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DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION FOR EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

## Decentralized Evaluation

### Endline Evaluation of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education Programme for WFP Cambodia

**FY 2017-2019**

#### **FINAL Evaluation Report: Volume 1 – Main Report**

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## Executive Summary

1. This report is the endline evaluation of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole Grant Food for Education programme implemented by World Food Programme (WFP) and partners in Cambodia (FY 2017-2019) (FFE-442-2016/015-00). This activity evaluation is commissioned by the WFP Cambodia Country Office (CO) and is based on the Terms of Reference provided by WFP Cambodia (Annex 1). The endline evaluation covers the period from September 2016 to August 2019. The McGovern-Dole programme is a continuation of the previous phase (2013-2016), which was itself a continuation of support from 2010. The programme is implemented in three provinces of Cambodia: Battambang (BTB), Siem Reap (SRP) and Kampong Thom (KTM) all of which received support in the previous phase of the programme.

2. The purpose of the endline evaluation is to critically and objectively review the programme implementation since the 2017 baseline to assess whether targeted beneficiaries received services as expected, while assessing whether the project met its stated goals and objectives. The main objectives of the evaluation are:

- **Accountability:** To assess and report on the performance and results of all the McGovern-Dole grant funded activities as per the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP).
- **Learning:** To determine the reasons why certain results occurred or not, to draw lessons, derive good practices and pointers for learning. It will also provide evidence-based findings to inform operational and strategic decision-making.

3. The main expected users for this evaluation report include USDA, the CO, its main implementing partner the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and the other implementing partners World Vision (WV), Plan International (Plan), World Education Incorporated (WEI) and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE).

4. As per the original design of the programme, during 2017-2019 WFP has continued to hand over the McGovern-Dole programme to the MoEYS as per the Roadmap of 2015, with a view to ensuring national ownership of the programme by 2021. This transition included moving away from the traditional school meals comprised mainly of USDA donated commodities, to a Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) model, including using a HGSF-hybrid model, using both locally purchased and externally sourced food. WFP is also reducing WFP's THR activities as planned as the government takes them over.

5. Cambodia has improved primary school enrolment and attendance in recent years and reducing gender disparities in education. The main challenge now is primary school completion. Although both repetition and dropout rates have steadily declined in the last five years,<sup>1</sup> they remain a key concern to MoEYS. Food security and undernutrition also remain important public health concerns, with a recent study<sup>2</sup> finding that the overall dietary intake of school children did not meet the local recommended dietary allowances.

### Methodology

6. The evaluation was designed to assess the 2017-2019 McGovern-Dole programme against each of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, with a focus on effectiveness, impact and sustainability since this is an endline evaluation. The planned transition to government ownership means that this evaluation has a strong focus on the sustainability aspect to see whether the plans for government ownership are feasible. Similarly, the evaluation is interested in assessing the impact of the programme to provide evidence to the government that school feeding is a worthwhile investment.

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<sup>1</sup> Final Draft Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, MoEYS, May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Horiuchi, Y et al (2019) Urban-rural differences in nutritional status and dietary intakes of school-aged children in Cambodia. *Nutrients*. 2019 Jan; 11(1):14.

The evaluation was designed to answer four main questions: How appropriate is the programme? What are the results of the programme? How and why has the programme achieved its results? And how sustainable is the programme?

7. In order to respond to these questions, the evaluation used a theory-based, gender-responsive and participatory approach, the same as used during the 2017 baseline. The evaluation design is quasi-experimental case-control (comparison) as per the baseline. The evaluation methodology used mixed methods, including secondary document review, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders, and a quantitative endline survey to enable comparison of results against the baseline. The evaluation was conducted during July-August 2019.

### Key Findings

#### **Evaluation question 1: How appropriate is the programme?**

8. The evaluation of the previous phase (2013-2016) established that the range of activities were appropriate, and that remains the case. The main issues that were highlighted during the baseline were that the modality of food procurement followed by WFP (food imported/donated from the US) was not sustainable once the government took over the implementation of the programme, and that food-based take-home rations did not align with the government's preference to provide cash-based support. To this end, over the 2017-2019 period, WFP has made substantial effort to work with the MoEYS to find a more appropriate SF model for government ownership.

9. WFP has continued to be instrumental in supporting policy development in Cambodia during this phase, on many relevant areas including food and nutrition security, social protection, school health and school feeding. The McGovern-Dole programme is therefore designed to align with government policies and strategies, and with WFP's own corporate guidance. The programme also aligns with several SDGs, most notably SDGs 2, 4 and 17. The literacy objective of McGovern-Dole also aligns well with the government's new Education Strategic Plan and with the new WFP Corporate Results Framework which aims to ensure that education quality (literacy) is improved.

#### **Evaluation question 2: What are the results of the programme?**

10. The main strategic objective (SO1) of the programme is to increase the number of children who at the end of Grade 2 are able to read grade level text. During 2017-2019, WEI and KAPE implemented several literacy-related activities and their end of programme assessment found that early grade reading improved from 23.8 percent in SY 2017/18 to 30.5 percent in SY 2018/19. This is a significant improvement over a short period. As well as being effective, the literacy activities have been implemented very efficiently, with a small number of WEI staff collaborating with the MoEYS at all levels to ensure that teacher training was completed with the appropriate materials, and then followed up in class.

11. The second programme SO is to improve the use of health and dietary practices. To do this, the programme provides infrastructure support to increase practices such as handwashing with soap, using clean latrines, and drinking clean water. The McGovern-Dole programme also includes training on good nutrition to help children and parents make sound dietary decisions. All these activities are intended to contribute to reducing health-related absence from school. The ET is confident that the provided training, along with a clean school environment are sound starting points for good health for the school children. Further, the continued support to infrastructure development during this phase was a good use of USDA resources, to ensure that all the USDA-supported schools provide children with an appropriate and healthy learning environment.

12. This phase has also seen improvement in school enrolment rates, and most stakeholders indicated that the presence of school meals plays a role in regular student attendance. MoEYS data indicates that dropout rates were lower in USDA-supported schools (4.9 percent vs. 6.0 percent) and completion rates were higher (81.3 percent vs. 80.1 percent) although these differences may not be

statistically significant. Girls in both categories of schools performed better than boys, with more girls being promoted, and less girls repeating grades or dropping out of school.

13. Aside from the above, the evaluation found that the McGovern-Dole programme has been effective at improving children's access to food, improving parental understanding on the benefits of primary education, improving school feeding related infrastructure in the USDA-supported schools and promoting parental/community engagement in the programme. The endline surveys were also able to establish other differences between USDA-supported schools and comparison schools, presumably as a result of the programme. These include reduced hunger in class and reduced inattentiveness (which are positively correlated). The evaluation also indicates that the programme saves parents time and money, enabling them to spend more time on livelihood activities. The ET also recognize that the McGovern-Dole programme promotes equal participation in the programme for boys and girls, by providing scholarships for both, ensuring gender separated latrines are present in schools, and providing all students with training on various topics. However, the issue of inadequate remuneration for the school cooks, almost all of whom are women, is an ongoing concern. Although both WFP and the MoEYS are aware of this issue, the gender transformative potential that the programme could bring to the cooks, is yet to be realized.

### **Evaluation question 3: Why and how has the operation produced the observed results?**

14. The evaluation identified several internal and external factors that have been instrumental to the achievement of the programme results, as shown below.

- **Internal factors:** Long term engagement between WFP and partners, strong programme management and technical capacity, strong logistic/supply chain support and technical support from RBB. High capacity of implementing partners, strong monitoring systems, and use of programme funds to support research, visits and workshops.
- **External factors:** Collaboration with MoEYS, Government commitment to school feeding and literacy programmes, support from other donors, capacity and turnover of MoEYS personnel, and unclear regulations on the use of Commune Development Funds.

### **Evaluation question 4: How sustainable is the programme moving forward?**

15. During the 2017-2019 period, the MoEYS has undertaken several pieces of work with the support of WFP, to clarify its position on school feeding. As a result, the government is now clearly articulating its preference for cash-based programming (scholarships) and for a HGSM model as it benefits the local economy. The government is also now demonstrating a stronger commitment to build and own a national school meals programme. The evaluation identified a significant change in the lexicon of MoEYS representatives since baseline, with many representatives now recognising school feeding as an important social assistance instrument, especially for households in areas experiencing food insecurity and poor educational outcomes. This growing government commitment to school feeding, culminated in the government developing a concept note for MoEYS implementation of school feeding activities in 205 schools in six provinces<sup>3</sup>, including schools in two provinces where the USDA McGovern-Dole programme is currently implemented: SRP (31 schools) and BTB (32 schools). In total, the project will cost at least USD 2 million per year. This proposal was recently accepted by the Prime Minister's Office and MoEYS is now planning to start implementation at the start of the next school year (SY2019/20). Overall, the evaluation team estimates that capacity of the government to implement school feeding programmes has increased from SABER Level 1 (latent) at baseline to SABER level 2 (emerging).

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## Overall conclusions

16. **Relevance:** During this phase, the government clearly stated their preference for a HGSF approach and WFP has piloted several HGSF models to help the government decide which aspects they would like to continue in a nationally owned programme. WFP is now appropriately transitioning all the USDA-supported schools to a HGSF model to align with the government's preference and with the agreed national transition plan.

17. **Efficiency:** USDA provided USD 15 million in funding for this phase of programming, 25 percent less than the previous phase. This is indicative of the transition of the programme to national ownership and reduction in programme implementation requirements, and a greater focus on capacity strengthening activities, which generally require less funds. WFP and partners have implemented the majority of the planned activities, with some capacity building activities ongoing that will be completed during a no cost extension period to March 2020. Aside from those activities, all others have been completed in a timely manner.

18. **Effectiveness:** The programme has effectively improved school enrolment rates, and most stakeholders indicated that the presence of school meals plays a role in regular student attendance. MoEYS EMIS data indicates that dropout rates were lower in USDA-supported schools (4.9 percent vs. 6.0 percent) and completion rates were higher (81.3 percent vs. 80.1 percent). Girls in both types of schools performed better than boys, with more girls being promoted, and less girls repeating grades or dropping out of school. The programme has contributed to increased school enrolment, increased community engagement in school activities and increased access to food, reducing hunger and inattentiveness in class.

19. **Impact:** For each programme activity, outputs have contributed to expected outcomes and it is clear that SO1 - improved literacy - has been achieved, as the percentage of children able to read and comprehend grade level text has increased. Similarly, the effectiveness of the SO2 activities have contributed to producing a healthy and conducive learning environment in schools. The differences noted from the MoEYS EMIS data between USDA-supported and comparison schools in completion and dropout, and the improved literacy rates found by WEI indicate the potential of the McGovern-Dole programme to have long-term impacts on the level of education achieved by children in this programme. The evaluation also found a significant difference in hunger (reduced) and attentiveness (improved) in USDA-supported schools compared with the counterfactual. The evaluation also found that total inattentiveness in class was significantly positively correlated with total percent reported hungry in class.<sup>4</sup> If the MoEYS take on all aspects of the programme, including the provision of school meals, and literacy activities and expand it to other areas, there is therefore great potential for improving the school standards and education outcomes for school children in Cambodia.

20. **Sustainability:** The evaluation commends WFP and MoEYS on the significant progress made during 2017-2019 on transitioning school feeding activities to national ownership. The upcoming

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