

Sustaining the Impacts of Food for Education Programming: A Synthesis of Promising Practices, Challenges, and Recommendations

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Introduction

Since 2002,¹ the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the McGovern-Dole (MGD) International Food for Education and Child Nutrition (FFE) Program, has provided support to low-income, food-deficit countries around the globe to reduce hunger and improve literacy and primary education among children, especially girls.² Through the provision of U.S. agricultural commodities and financial and technical assistance to support education, school feeding programs, and maternal and child nutrition, USDA has supported more than 31 million children in 48 countries.³ Although the goal of these programs is to reduce hunger and improve education and nutrition for vulnerable children, the programs are designed with the understanding that USDA assistance is limited and that, in order to maintain improved education and nutrition outcomes, programs must be supported by host governments and local communities to bring about long-term benefits.⁴ As such, sustainability is a critical component of MGD FFE program design and implementation. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002—known as the Farm Bill—codified this commitment by stipulating that all MGD FFE programs must include a plan for recipient countries to graduate from the program and provide sufficient assistance for the school feeding program and the literacy initiatives without the support of USDA.⁵ Although graduation from the program is the ultimate goal for all MGD FFE recipient countries, USDA understands that the path to graduation will look different for each country. Therefore, we encourage implementing partners to develop context-specific sustainability plans with relevant and appropriate strategies, timelines, indicators, and targets. In this brief, we explore the different sustainability strategies used in five countries—Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Lao



“The ultimate goal of the McGovern-Dole program is to bring about sustainable, lasting change. We’re not just providing food, we’re also investing in education and working to ensure that the communities we serve will ultimately be able to continue school feeding and related activities on their own or with local support.”

– Jewel Bronaugh, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, USDA

¹ The McGovern-Dole Food for Education (FFE) Program was created as part of the 2002 Farm Bill.

² <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/mcgovern-dole-food-education-program>

³ <https://www.fas.usda.gov/newsroom/usda-awards-248-million-international-school-feeding-projects>

⁴ <https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/McGovern-FY2020.pdf>

⁵ <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?hl=false&edition=prelim&req=granuleid%3AUSC-prelim-title7-section1736o-1&num=0&saved=%7CKHRpdGxIOjgc2VjdGlvbjoXNzM2byBlZGl0aW9uOnByZWxpbSk%3D%7C%7C0%7Cfalse%7Cprelim>

People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Liberia, and Mali—to unpack and identify the strategies that show promise and the common challenges that MGD FFE programs face. We also provide suggestions for how USDA and its implementing partners can learn from this cross-country synthesis to promote the sustainability of current and future MGD FFE programs.

Methodology

Research Questions

Although graduation and sustainability are critical to MGD FFE programming, there is little evidence on the most effective approaches and strategies for graduation and sustainability. This is due in part to the fact that graduation and sustainability themselves are highly contextualized concepts, but also because, as noted in the MGD FFE Learning Agenda, “there are many layers to and definitions of the term [sustainability].” MGD FFE programs address sustainability at multiple levels including “policy level decision-making, programmatic efficiency, and cost effectiveness,” which makes it impossible to measure sustainability using one metric.⁶ Additionally, given the long-term nature of sustainability, very few recipient countries have graduated from MGD FFE programming; therefore, any lessons learned discussed in this brief must be drawn from programs in countries that are still receiving USDA support. We seek to contribute to this evidence gap by looking across MGD FFE programs to answer the following research questions:

1. What approaches and strategies are implementing partners using to promote sustainability and handover?
2. Which approaches and strategies show promise for promoting sustainability and handover?
3. What challenges do implementing partners continue to face when it comes to sustainability and handover?
4. How can USDA take these lessons learned and apply them to help promote sustainability of current and future MGD FFE programs?

Data and Analysis

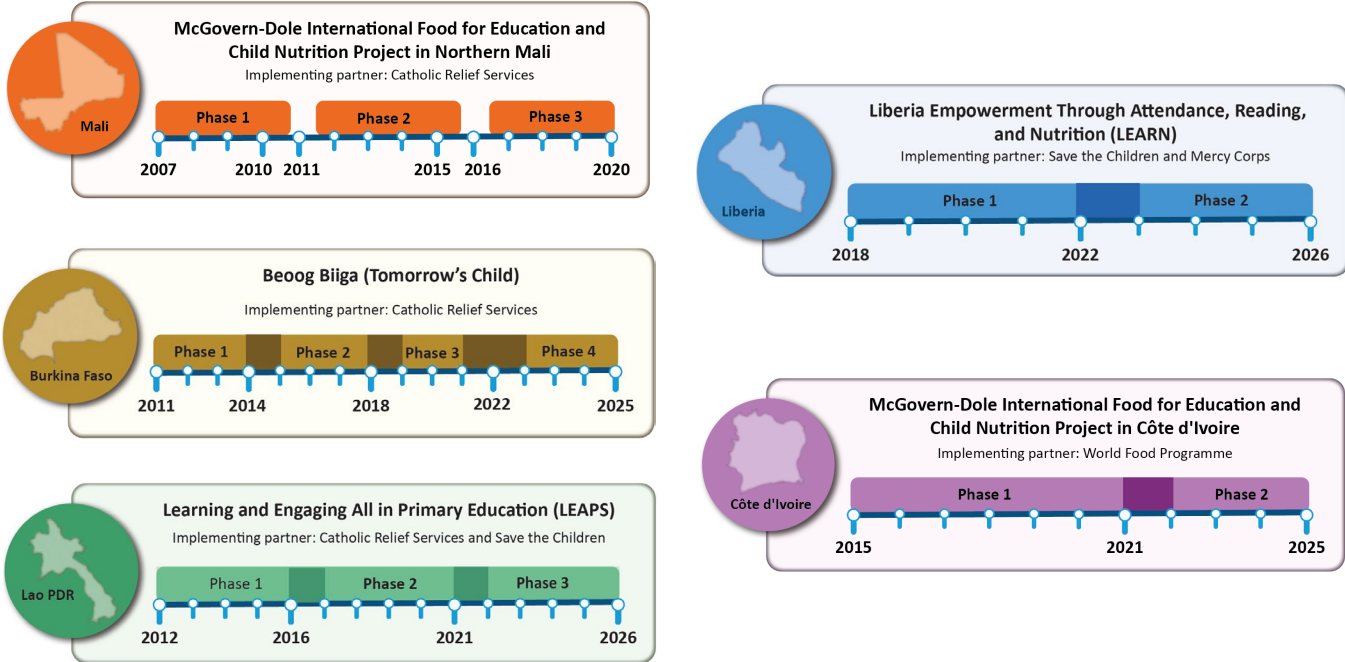
In accordance with the USDA Food Assistance Division’s Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, external evaluators evaluate all MGD FFE programs against five dimensions: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. With regard to sustainability, the policy mandates that programs be assessed based on “the likelihood that the benefits of the project will endure over time after the completion of the project” and “the extent to which the project has planned for the continuation of project activities, developed local ownership for the project, and developed sustainable partnerships.”⁷

⁶ McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, A Learning Agenda, February 18, 2016.

⁷ https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_mande_policy_feb_2019.pdf

To answer our research questions, we analyzed findings from evaluations (Exhibit 1) conducted in Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Lao PDR, Liberia, and Mali, with a focus on the sustainability component. All five countries received at least two phases of MGD FFE funding,⁸ and several countries were receiving their third and fourth phases of program support therefore we can explore sustainability initiatives over time. We conducted a content analysis of findings and recommendations from the evaluations—primarily focusing on the qualitative analysis from focus group discussions and key informant interviews—to identify common themes and divergences across the programs. We grouped data based on strategies and approaches to promote sustainability, promising practices, common challenges, and key recommendations. We analyzed data from baseline, midline, and endline evaluations to determine whether approaches and strategies appeared to be successful over time and whether conditions such as stakeholder support or external factors, such as COVID-19, affected the potential for sustainability. Although our analysis focused primarily on qualitative data, where possible, we explored quantitative results related to sustainability. However, our analysis was limited, as sustainability indicators and measurement tools varied across programs.

Exhibit 1. MGD FFE Programs Included in Our Sample



⁸ MGD FFE program funding is typically for a 4- to 5-year period of performance. USDA assesses and prioritizes countries for funding each year based on whether countries have “demonstrated significant need, a national government commitment to school feeding programs, and shared views on global food security, agricultural sustainability, and key international initiatives (such as the School Meals Coalition).” <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/mcgovern-dole-food-education-program>

Findings

We present our findings by first highlighting common strategies and approaches used for promoting sustainability. We then explore which of these approaches show promise for sustainability. We conclude by discussing challenges that consistently threaten sustainability.

Strategies and Approaches for Promoting Sustainability

USDA takes both a top-down and bottom-up approach to promoting sustainability. At the top, MGD FFE programs collaborate with national governments to “develop and implement long-term strategies, policies, and regulatory frameworks” to support national school meals programs and activities to promote education, literacy, and nutrition. Working from the bottom up, MGD FFE programs partner with local communities, including parents and families, school staff and administrators, community members, and local farmers to encourage their involvement in education activities and strengthen their capacity to invest in,

support, and manage school meals programs.⁹ For example, in Lao PDR, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Sports at the national level to

Exhibit 2. MGD FFE Foundational Results

1 Increased capacity of government institutions

2 Improved policy and regulatory framework

3 Increased government support

4 Increased engagement of local organizations and community groups

better define the size and scope of the National School Meals Program, improve coordination among relevant government ministries, and identify funding needs and advocate for funding allocations within the national budget. At the local level, CRS trains Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) to manage the school meals program, develops relationships with local farmers and producers to increase the availability of fresh produce, and trains cooks in preparing nutritious meals.¹⁰ This two-pronged approach to sustainability is reflected in the MGD FFE results framework, which recognizes that all programs must contribute to four foundational results (Exhibit 2). How programs and implementing partners achieve these results is based on the country context and program design. However, in examining the five programs, we found common approaches to support improved literacy and nutrition outcomes.

Literacy. From a sustainability perspective, the goal of the MGD FFE programs is to improve the capacity of governments in host countries to design, implement, and monitor initiatives that support improved literacy. This includes initiatives that address literacy instruction itself, such as developing,

⁹ The Global Effort to Reduce Child Hunger and Increase School Attendance, McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, Report to the United States Congress, Fiscal Year 2015.

¹⁰ LEAPS III USDA Agreement Activities Attachment

revising, or assessing the effectiveness of national-level policies for literacy instruction or developing and implementing common standards for teacher training and professional development. This also includes activities focused on improving the learning environment for students, such as developing culturally relevant and appropriate learning materials, organizing extracurricular events to promote reading, and improving the physical conditions of the school environment. To promote improved literacy, MGD FFE programs employ the following strategies and approaches, among others:

School administrator and teacher training—School administrators and teachers receive training in country-specific literacy approaches and curricula as well as essential teaching skills such as classroom management and gender-based policies. Trainings are complemented with resources and support services, such as mentorship programs, to promote knowledge transfer and continued capacity building within schools.

Literacy champions—The program implementers select and train teachers to serve as literacy champions. Such literacy champions are responsible for planning, managing, and monitoring school- and community-level literacy activities such as book banks, reading clubs, and reading camps. The intent is for literacy champions to cascade the training and knowledge they receive from the program by coaching other teachers, both at their school and in neighboring schools, in how to manage school- and community-based literacy activities.

Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)— Program implementers also identify or, when needed, establish PTAs to support community ownership of program activities including literacy activities, school meals, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition initiatives. Program implementers train PTA members in community mobilization, program planning and management, and advocacy to support different program components.

School Management Committees (SMCs)— Program implementers identify or, when needed, establish SMCs to support school-level initiatives, such as creating community scoreboards, building school libraries, or making infrastructure improvements. SMCs receive training in participatory school management, administrative and financial management, and monitoring and evaluation. As part of these trainings, MGD FFE programs work with SMCs to build their capacity to develop and submit education action plans to government stakeholders to advocate for their local education needs.

Government capacity building—National-, regional-, and local-level government stakeholders receive training in country-specific literacy approaches and curricula as well as in how to measure and monitor progress toward improving literacy outcomes. These trainings are accompanied by resources and other materials that can be shared to increase knowledge across different levels of government. In addition to training, MGD FFE programs provide hands-on mentorship support to government officials, including through field visits and joint monitoring efforts, to strengthen their capacity to monitor school administration, teacher performance, and adherence to literacy instruction materials.

School feeding. From a sustainability perspective, the goal is for MGD FFE programs to transfer ownership and management of the school meals program to the host country’s government and local communities. This includes ensuring that the government allocates financial and human resources to implement and monitor the school meals program and that communities have the capacity and mechanisms in place to oversee and manage the program at the local level. Understanding that, in most country contexts, the government will not have the resources to fully fund the school meals program, local communities are expected to augment the program through contributions, both financial and in-kind (e.g., contributing rice, vegetables, other staples; contributing kitchen and cooking supplies; and providing labor to support the maintenance and rehabilitation of storage facilities and kitchens). In most countries, the handover process is implemented gradually, with implementing partners phasing out the provision of commodities and management support. To facilitate sustainability and the handover process, MGD FFE programs employ the following strategies and approaches, among others:

School gardens/collective fields—MGD FFE programs work with school administrators and community members to set up and maintain school gardens and collective fields to augment food provided by USDA and recipient country governments for the school meals program. School gardens are a collaborative initiative between schools and community members, including PTAs, parent volunteers, local leadership, and government stakeholders. Those engaged in managing the school gardens receive training in creating a school garden plan as well as improved agricultural practices and techniques, crop selection, and garden management; in some country contexts, they are connected to agricultural extension services that provide additional training and inputs.

Government capacity building—National, regional, and local government counterparts receive training in how to implement and manage school meals programs. This includes training in “commodity handling, storage, and distribution as well as accounting and reporting.”¹¹ In addition to training, many MGD FFE programs provide hands-on mentorship opportunities such as “ride-alongs” and joint monitoring visits to build the capacity of government stakeholders to monitor implementation activities. MGD FFE programs also work with government stakeholders to advocate for increased funding for school meals in the national budget.

Local and regional procurement—MGD FFE programs identify and work with local and regional farmer cooperatives and suppliers to procure goods from the local market to augment food provided by USDA and recipient country governments for the school meals program. USDA encourages implementing partners to allocate at least 10% of the total budget to local and regional procurement to promote sustainability.

Savings and lending groups—Community savings and lending groups are identified or established to improve the financial capacity of parents and community members to support education initiatives

¹¹ LEARN Activity Description

and contribute to the school meals programs. MDG FFE programs train these groups in financial literacy, saving, and lending to support household-level economic resilience and broader income generation among community members.

School/community management committees—Community structures are identified or established to serve as community management committees to oversee and manage the school meals program. Committees receive training and capacity building in management, advocacy, planning, and accountability.¹² Committees collaborate with other school and community structures, such as PTAs and farmer cooperatives, to develop, implement, and monitor action plans for community contributions. Depending on the country context, committees also collaborate with representatives from the local governments, including the countries’ Ministries of Education, Ministries of Health, and Ministries of Agriculture, to advocate for budget provisions to support school feeding.

Exhibit 3. Sustainability Activities by Project

Components	Details/Description	Burkina Faso	Cote d’Ivoire	Lao PDR	Liberia	Mali
Literacy	Training and capacity building of teachers and school administrators	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Literacy champions/reading clubs				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Parent-teacher associations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Mentorships	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	School management committees			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Government capacity building	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
School Feeding	Collective fields and school gardens		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Government capacity building			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Local and regional procurement				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Savings groups/income generation strategies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Community management committees			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

¹² LEARN Activity Description

Promising Approaches for Promoting Sustainability

Although the context in which each MGD FFE program is implemented is unique and requires a tailored implementation and sustainability plan, our analysis revealed that there are some promising approaches that may contribute to sustainability and graduation across different contexts.

Leveraging community-based structures can promote the sustainability of education initiatives and the school meals program and improve nutrition and WASH. MGD FFE partners engage in a variety of community structures, including PTAs, SMCs, and VEDCs, depending on the specific country context and program design (Exhibit 4).

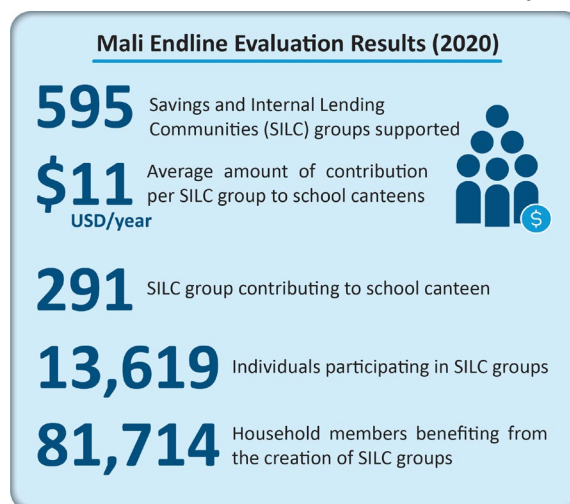
Although the composition and responsibilities of the community structures may vary between contexts, overall, they are noted as playing an important role in promoting sustainability for several reasons. First, using the training and capacity-building support received, these community structures can organize and support the management of education initiatives, the school meals program, and nutrition and WASH initiatives. At the school level, these structures can mobilize funds to pay volunteer teachers, cooks, and storekeepers; coordinate infrastructure maintenance and improvements, most notably maintenance of WASH facilities; and supervise school gardens, among other things. Second, because of their position within the communities, these structures can leverage their knowledge and relationships with community stakeholders, including parents and local leaders, to ensure that program initiatives are culturally relevant and appropriate, which, in turn, increases uptake. This includes working with local stakeholders to develop community contribution mechanisms that align with community resources and needs; working with the program to develop culturally relevant WASH messaging; and sensitizing parents on the importance of education by appealing to barriers affecting access to education in their communities.

Savings and lending groups are effective mechanisms to support school initiatives at the community and household levels. At the school and community levels, PTAs and community

Exhibit 4. Community based structures leveraged by each program

MGD programs supported local communities through capacity building, training, and grants.	Laos	Mali	Burkina Faso	Liberia
PTAs/school governance structures supported	853	350	271	217
Management committees trained	350	2,790		
Grants provided to management committees	80	127		

Exhibit 5. Mali Endline Evaluation Results (2020)



management committees can leverage savings and lending groups to raise funds to pay for school initiatives including school meals programs; paying volunteer teachers, cooks, and storekeepers; and rehabilitating WASH, food storage, and classroom infrastructure (Exhibit 5). At the household level, households can use income generated through savings and lending groups to fulfill community contribution requirements for school meals programs. In addition to helping support school initiatives, data show that participation in savings and lending groups can help parents save money for their children's school fees and improve their livelihood, including their income, assets, and food security.¹³ The benefits of participating in savings and lending groups extend beyond financial resources, as the financial knowledge gained through trainings and participation in these activities is expected to last after the project ends and help with sustaining both school-based initiatives and general household well-being.

Livelihood and income-generating activities show strong potential for promoting the sustainability of the school meals program. Collective fields, school gardens, and women's productive groups (WPGs) were noted as promising strategies to support school meals programs for two reasons. First, the school meals program can use crops grown by communities to augment the food provided by the government. Second, these crops can be sold in the local market to generate income that can then be used to purchase food, such as vegetables, and other necessary items, such as condiments, plates, and cutlery, for use in the school meals programs. In both instances, the collective fields, school gardens, and WPGs help provide culturally appropriate foods and contribute to meal diversification, which is critical given that, in most cases, the food provided by the government consists of grains or staples that do not satisfy all nutritional requirements. In some countries, collective fields and WPGs have identified creative ways to create additional income streams, providing income to members to support household expenses, including education and nutrition expenses.



Program Highlight: In Cote d'Ivoire, WFP supported 50 Women's Productive Groups (WPGs), which contributed vegetables to the school canteens and diversified the nutritional content of school meals. In addition to canteen contributions, the WPGs generated extra income renting out farming equipment to community members, providing a needed service to small farmers in their community. Using this additional income, WPGs were able to support other initiatives such as buying handwashing devices for schools in their communities.

¹³ Mali FFE Midline Evaluation



Program Highlight: In Burkina Faso, mentors shared their experiences with neighboring communities. Stakeholders noted that villages not receiving program support had started their own initiatives and mentorship programs based on the information and lessons learned from project mentors.

Identifying champions of change to support improved teaching and learning approaches is an effective way to sustain knowledge transfer and expand the reach of the FFE program. Approaches focused on identifying and building the capacity of champions of change to cascade skills were noted as being the most likely to support the sustainability of literacy initiatives. Approaches varied based on the country context and included peer-to-peer training, mentorship, and literacy champions, among others. The commonality across these approaches is the concept of individual teachers serving as advocates for change within their schools and the broader community. These types of approaches were noted as sustainable because they are low to no cost and can be replicated by the individuals themselves to enhance sustainability and reach.¹⁴

Challenges to Promoting Sustainability

Although our analysis revealed that there are promising approaches for promoting sustainability, there are also some common challenges and barriers that MGD FFE programs need to address to ensure program sustainability and graduation from the program.

Communities' inability to make contributions to support education or school meals programs. Across all our evaluations, school feeding programs were identified as an impactful intervention that was critical in encouraging school attendance and improving nutritional status. Despite consensus on the importance of these programs, stakeholders expressed concern over their sustainability. Although stakeholders were positive about strides made at the national level, such as the inclusion of school meals programs in national-level policies and budgets, they expressed concern over the ability of communities to provide consistent and reliable contributions to the program. Economic hardship, environment shocks, and the impact of COVID-19 were all cited as challenges that could impede the ability of households to make either financial or in-kind contributions to school meals programs. Although some MGD FFE programs are attempting to mitigate challenges faced at the household level by working with local suppliers and farming cooperatives and organizing collective farms and school gardens, these stakeholders also face challenges. For example, local suppliers face challenges related to inflation and continued economic hardship from COVID-19, which is causing many suppliers to terminate or not engage in agreements to supply goods for school meals. Collective farms and school gardens, while a potential resource to sustain the program, are not producing enough to sufficiently supplement the rations provided by the government. In addition, production challenges are

¹⁴ BB3 Endline

complicated by land access and rights issues as well as environmental events and the impact of climate change. Due to these challenges, many stakeholders noted that even if they were able to sustain school meals, they would not be able to provide food in the same quantity or quality that the MGD FFE program provides.

Insufficient resources to continue monitoring the implementation of school meals programs and literacy initiatives. Due to budgetary, human resources, and logistical constraints, stakeholders fear that government officials will not be able to provide the necessary monitoring and follow-up to ensure the sustainability of education initiatives and school meals programs. Without regular monitoring and follow-up, it will be difficult to determine whether handover has been successful and whether communities are able to provide the necessary contributions required by many of the government policies related to school meals programs. Monitoring education initiatives can reinforce the implementation of what teachers have learned from trainings as it holds teachers accountable while also providing needed feedback and guidance; however, without regular monitoring, it may be hard to reinforce these concepts. Ensure the implementation of the initiatives is especially important because stakeholders fear that staff turnover at schools will result in a lack of knowledge transfer after the program ends.

Lack of clarity around sustainability plans and processes. Although each MGD FFE program must have an articulated sustainability plan with associated indicators and targets, stakeholders noted that there is a lack of clarity among local actors regarding their roles and responsibilities with regard to sustainability and handover. This is particularly true among community-based structures when it comes to roles and responsibilities related to sustaining the school meals programs. Stakeholders also expressed concern about who would sustain the literacy trainings and capacity building as well as how the provision of teaching and learning materials would continue given the resource constraints that schools and households face. This lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities leaves many stakeholders feeling unprepared to take over program components. Stakeholders noted that they need additional training and capacity building to overcome this challenge.¹⁵



Program Highlight: To assess and monitor school preparedness for sustainability and help clarify stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in the handover process, in Lao PDR, Catholic Relief Services adapted the WFP Community Capacity Assessment (CCA) tool to identify and track key indicators on school infrastructure, community contributions, and VEDC functionality and management capabilities.





¹⁵ LEAPS II Endline

Next Steps

Although there is no one-size-fits-all sustainability plan to ensure MGD FFE recipient countries graduate from USDA support, based on our analysis of sustainability efforts across five countries, we provide the following suggestions for USDA and its implementing partners' consideration on how to enhance and further sustainability efforts.

Expand local and regional procurement commitments. In line with USDA's commitment to prioritize local and regional procurement, and given the challenges around community contributions, USDA and its implementing partners should expand their local and regional procurement commitments. To do this, USDA and its implementing partners could start by conducting a comprehensive market assessment to identify and develop a roster of local and regional producers and suppliers that could support the school meals program. This assessment should include an analysis of land access, land rights, and potential environmental impacts in the program areas to identify any potential challenges that could impede procurement. Additionally, while some public-private partnerships already exist (Exhibit 6), the market assessment may also explore potential partnerships that could be leveraged to support the producers and suppliers. USDA and its implementing partners could use the findings of the market assessment to help facilitate connections between local suppliers, the government, and community management committees.

Exhibit 6. Value and number of public-private partnerships leveraged by each country

<p>MGD programs made strides in developing public-private partnerships but should expand those opportunities to further promote sustainability.</p>	 <p>Laos</p>	 <p>Mali</p>	 <p>Burkina Faso</p>	 <p>Liberia</p>
	<p>Value of public-private partnerships leveraged</p>	<p>\$134k</p>	<p>\$1.4 million</p>	<p>\$5.4 million</p>
<p>Public-private partnerships formed</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>33</p>	<p>1</p>

Increase communication and coordination with government and local stakeholders. Given the lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities with regard to sustainability and handover, USDA and its implementing partners should increase their communication and coordination with government and local stakeholders. This may include a joint effort by the government and communities themselves to develop a sustainability strategy that aligns with local resources, needs, and priorities. This collaboration would allow programs to identify existing capacities as well as gaps that they could use to

more accurately tailor training and capacity strengthening activities. It would also allow programs to develop resources and materials to support continued implementation.

Continue to identify and support income-generating activities. Despite community enthusiasm and interest in sustaining MGD FFE program initiatives, community members' inability to provide consistent and reliable contributions to the school meals programs poses a serious threat to sustainability. Although households may be able to support the program during specific times of the year (e.g., during harvest when food plentiful and community member income is higher), economic hardships may prevent community members from making consistent contributions. Given the promising findings concerning income-generating activities, USDA and its implementing partners should continue to identify and expand these activities as part of the program design. This may include conducting feasibility studies to determine the livelihood opportunities and capacities within the program area to make sure the proposed income-generating activities are leveraging local resources while providing creative and new approaches to support households.

Partner with local universities to strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) capacity and evidence generation. A potential sustainability challenge noted in several of the countries was the ability of the government to continue monitoring initiatives, both literacy initiatives and school meals implementation, after funding for the program ends. This is a financial challenge (e.g., governments not having enough funding to support frequent monitoring visits), a human resources challenge (e.g., not having enough staff or staff with the right skill sets to conduct monitoring visits), and an infrastructure challenge (e.g., the current monitoring systems are too complex for the government to maintain). USDA and its implementing partners should consider partnering with local universities to strengthen their capacity to assist the government in either directly monitoring implementation on behalf of the government or providing future capacity-building support to the government to help them improve their internal monitoring systems and processes.

Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify sustainability champions who can support initiatives after funding for the program ends. Given the success that MGD FFE programs have demonstrated over the past two decades, stakeholders have expressed their interest and hope that the initiatives will continue after the programs end. However, our analysis found that sustainability is most promising when there are key stakeholders driving the success that MGD FFE programs have demonstrated. USDA and its implementing partners should consider conducting stakeholder mapping exercises as part of their sustainability planning efforts to identify stakeholders within existing infrastructures who could support the continuation of program initiatives. This would include stakeholders at the national, provincial, local, school, and community level. This mapping would include an assessment of the

resources available to these stakeholders, the potential allies they could engage, and the potential barriers that they may encounter.

Contact

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