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COUNTRY CASES

BANGLADESH 



**World Food
Programme**

Centre of Excellence
against Hunger

SCHOOL FEEDING IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is home to over 160 million people, seeking to reach the status of a middle-income country. Over the past few decades, Bangladesh has made progressive developments to improve its state of food security, with the prevalence of undernourishment declining from 32% in 1990 to 15% in 2014¹. However, despite significant gains in macroeconomic growth and human development, Bangladesh's Human Development Index (HDI) and general food and nutrition security status remain lower than average. Currently, around 40% of the country's population are considered poor.

Wasting rates in the country are currently at around 10% among children under five years. Similarly, about 27% of children under five years are underweight and 28% are stunted². The concerns about food security and nutrition in Bangladesh have become even more pressing, due to the effects of climate change³. About half of the country's population suffers from micronutrient deficiencies, especially of iron and zinc.

Food provision in schools in Bangladesh started in 2001, when the World Food Programme (WFP) partnered with the Government to launch a school feeding programme in the most vulnerable areas of the country. This programme had the short-term goal of improving child attendance and enrolment in classrooms through the distribution of micronutrient fortified biscuits to pre- and primary school children. The programme provides 75g

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packets of micronutrient fortified biscuits to targeted children for all 240 school days. The biscuits are produced locally in Bangladesh by independent and qualified manufacturers⁴.

In 2011, encouraged by the success of WFP's school feeding activities, the Government of Bangladesh launched their "School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas" project. This programme has scaled up rapidly, as WFP provides technical support and progressively hands over its areas of implementation to the Government. As of 2021, around 3 million children received School Feeding assistance across Bangladesh provided by both the Government and WFP.

Hot meals were initially piloted by WFP in 2013 and then transitioned to Government-led implementation in 2019. WFP introduced fortified rice in school meals, as the initiative has shown potential in reducing micronutrient deficiencies at scale.

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WFP Bangladesh has worked with the Government to formulate the first National School Meal Policy and will undertake critical action research initiatives.

BANGLADESH'S COOPERATION WITH THE WFP CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE AGAINST HUNGER BRAZIL, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE BRAZILIAN COOPERATION AGENCY (ABC) AND THE NATIONAL FUND FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION (FNDE)

In 2012, a delegation from Bangladesh made a high-level study visit to Brazil to learn about the country's experience in school feeding and its solid institutional framework for food and nutrition security. The visit was facilitated by the WFP Centre of Excellence in Brazil who was then engaged in the country's policy dialogues to strengthen school meal programmes.

Following this visit, the Centre of Excellence continued its support to the Bangladeshi Government and in July 2013 the Government initiated a school meals pilot jointly with WFP. The pilot linked school feeding to smallholder farming to assess the benefits, risks and challenges of adopting this modality on a national scale. The pilot started in one school in the district of Barguna, reaching 286 children. In the same year it was further expanded to reach 12,000 children in 63 schools. By July 2014, the pilot covered 18,000 children in 95 schools. According to monitoring visits by WFP, one of the results of the pilot has been an increase from 70% to 95% in student attendance in schools covered by the program.

With positive results in terms of attendance, a decrease in the dropout rate and improved school performance, the government decided to move forward with the creation of a national school meal policy.

As a result of the Brazil study visit, and with support from the WFP Country Office and the Centre of Excellence, the Ministry of Primary Education and the Bangladesh Government Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) launched a plan to review and restructure its school feeding programme on a national scale and to design alternative modalities for school feeding. The new programme would include the provision of hot meals using fortified rice and locally sourced products.





The Government began leading most of the school feeding, including ensuring its funding, while WFP continued assisting in conducting institutional reviews of the School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas. This is expected to increase access to resources and expand the delivery of the School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas to all school children in Bangladesh.

At the request of the Bangladeshi government and WFP, two technical missions by the WFP Centre of Excellence Brazil were organized in 2015, to support the preparation of a plan that could facilitate the development of the national school meal strategy, including opportunities and potential modalities. The technical experts from the Centre of Excellence visited local schools where the school meal is implemented, engaged with WFP staff and government officials in the field, and held meetings with the local community, members of the school management committees, children, school cooks and local vegetable producers for data collection.

The Government formed the Inter-Ministerial Committee in February 2016 to prepare a draft of the national school meal policy

outline and policy-preparation framework. Eight policy consultation workshops were conducted at divisional level to finalize the draft policy. In 2019, the Government of Bangladesh passed the National School Meal Policy. The policy was drafted with the active participation of government officials and technical teams from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, WFP and relevant ministries including Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council. The school meal policy aims to ensure that 30% of the minimum nutritional requirements of all primary school students in the country are met through the school feeding programme.

Once the policy is fully implemented, the state will provide each government pre- and primary school student across the country with one meal every school day. To meet the nutritional needs of children, the programme is eventually expected to serve cooked meals five days per week, along with micronutrient fortified biscuits once a week. The meals will contain at least four food groups out of the 10 food groups possible, to ensure dietary diversity.

WHY IS A SCHOOL FEEDING POLICY IMPORTANT?

A school feeding policy defines the goals of an intervention and provides guidance on how to achieve short-, mid-, and long-term objectives. A policy document – whether it is entitled a School Feeding Policy, a School Health and Nutrition Policy or a broader Food and Nutrition Security Policy – organizes the roles and responsibilities of school feeding actors at all levels. This document can also help to identify managing and funding structures of a school feeding programme, define rules for food purchase and promote linkages to other government agendas or sectoral policies.

Establishing policies and procedures for any programme of public interest, such as school feeding, is a way to ensure that these programmes have stability throughout different governments. The stronger the legal and institutional frameworks of a school feeding programme are, the harder it is for it to be discontinued. When school feeding programmes have an adequate policy structure and funding guaranteed by binding documents, they have a higher chance of remaining state, rather than party-specific, policies. Consistent policies also make it easier for newly elected governments to understand and implement the programme, including what is expected of them as national managers.

When policies and procedures for school feeding programmes are well established and consistently followed by all involved stakeholders (including governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and other local actors), the responsible agents can better avoid misconduct and other violations. School feeding policies can improve overall programme performance by keeping everyone “on the same page” when it comes to expectations and issues, as well as guarantee the longevity and continuity of the programme.



¹ Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP School-Feeding USDA Mc Govern Dole Grant for FY 2017-2020 in Bangladesh. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114779/download/?_ga=2.138576051.1443818602.1616506415-1043232169.1572994835

² Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019, BBS and UNICEF. Available at: https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2020-02-25-10-45-cd0b88df19645ebac225dada954bf4b3.pdf

³ Mid-Term Evaluation of WFP School-Feeding USDA Mc Govern Dole Grant for FY 2017-2020 in Bangladesh. Available at: https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114779/download/?_ga=2.138576051.1443818602.1616506415-1043232169.1572994835

⁴ School Nutrition Programme, Bangladesh: WFP-BRAC Initiative. Available at: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14061/LANSA_WP_32_BRAC_School_Nutrition_Programme%20_Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁵ School Nutrition Programme, Bangladesh: WFP-BRAC Initiative. Available at: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/14061/LANSA_WP_32_BRAC_School_Nutrition_Programme%20_Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y



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