



WORKING PAPER

School Meals Case Study: Bangladesh

Prepared by the Research Consortium for School Health and
Nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition

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Historical background

Bangladesh's current education system has its roots in British colonial India.¹ post-independence in 1971 from Pakistan, successive governments of Bangladesh implemented many initiatives to improve the education system at all levels. Key initiatives included nationalization of primary education, enactment of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act in 1990, stipend for underprivileged students, free textbooks for all students up to Grade 10, and free education for all primary students (Grades 0-5) and up to Grade 12 for girls. In Bangladesh, the school meals programme was introduced in 2001 to improve education and nutrition outcomes of primary school children.² Over the decades, school meal programme has significantly evolved, driven by both national policies and international support, with a focus on in-school feeding over take-home rations.

Country profile

Population and economics

Table 1: Key data on Bangladeshi population and economic indicators

| Total population (2022) ³ | Total number of people aged 5 to 19 ⁴ | Total number of people employed in the agriculture sector ⁵ | Gross domestic product per capita (2021) ⁶ |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 165.16 million | 48.23 million | 45.4% | 2,457.92 USD |

Education

Table 2 outlines the basic structure of school education, detailing how schools are organized to cater to distinct age groups, including primary, secondary, vocational, and Madrasa education. Primary education falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), while secondary and tertiary education are overseen by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

¹ Nath, S. R., (2016). Realising Potential: Bangladesh's Experiences in Education. Academic Press and publishers Library, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 228p.

² Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). (2024). Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

³ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). 2023. Population and housing census 2022: National report (volume 1). Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁴ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). 2023. Population and housing census 2022: National report (volume 1). Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). 2023. Labour force survey 2022 Bangladesh: Final report. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁶ Online source (accessed on 14 July 2024 through [this link](#)).

Table 2: The basic structure of school education by age group in Bangladesh⁷

| Age (year) | Grade | Education level | General education | Vocational education | Madrasa education |
|------------|-------|-----------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <=5 | - | Primary | Pre-primary | - | - |
| 6-10 | 1-5 | | Primary | - | Ebtedayee |
| 11-13 | 6-8 | Secondary | Junior Secondary | - | Junior Dakhil |
| 14-15 | 9-10 | | Secondary (general) | Secondary (vocational) | Dakhil |
| 16-17 | 11-12 | | Higher Secondary (general) | Higher secondary (vocational) | Alim |
| ≥18 | ≥13 | Tertiary | Diploma, Bachelor, Masters, MPhil, PhD etc. | | Fazil, Kamil |

Table 3: Key data on primary education and school meal coverage indicators (2023)

| Total number of students ⁸ | Total number of schools ⁹ | Student teacher ratio ^{10,11} | Number of children involved in (free) school meals ¹² | Percentage of children eligible for free school meals ¹³ |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 19,713,685 | 114,630 | 29:1 | 3,465,000 (in the proposed programme) | 16.86% |

Food security, nutrition and health

Food insecurity:

(a) At the population level, moderate to severe food insecurity (2020-22): 31.1%.¹⁴

(b) At the household level, moderate to severe food insecurity (2023): 18.0%.¹⁵

Table 4: Nutritional status of children from 5-9 and 10-19 years (2023, national level)¹⁶

| Nutritional status | 5-9 years | | 10-19 years | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-------|-------------|--|
| | both sexes | boys | girls | |
| Stunting [Height for age z-score] (%) | 16.85 | 20.18 | 21.73 | |
| Thinness [BMI for age z-score] (%) | 34.08 | 33.15 | 22.48 | |
| Overweight [BMI for age z-score] (%) | 1.97 | 4.20 | 5.81 | |
| Obesity [BMI for age z-score] (%) | 3.22 | 3.55 | 4.33 | |

BMI: Body-mass index.

⁷ Nath, S. R., (2016). Realising Potential: Bangladesh's Experiences in Education. Academic Press and publishers Library, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 228p.

⁸ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) 2024. Annual Primary School Census 2023, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁹ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) 2024. Annual Primary School Census 2023, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹⁰ Information on average class size is not available. Hence, we included student teacher ratio.

¹¹ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) 2024. Annual Primary School Census 2023, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹² Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). 2024. Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹³ Authors' calculations based on the total number of primary students and those covered by the upcoming government school feeding programme (2024-2027).

¹⁴ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en>

¹⁵ BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health and the World Bank. (2024). Nutrition across the life stages: Evidence from a nutrition panel study in Bangladesh. Dhaka, Bangladesh: James P Grant School of Public Health and the World Bank (unpublished)

¹⁶ BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health and the World Bank. (2024). Nutrition across the life stages: Evidence from a nutrition panel study in Bangladesh. Dhaka, Bangladesh: James P Grant School of Public Health and the World Bank (unpublished, personal communication with Principal Investigator, Prof. Malay Kanti Mridha)

Micronutrient deficiency from 5 to 14 years (2011, national level)^{17,18}

- Vitamin A deficiency (6-14 years): 20.9%
- Vitamin D deficiency (6-14 years): 45.5%
- Anaemia (6-11 years): 19.1%
- Anaemia (12-14 years): 17.1%
- Iodine deficiency (6-14 years): 40.0%
- Calcium deficiency (6-14 years): 17.6%

Design and implementation of school meal programme

Description

The programme began in 2001 under World Food Programme’s (WFP) Emergency Programme and expanded significantly in 2010 when the government and WFP jointly funded the “School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas” (SFPPPA), which ran from 2011 to 2022 across 104 upazilas i.e., sub-districts distributed fortified biscuits only. In 2013, a pilot initiative introduced cooked meals as part of an alternative school feeding approach; it included fortified rice and oil, eggs, pulses, vegetables, and fruits. Vegetables, fruits, and spices were sourced from local women cultivators, and the meals were primarily prepared by women. By 2022, the national school feeding programme, SFPPPA, had reached 3 million children. Looking ahead, a new three-year government school feeding programme/GSFP (2024–2027) aims to support 3.46 million children, pending approval. In addition to the national school feeding programme, various small-scale school meal initiatives are implemented by different organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGO). **Figure 1** highlights key milestones of Bangladesh’s experience in implementing various school feeding modalities.

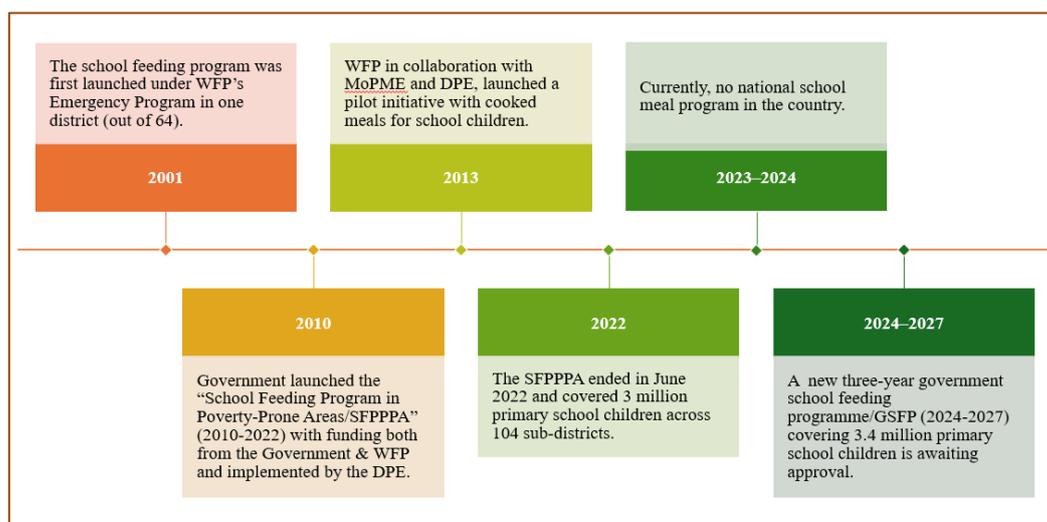


Figure 1: Timeline of the national school feeding programme in Bangladesh

¹⁷ National Micronutrient Survey 2011-12, Final Report. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Institute of Public Health Nutrition, United Nation Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Icdrr,b and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).

¹⁸ A nationally representative micronutrient survey was conducted in 2019–2020, but the results for school-age children had not yet been published at the time the case study was prepared.

Objectives

The overall objective of the national school feeding programme in Bangladesh is to improve the education and nutrition outcomes among primary school-age children, thereby contributing to SDG 2 and SDG 4. While the overall objective of the school feeding programme has remained stable over time, its specific objectives have varied slightly across different phases since its inception. In general, the specific objectives are a) to increase enrolment, attendance, and primary education cycle completion rates; b) to reduce malnutrition among school children; c) to reduce hunger and increase attention in the classroom; and d) to enhance institutional capacity to implement the school feeding programme effectively, affordably, and sustainably.^{19,20,21,22,23} However, exact specific objectives of the upcoming GSFP are not yet accessible.

Coverage

The SFPPA covered approximately 3 million children in 15,289 out of 133,002²⁴ primary schools, across 104 out of 495 upazilas.²⁵ Thus, only 14% of the total 21.55 million pre-primary and primary school going children were covered under the programme.²⁶ This programme was funded by both the government and WFP and implemented by MoPME and the Directorate Primary Education (DPE) with the involvement of NGOs. The upcoming GSFP (2024-2027) is planned to cover 3.46 million students from 21,195 government primary schools of 150 subdistricts of 62 districts of Bangladesh.²⁷ As of writing this case study, there is no school meal programme for secondary school children.

In addition to the national school feeding programme, several small-scale school meals initiatives exist in Bangladesh. For instance, the School Milk Project (2023–2025) aims to improve children's health, school attendance, and local dairy development by providing safe, nutritious milk to 60,000 primary students in 300 schools. This programme is a collaboration between the Department of Livestock, the DPE, three dairy processors, and a dairy organization. Similarly, the World Bank's Pre-Primary and Primary Education Improvement Project (2024–2027) supports 236,000 students across 1,098 schools in 15 upazilas of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar districts. Additionally, some NGOs such as BRAC, *Banchte Shekha*, the Japan-Bangladesh Cultural Exchange Association (JBCEA) have piloted small-scale school meals programmes. BRAC and Banchte Shekha piloted a school nutrition programme (2012-2013) funded by Dubai Care and GAIN.²⁸ During this programme, BRAC covered 12,058

¹⁹ Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF). 2024. Global Survey of School Meal Programs Country Report, Bangladesh. (available at: <https://gcnf.org/country-reports/>; accessed on 14 Dec 2024)

²⁰ Afroze, R., Mia, M. M. U., & Majumder, M. S. I. (2013). School Nutrition Programme of BRAC and Banchte Shekha: A Baseline Report. Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

²¹ Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), World Food Programme (WFP). 2020. Systems Approach to Better Education Results (SABER) for School Feeding SABER: Country Report February 2020, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

²² Kabir, M. A. U., & Islam, M. S. (2018). School Nutrition Programme, Bangladesh: WFP-BRAC Initiative (Vol. 32). Lansa Working Paper Series.

²³ World Food Programme and Directorate of Primary Education. (2013). Annual Report-2012 on School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas (p. 41). World Food Programme and Directorate of Primary Education. Dhaka, Bangladesh

²⁴ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) 2021. Annual Primary School Census 2020, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Directorate of Primary Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

²⁵ Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), World Food Programme (WFP). 2020. Systems Approach to Better Education Results (SABER) for School Feeding SABER: Country Report February 2020, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

²⁶ Ahmed C. M. (2022). School Meals Financing Rapid Assessment Bangladesh. Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition (SFI) (available at: <https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/countrydetails/BGD/2022>; accessed on 17 Dec 2024)

²⁷ Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF). 2024. Global Survey of School Meal Programs Country Report, Bangladesh. <https://gcnf.org/country-reports/>

²⁸ Afroze, R., Mia, M. M. U., & Majumder, M. S. I. (2013). School Nutrition Programme of BRAC and Banchte Shekha: A Baseline Report. Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

students across 80 primary schools (23 rural and 57 urban) and Banchte Shekha covered 6,208 students of 22 primary schools.

Targeting

The SFPPA focused on socio-economically disadvantaged and nutritionally vulnerable children in 94 of the 104 subdistricts funded by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). Intervention areas were selected using a poverty map jointly developed by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and WFP. In the 10 subdistricts funded by WFP, targeting criteria included both poverty rankings and primary cycle completion rates. The programme covered three types of schools: government primary schools, independent Ebtedayee (primary) Madrasas, and schools under the Children Welfare Trust. While many poor and nutritionally at-risk children attended these tuition-free schools, a significant number remained outside the programme's reach. For the upcoming GSFP (2024–2027), targeting is based on a priority ranking map²⁹, which uses upazila-level indicators of poverty, nutrition, and education to identify intervention areas.

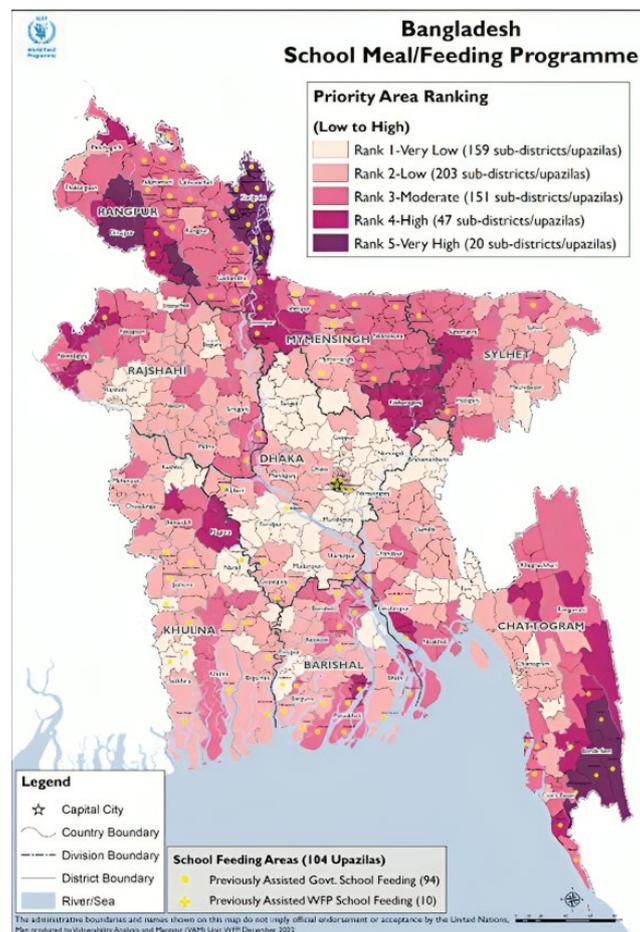


Figure 2: Priority ranking map for the upcoming government school feeding programme (2024-2027)³⁰

²⁹ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). 2024. Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh

³⁰ *ibid* (p-28)

Meal types

The SFPPPA provided 75g packets of fortified biscuits to pre-primary and primary school children six days per week. BRAC and Banchte Shekha provided 'khichuri' as hot cooked meal which is made of rice and lentils, vegetables, and oil during their pilot school nutrition programme in 2012-2013.³¹ A pilot was launched in October 2013, in which cooked meals were provided, comprising of fortified rice, pulses as well as vegetables and eggs sourced from local women farmers in some schools of two subdistricts by WFP in 2013. The meals were composed of 90 g fortified rice, 25 g lentils, 12 g oil along with vegetables. This initiative was later discontinued because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The upcoming GSFP (2024-2027) is designed in a way to provide a weekly combination of fortified biscuits (75g), one boiled egg (60g), one bun (120g), and one banana/other locally available seasonal fruit (100 g) from the 7th month of project implementation (only fortified biscuits will be provided during first six months of the project). Biscuit ingredients are: wheat flour (69% by weight); sugar (12%); vegetable fat (hydrogenated – 75% & liquid – 25% – 13%); soya flour (6%); iodized salt (0.5%); leavening agent (1.0%); and micronutrient premix (1.5 kg premix in 998.5 kg biscuit dough). The fortified biscuit is formulated to provide 300 kcal per 75g packet (approximately 15% of daily calorie requirements) and a range of micronutrients contributing to about 75% of the daily requirements for vitamin A, folate, iron, iodine, zinc, and magnesium.³² The biscuits will be prepared by local medium to large manufacturers who can maintain the required quality standards. Previously, WFP and the Government selected vendors, provided technical support to produce the biscuits, and monitored the quality according to an established protocol.³³

Nutritional norms

The National School Meal Policy 2019 aims to fulfil at least 30% of calorie needs for children aged 3–12 years through school meals (50% of daily micronutrient needs for half-day schools). It specifies that 10–15% of energy should come from protein and 15–30% from fat, with saturated fat under 10%. Dietary diversity should include at least four food groups, with one from an animal source. Additionally, the policy envisions gradually providing cooked meals five days a week and fortified biscuits one day a week to all pre-primary and primary students. The biscuits distributed through the SFPPPA provided 338 kcal per day and on average, 67% of the children's daily micronutrient requirements.³⁴ The combination of food proposed for the upcoming GSFP (2024-2027) will cover substantial nutritional requirements with a relatively lower cost (food combination 1 – energy (27.0%), micronutrient (58.0%), protein (10.9%), fat (26.7%) and food combination 2 – energy (30.8%), micronutrient (60.0%), protein (12.5%), fat (25.9%) and also will contribute to stimulation of local economy and poverty reduction as the majority of commodities will be purchased locally.³⁵ This combination of foods proposed for the upcoming school feeding programme is also aligned with the approved national school feeding policy 2019.

³¹ Afroze, R., Mia, M. M. U., & Majumder, M. S. I. (2013). School Nutrition Programme of BRAC and Banchte Shekha: A Baseline Report. Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

³² Adams AM, Ahmed R, Latif AHMM, Rasheed S, Das SK, Hasib E, et al. (2017) Impact of fortified biscuits on micronutrient deficiencies among primary school children in Bangladesh. PLoS ONE 12(4): e0174673. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0174673>

³³ Hossain, M. A., & Nitai Chakraborty. (2022). Quality Assessment of high energy biscuits Served in School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Advances in Scientific Research and Engineering (IJASRE)*, ISSN:2454-8006

³⁴ World Food Programme and Directorate of Primary Education. (2013). Annual Report-2012 on School Feeding Programme in Poverty-Prone Areas (p. 41). World Food Programme and Directorate of Primary Education. Dhaka, Bangladesh

³⁵ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). 2024. Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Food procurement

During the implementation of the SFPPA, a number of biscuit factories was selected through a centralized procurement system. For the small-scale cooked meal trial- rice, lentils and oil were procured centrally, however, spices, etc. were procured locally by the NGOs. In the upcoming GSFP (2024–2027), a mixed procurement model will be adopted: biscuits, UHT milk, and buns will be procured centrally, while fruits and eggs will be sourced locally.³⁶ Albeit the government has established systems for implementing the fortified biscuit modality, the new “combined menu” approach requires the development and testing of systems and structures. In collaboration with WFP, MoPME and DPE will spend the initial months developing operational guidelines, training materials, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the local supply chain, followed by training sub-national officials to ensure effective implementation.

Legal framework and public policy evolution

The Systems Approach for Better Education Results for School Feeding (SABER-SF) is a tool and methodology collaboratively developed by the World Bank, WFP, and the Partnership for Child Development.³⁷ According to SABER-SF, Policy Goal 1 (Policies and Legislation) comprises four sub-components.³⁸ In Bangladesh, school feeding embedded in national development plans is rated as self-sufficient, while integration with other sector policies, policy dissemination mechanisms, and international/regional partnerships are considered emergent. On August 19, 2019, the GoB approved the National School Meal Policy 2019. Key features of the National School Meal policy include the following key elements:

- Inclusivity. Enhancing educational attainment, nutrition, health, and social protection for all pre-primary and primary school children, aligned with SDG-2 and SDG-4.
- Gender sensitivity. Incorporate gender-sensitive measures such as promoting women's empowerment by creating paid cooking jobs and market opportunities for local growers while engaging mothers' groups.
- Embeddedness. Linked with national policies, strategies and plans such as Vision 2021, the 7th Five-Year Plan, and the Second Country Investment Plan for Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems (CIP2).
- Multi-sectoral approach. Emphasizes collaboration across sectors such as education, health and nutrition, social protection, agriculture and rural local development.
- Guiding principles. Includes a wide range of approaches including targeting and criteria for coverage, a minimum nutritional requirement for school meals, food basket, food safety and quality, seasonal or geographic variations, supply chain and procurement, implementation and funding.
- Resource mobilization. Indicates how to mobilize the resources including main funding source, annual budget allocation by GoB.
- Regulatory framework. Mentions the relevant regulations such as national public procurement rules and Bangladesh food safety authority regarding food safety and quality.

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), World Food Programme (WFP). 2020. Systems Approach to Better Education Results (SABER) for School Feeding SABER: Country Report February 2020, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

³⁸ ibid

Costs of implementation

Table 5: Cost analysis of the national school feeding programme

| Indicators | SFPPPA (2011-2022) ³⁹ | GSFP (2024-2027) ⁴⁰ |
|---|---|--|
| Number of children | 3 million | 3.47 million |
| Average cost of a meal (BDT) | Fortified biscuit: 0.12 USD per child Cooked meal: 0.23 USD per child. (1 USD= BDT. 86 in 2022) | On average (considering whole week): USD 0.30 per child (1 USD= BDT. 118 in 2024) |
| Cost of raw material (%) | Food: 87.26% Administrative cost 7.85% Pilot programme in selected areas: 4.75% Social mobilization: 0.14% | Food: 89% |
| Labour costs | Not known. | Not known yet. |
| Family participation | Nil | Not known yet. |
| City budget per child and meal | Nil | Not known yet. |
| Government budget per child and meal | Not known | Not known yet. |
| Number of teaching days/year in one academic year | 242 | 180 |
| Number of school meal days in one academic year | 242 | 180 ⁴¹ |

SFPPPA: national school feeding programme. GSFP: government school feeding programme. BDT: Bangladeshi Taka. 1 dollar USD = 121.5 BDT in March 2025.

Financing

The SFPPPA was funded by the GoB and WFP, with no contribution from local government or other sources. The GoB financed the programme through general taxation without any earmarked taxes for school feeding. WFP's funding came as a grant, sourced from three main channels: McGovern-Dole (50%), GoB (30%), and multiple donors through WFP HQ (20%). Programme managers confirmed that funding was sufficient, with resources allocated on time, ensuring smooth implementation. Notably, savings allowed for a 1.5-year no-cost extension beyond December 2020. The private sector's role was limited to producing fortified biscuits, and households did not contribute financially to the programme.

³⁹ Ahmed C. M. (2022). School Meals Financing Rapid Assessment Bangladesh. Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition (SFI) (available at: <https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/countrydetails/BGD/2022>; accessed on 17 Dec 2024)

⁴⁰ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). 2024. Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁴¹ Previously, schools had a one-day weekend, but it has now changed to a two-day weekend, resulting in a decrease in the number of school days.



Figure 3: Fund allocation (cumulative) by GoB and WFP (2011-2020) during SFPPA⁴²

The total estimated cost of the upcoming GSFP (2024-2027) is USD 403,334,745 (GoB: USD 397,894,067 and WFP: USD 5,440,678). Cost per student during project duration: USD 120.45 (including all expenses) and average annual cost per student: USD 40.15 (including all expenses).⁴³

Monitoring and evaluation

During the SFPPA, field-level officials from the DPE, supported by NGOs and overseen by WFP, conducted monitoring activities. From the inception of the programme, a strong research culture was maintained throughout the project cycle, with evaluations carried out by WFP, the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of Ministry of Planning, and external evaluation organizations. These evaluations played a key role in evidence-based scaling up and continuation of the project. In the upcoming programme, WFP will provide technical assistance to enhance monitoring and evaluation systems. A comprehensive monitoring framework, proposed within the project plan, includes indicators and checklists aligned with the 'Systems Approach for Better Education Results' for School Feeding (SABER-SF).⁴⁴ Monitoring activities will be conducted at the school, sub-district, and district levels.

Lessons learned and best practices

- Providing **fortified biscuits** through the SFP reportedly increased the BMI of participating children by an average of 0.62 points, reflecting a 4.3% increase compared to the average BMI of school children in the control group.⁴⁵
- **Cooked meals** were piloted in relatively small scale in Bangladesh by different organization including WFP, BRAC, the JBCEA and others. BRAC provided hot cooked meals to school children under a pilot project. Research conducted among school children participating in this programme demonstrated that the nutritional status of

⁴² Ahmed C. M. (2022). School Meals Financing Rapid Assessment Bangladesh. Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition (SFI) (available at: <https://www.schoolmealscoalitiondatabase.wfp.org/countrydetails/BGD/2022>; accessed on 17 Dec 2024)

⁴³ GSFP project document (not published, personal communication by the authors).

⁴⁴ Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). 2024. Feasibility study report for the national school feeding Programme in government primary schools of Bangladesh: Summary report. BBS, Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁴⁵ Ahmed, A. U. (2004). Impact of feeding children in school: Evidence from Bangladesh. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.

these children significantly improved in addition to increasing the enrolment and school attendance.^{46, 47} Another school meal programme by JBCEA, incorporating local foods with soybean, enhanced the growth in height and haemoglobin concentration of children, in comparison to those from the control school.⁴⁸

Challenges

Major challenges include:

- Sustainable funding mechanism. Government funding comes from development budget (short-term project/programme-based) and not from recurring revenue budget.
- Low coverage. Scaling up is not happening as stipulated in the policy. Moreover, coverage is almost the same in the upcoming project.
- Delivery mechanism for cooked meals is not adequately tested.
- Nationwide supply chain capacity building including development and operationalization of food safety and quality guidelines for food distribution other than for biscuit is not well established yet.
- Additional challenges identified for providing cooked meals were the availability of infrastructure, higher cost and the availability of an acceptable rotational menu.⁴⁹
- Outbreaks of mass sociogenic illness, also known as epidemic hysteria or mass psychogenic illness, can be a potential challenge. Although they occur sporadically and infrequently, they often receive extensive media coverage.⁵⁰
- The national school meals policy does not mention the importance of school meals in emergency situations such as COVID-19 pandemic, conflict etc., when schools can act as a safe harbour for students.

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We would like to express our heartiest gratitude to Ms. Sneha Lata, Programme Policy Officer, School Feeding Programme, the World Food Programme (WFP), Bangladesh, for her valuable support. We appreciate Mr. Sarthak Agarwal's review and comments, which have helped enhance this work.

Related resources and data sources

All references have been cited in footnotes.

⁴⁶ Afroze, R., & Mia, M. M. U. (2013). School Nutrition Programme of BRAC and Banchte Shekha: Midline Report. Dhaka: BRAC.

⁴⁷ Afroze, R., & Tukun, A. B. (2014). Evaluation of school nutrition programme of BRAC and Banchte Shekha: Learning from a pilot project. BRAC Education

⁴⁸ Murayama, N., Magami, M., Akter, S., Hossain, I. A., Ali, L., Faruquee, M. H., & Ahmad, S. A. (2018). A pilot school meal program using local foods with soybean in rural Bangladesh: Effects on the nutritional status of children. *Food and Nutrition Sciences*, 9(4), 290-313.

⁴⁹ Shamim, A. A., Mayna, I. J., Ridwan, S. M., & Khondker, R. (2018). Weekly menu for midday meal in Bangladeshi schools: Caregivers' choices. *Field Exchange*, 58, 27.

⁵⁰ Haque, F., Kundu, S. K., Islam, M. S., Hasan, S. M., Khatun, A., Gope, P. S., ... & Luby, S. P. (2013). Outbreak of mass sociogenic illness in a school feeding program in northwest Bangladesh, 2010. *PLoS One*, 8(11), e80420.

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