD centres.

Recommendation 8: Report national assessment test results at the school level rather than at the student level and report school-level results to communities.

Recommendation 9: Test teachers on content knowledge appropriate for grade-level content and teaching skills needed to teach primary grade subjects.



Reference:

Full and summary reports of the Evaluation and the Management Response are available at:

<http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation>

For more information, please contact the WFP Office of Evaluation at:

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³average exchange rate in 2008 was \$1 = D22.4