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Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China

01/09/2018-19/11/2021

Decentralized Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

1. This is the Endline Report for the impact evaluation of WFP's Preschool Nutrition Pilot Program in selected counties of Hunan province in Central South China, a project that aims to improve nutrition, cognitive, and socio-emotional conditions of preschool children and to increase smallholders' agricultural production and income through providing school meal subsidy, upgrading kitchen facilities, enhancing nutrition education of caregivers and preschool personnel and involving local poor smallholder farmers in the preschool food supply chain.

2. Rapid economic growth over the past four decades has contributed to China's progress on eliminating early childhood malnutrition, concerns rise on prominent rural-urban disparities in early nutrition. The prevalence of anemia, stunting, and underweight among children under 5 were 5.38%, 1.12%, and 1.37% respectively in 2019, far below the set goals for the end of 2020 (12%, 7% and 5%, respectively) . However, children under 5 in rural areas are more vulnerable than their peers in urban areas. Most recent national statistics showed that the stunting rate for rural children was 5.8% by 2020, higher than the national average level of 1.12%. In addition, nutrition status of rural children, especially in poor areas, are more vulnerable than urban children when facing economic shocks and unexpected events .

3. WFP China Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2017-2021 commits to assist the country to achieve the national SDG target, which is reducing the stunting rate of children under 5 to below 7% and reducing anemia prevalence to less than 12% by 2020 . Hunan province is prioritized in the CSP, given the concentration of poverty and prevalence of malnutrition there. Since 1980s, WFP has implemented three assistance programs in 12 counties/districts in Hunan province, and played an important role in rural infrastructure improvement and poverty alleviation in western Hunan.

4. By the time the nutrition pilot under discussion was introduced, as far as we know, there has been no national-level nutrition program in China targeting 3-5 years old. Although the government has targets for preschool enrolment, there is no platform for public food provision targeted at preschool aged children. Obviously, there is a gap to be filled. Therefore, WFP China Office seeks to fill this gap by introducing this nutrition pilot among preschoolers in Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan Province.

5. The impact evaluation of this nutrition pilot is commissioned by the World Food Program (WFP) China Office and covers the period from April/2018 to November /2021¹. The purpose of this Endline Report is to: 1) overview the design and activities of the evaluation 2) document the fieldwork, data collection and management, and analyses of data from both the baseline and endline surveys; and 3) report key evaluation findings. The expected primary users for this endline report are the WFP China Office and its partners² in decision-making, notably related to program implementation.

6. Since the way that WFP selected the kindergartens/preschools for the interventions is not random, an experimental design with complete randomization was not achieved. To evaluate impact in the most methodologically rigorous manner for the context, a quasi-experimental design was used. Specifically, the team estimated the program impact by Differences-in-Differences (DID) methods to correct for observable and unobservable biases. Therefore, baseline (pre-treatment, conducted in September 2018) and endline

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