

Action brief

Nationalizing the school feeding programme in Tajikistan

Country: Tajikistan
Topics: Nutrition Sensitive
Sub-topics: School-feeding

Date: 2023

© WFP Muboraksho Gulijonov



Overview



School feeding programmes are crucial to combating malnutrition and improving the health of children. They also advocate for healthy diets, foster public-private partnerships and support local food systems. Moreover, these initiatives help reduce school dropout rates and act as a vital social safety net, ensuring that economically disadvantaged students receive at least one nutritious meal daily, thus promoting equitable access to education.

Since the 1990s, the Tajikistan Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population, the Tajikistan Ministry of Education and Sports, and the World Food Programme (WFP) have collaborated to implement school feeding activities. In 2021, bolstered by financial support from the Russian Federation and in collaboration with the Russian Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI), a non-governmental organisation, Tajikistan took steps towards transitioning the school feeding programme into full national ownership by 2027.



SDGs





Objectives of the action brief

This brief outlines strategies for enhancing the sustainability of school feeding programmes, presenting the Tajikistan experience as a model for achieving long-term viability and local ownership in similar contexts.



Period covered

The Tajikistan school feeding programme was first implemented in the 1990s with support from the WFP. A capacity development augmentation programme was set up in 2013 to strengthen the abilities of school staff and to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the feeding programme. This brief covers 2013 to 2023.



What action was taken?

The scope of the school feeding programme in Tajikistan was broadened significantly in 2013 via infrastructure renovations and capacity strengthening initiatives, with support from the Russian Federation and the WFP. Notably, Tajikistan received technical assistance from SIFI to consolidate the programme's institutional and management framework.

Financing for the programme comes from a diverse array of sources, including the WFP, the government, local authorities, parents' associations and the schools themselves. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations helped set up income-generating activities related to greenhouses, beekeeping and fishponds in 118 schools. In a stride towards sustainability, these activities bolstered programme finances and ensured a consistent supply of fresh produce for the schools.

However, unforeseen funding challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reduction in food distribution. This necessitated financial and in-kind **commitments from local government and parent-teacher associations** – a shift towards community ownership that was instrumental in navigating the pandemic's disruptions. **Awareness-raising activities** also played a crucial role in community engagement, extending beyond students to reach a spectrum of stakeholders, including parents, cooks and teachers. Community involvement has been critical in sustaining the programme and expediting the transition towards national ownership.

This progress owes much to a **supportive political landscape**. The approval and adoption of the state-level Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Feeding 2017–2027 and Programme on School Feeding Development for 2022–2027 have been pivotal. The establishment of school feeding units under the Ministry of

Education and Science further attests to the commitment to long-term programme management, including rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

This concerted effort has yielded substantial results:

- A network has been established of nutrition-focused councils (one national, three regional and 48 at the district level).
- A 2016 pilot micronutrient study of primary schoolchildren demonstrated that children benefiting from the programme experience fewer essential nutrient deficiencies.
- A 2022 WFP evaluation showed that the programme significantly contributes to improved school attendance in Tajikistan.
- The ripple effects of the programme have extended to the local economy, with nearly 6,000 jobs created. The school feeding programme currently covers 52 districts, benefitting half a million people, including 405,000 primary school students, and involving 6,000 technical staff across more than 16,000 public schools.





What would the country do differently?

Challenges:

- **Sustainable financing:** The lack of dedicated financial support in the national budget posed a significant hurdle in the transition towards a nationally owned programme. A public financing mechanism for school feeding is necessary for the development of a sustainable resourcing plan.
- **Engagement in school feeding:** While parent–teacher associations are actively engaged in school feeding implementation, providing in-kind or financial support for school meals, their contributions are variable and not yet formalised. Communities are rarely sufficiently engaged in deciding, managing and monitoring school menus and their quality.
- **Costly supplies:** The high prices of fresh products due to seasonal fluctuations presented a notable challenge. To overcome this, land was provided to schools to enable them to cultivate their own fruits and vegetables. This not only addressed cost but also promoted self-sustainability.
- **Bread delivery logistics:** Ensuring the smooth delivery of bread from bakeries to schools presented logistical difficulties. This challenge was effectively tackled by entrusting this task to local governments, leveraging their proximity and resources for streamlined distribution.
- **Legislative barriers:** Legislative barriers in promoting income-generating activities within schools posed a substantial challenge. Engaging with relevant stakeholders and advocating for policy reforms could have facilitated the integration of such activities, bolstering the programme’s sustainability and impact.



Adaptation and applicability

Advice for other countries implementing a similar plan:

- Establish a robust legal and regulatory framework for school meal programmes, including the establishment of effective organisational and management structures. To be sustainable, the policy framework should foster multisectoral engagement and interministerial budget allocations to support all aspects of the programme and ensure its long-term success.
- Conduct pilot projects to implement various school meal models, carefully assessing conditions and costs for successful implementation.
- Prioritise human resource development to ensure that staff are adequately trained and equipped to manage the school feeding programme effectively.
- Cultivate an enabling political environment that embraces change and demonstrates a strong commitment to programme success, including during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Implement a thorough monitoring system to track the progress of the transition process, identify areas for building capacity, and pinpoint where technical assistance may be required.
- Include a behavioural change component at the community level to raise awareness among teaching staff about the crucial role of nutrition and school feeding programmes.





© WFP



Next steps

Next steps:

- **Enhance financing mechanisms:** Improved financing mechanisms between national and local levels will be implemented to enable local authorities to make more substantial contributions to the programme.
- **Collect feedback through surveys:** Planned surveys aim to collect feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders to help refine and optimise programme delivery.
- **Renovate infrastructure and procure equipment:** Execute the objectives outlined in the document signed between WFP, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, focusing on the renovation of infrastructures and the purchase of equipment for 2022–2024. This initiative will play a pivotal role in ensuring the programme's effectiveness and sustainability.



Further information

-  [Evaluation of Tajikistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019–2024](#)
-  [School feeding programme in Tajikistan with the support of WFP and Russia](#)
-  [Global Survey of School Meal Programs, 2021, Tajikistan – Global Child Nutrition Foundation](#)
-  [Micronutrient Survey 2016: Testing of schoolchildren at WFP supported schools and school children beyond the school feeding programme](#)


Scaling Up
NUTRITION

ENGAGE • INSPIRE • INVEST

Scaling Up Nutrition Movement
c/o SUN Movement Secretariat
Villa Le Bocage, Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland
+41 (0) 22 917 7283
info@scalingupnutrition.org
www.scalingupnutrition.org