

# The Global Food For Education Pilot Program: Final Report



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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WITH

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# THE GLOBAL FOOD FOR EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM: FINAL REPORT

## SUMMARY



Albania

Between September 2001 and December 2003, the Global Food for Education (GFE) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), fed nearly seven million children through 48 school feeding projects in 38 countries. The United States allocated \$300 million in resources to establish this pilot program and support education in developing countries, particularly in countries committed to universal education for their children.

The GFE program resulted in higher school enrollment and improved access to education for girls. In projects involving about 4,000 participating schools, the World Food Program (WFP) reported an overall enrollment increase of 10.4 percent, with an 11.7-percent increase in enrollment of girls. Projects operated by private voluntary organizations (PVOs) reported an overall enrollment increase of just over six percent in GFE-participating schools. In some projects, increases were as high as 32 percent compared with enrollment levels during the previous three years.

According to reports from teachers and school administrators, GFE school feeding projects also boosted daily attendance and helped focus attention on the quality of education, including good health, hygiene, and nutrition practices. Project monitors, parents, and focus groups routinely noted improved energy, classroom participation, and student performance after children began receiving nutritious school meals.

For individual schools and entire communities, GFE projects proved to be a catalyst for change, resulting in additional benefits beyond those directly related to the program's initial goals. These benefits included increases in local employment and economic activity, greater community participation in local infrastructure and other improvement projects, and more involvement by parents in local schools and their children's education.

The GFE program also encouraged the involvement of other donors and local networks, including parent-teacher groups, to support feeding programs and assume greater responsibility for local education. Complementary donations from other organizations during the GFE program totaled almost \$1 billion, supporting activities such as training in HIV/AIDS prevention, the improvement of school gardens to promote self-reliance, and the construction of classrooms, school kitchens, water systems, and sanitation facilities.

Today, USDA is applying many of the lessons and best practices learned from the pilot GFE program in administering the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, which was authorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.



**Dominican Republic**

## INTRODUCTION

An estimated 120 million children around the world do not attend school, in part because of hunger or malnourishment. The majority of these children are girls. Education is a path to upward mobility that can help poor children improve their standard of living, while also helping poor nations develop more productive, self-reliant economies. Research suggests that school meals bring more children into school, keep them coming back each day, and make it easier for them to learn.<sup>1</sup> The United States has long been committed to providing school meals for children of low-income American families.

“Missing school meant losing the chance to eat.”  
*Luz Eliana, Bolivia*

Under the pilot GFE program, this commitment was extended to millions of children in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, building on ideas promoted by former Senators George McGovern and Robert Dole. USDA provided surplus commodities, as well as funds to cover commodity transportation and distribution, to the WFP, 13 PVOs, and one national government (Dominican Republic). These organizations then used the commodities in 48 USDA-approved school feeding projects in 38 countries, feeding nearly seven million children between September 2001 and December 2003. The goal was to bring more children into school by providing them with a nutritious meal or take-home ration.

USDA provided technical assistance to the projects and was responsible for monitoring and evaluation. In February 2003, USDA issued a preliminary review of program implementation and impact. This final report updates the preliminary review, focusing on program accomplishments, evaluation results, and outcomes, as well as best practices and lessons learned. Final reports on individual projects, as submitted by the organizations conducting those projects, are available on the Foreign Agricultural Service/USDA web site at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/excredits/FoodAid/FFE/gfe/2004/index.html>. The individual project reports document each project’s impact on student enrollment, attendance, and performance; on the communities served; and on the educational environment of schools.



**Bolivia**

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Levinger, Beryl. 1986. “School Feeding Programs in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Actual and Potential Impact” in *U.S. Agency for International Development Evaluation Special Study, No. 30*; Ahmed, Akhter U. and Billah, K. 1994 “Food for Education Program in Bangladesh: An Early Assessment” IFPRI, Bangladesh Food Policy Project; Del Rosso, Joy Miller and Marek, Tonia. 1996. “Class Action, Improving School Performance in the Developing World through Better Health and Nutrition” The World Bank, Washington; and many more.

## PROJECT GOALS AND IMPACTS

The goals of the pilot GFE program were to establish pre-school and school feeding projects in developing countries to improve enrollment and attendance, particularly for girls, and to enhance the nutritional well-being and learning ability of the children involved.

The pilot GFE program reached nearly seven million beneficiaries, including around five million children through projects administered by the WFP and two million children through projects conducted by a number of PVOs and the government of the Dominican Republic. These numbers, however, reflect only those children who were actually fed through the program. In many cases, benefits also went to additional children within the families, and to the community as a whole.

For this final report, USDA was able to gather preliminary and follow-up data from 460 schools in 21 PVO country projects, and the WFP compiled data on about 4,000 schools in 23 countries. Both the WFP and the PVOs used the same standardized questionnaire to collect data. Additional information on evaluation methodology is available in the February 2003 preliminary GFE report, which can be found on the FAS/USDA web site at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/excredits/FoodAid/FFE/gfe/congress2003/index.html>.

## ENROLLMENT INCREASES

In order to evaluate the GFE pilot projects, USDA used official enrollment figures reported by the head teacher to the appropriate ministry or department responsible for collecting such information. Based on these records, overall enrollment in GFE-participating schools increased by 10.4 percent for WFP projects and 6.04 percent for PVO projects. The greatest increases were documented in areas with serious food deficits and previously low enrollment levels.



Albania

Enrollment increases were reported in all countries with available data except Vietnam, where flooding impeded enrollment, and Uganda, where children's access to schools was blocked by war and rebel activity.

Detailed information on enrollment changes on a project-by-project basis is presented in tabular form at the end of this report. Although the enrollment data is consistent with observations and believed to be generally reliable, official records reported by head teachers may be distorted by errors or even misrepresentation, reflecting pressure on schools to increase educational subsidies by reporting higher numbers.

## ATTENDANCE RATE INCREASES

School attendance was the most difficult GFE indicator to reliably measure and document because of differences in how schools define and record attendance. Although accurate, consistent attendance data was not available, program monitors received feedback through focus group discussions and reports by teachers, school administrators, parents, and students. All projects repeatedly confirmed that attendance rates increased after the feeding began. School officials and program monitors found this qualitative evidence to be significant and compelling. It is also consistent with the findings of rigorous studies on the relationship between school feeding and attendance.

## PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENTS

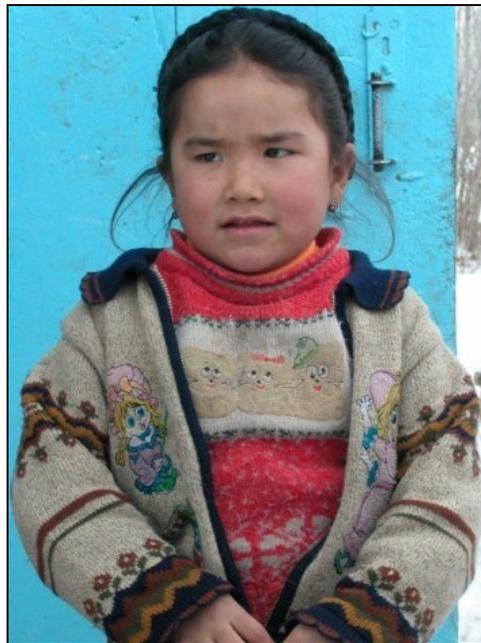
Every organization and program monitor from both the WFP- and the PVO-administered projects reported that students receiving food at school performed better. These conclusions were based on focus group reports and direct observations that students receiving meals concentrated better, demonstrated improved attitudes toward learning, comprehended subject matter faster, and were more energetic. Teachers, school administrators, and parents immediately noted changes in the children when the feeding projects began. The contrast in attention span and behavior before and after feeding was particularly dramatic in cases where the projects started in the middle of a school year.

To quantitatively measure performance indicators, data should be collected over a long period of time. Because of the relatively short duration of the pilot program, long-term measurements are not available. Nevertheless, the qualitative data gathered from school communities and parents who interacted with students on a daily basis, and corroborated by those who visited the schools, supported the conclusion of improved performance associated with school feeding.

## SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIRLS

The GFE program positively impacted school enrollment and access for girls. WFP-administered programs reported an 11.7-percent increase in the enrollment of girls, and PVO-administered programs reported an increase of 5.7 percent.

Both the WFP and the PVOs used take-home rations as an incentive to parents to allow their daughters to attend classes. Basic food items, such as a sack of rice or several liters of vegetable oil, were distributed to families in exchange for allowing their daughters to attend school and to



Kyrgyzstan

compensate parents for the loss of the daughter's labor. The PVOs used take-home rations as part of the feeding projects in Benin, Honduras, Uganda, and Yemen. The WFP operated such programs in Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Nepal, Pakistan, and Uganda.

## OTHER PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

**COMMUNITIES UNITED AND ENERGIZED:** The introduction of a GFE project into a community required the participation of local support organizations for schools, such as parent-teacher groups. In areas without such organizations or with weak organizations, communities were encouraged to unite and energize themselves. Dormant organizations were revived and given a purpose, resulting in increased community participation and active involvement in decision-making and problem solving. Previously, parents had often felt powerless and voiceless, lacking the resources and organizational tools to play a role in the education of their children. Organizational involvement in feeding their children and seeing the impact of that feeding empowered parents, benefiting the schools, developing local leadership, and mobilizing communities to launch educational and other local improvement projects. Although the established goals of the GFE program had not included the transformation of communities and schools, these positive impacts should be recognized.

**LOCAL ECONOMIES STIMULATED:** The introduction of GFE resources stimulated national and local economies in all participating countries. The construction, repair, and maintenance of food storage and preparation facilities at feeding sites, as well as the offloading, delivery, storage, and processing of commodities, created thousands of new jobs. Some of these added jobs were sustainable beyond the completion of the GFE program because of new businesses, new demand, and new markets that developed.



Cambodia

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IMPROVED:** Just as the GFE program stimulated jobs and community involvement, it also brought increased attention to the quality of education in the schools served. Private organizations, community members, and parents involved with food delivery and administration in the schools noted the need for other educational interventions, from improving classrooms and playgrounds to supplying more books and other learning tools. These groups routinely took action to



Honduras

provide what was lacking, recognizing that while feeding the children was critical to improve learning, many other factors also have an impact.

### **GOOD HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND NUTRITION PRACTICES REINFORCED:**

Health and nutrition were integral links between school feeding and improving the children's quality of life and learning. The steps taken to integrate health, nutrition, and hygiene education included: conducting de-worming programs in areas where needed; implementing water and sanitation programs in areas where there was no access to clean water or to

sanitation systems; and educating parents and students on nutrition as well as hygienic food handling practices.

**DONOR BASE EXPANDED AS OTHER CONTRIBUTORS STEP FORWARD:** As intended, the GFE program attracted other donor organizations and initiated local networks that can eventually sustain feeding programs without continued U.S. assistance. Parents and local contributors were trained in small grants management, canteen operations, inventory control, and fund-raising techniques. Parent-teacher groups assumed greater responsibility for the children's education, and communities united to resolve long-standing educational issues. Teachers became more accountable to the community, and their attendance markedly improved.

All WFP-administered projects and more than half of the PVO projects leveraged other donor resources. For example, in its 2002 Tanzania school feeding project, WFP secured the equivalent of \$5.5 million from the Japanese government through the United Nations Human Security Trust Fund. These funds supported activities to complement the school meals, including HIV/AIDS training in coordination with UNICEF; improvement of school gardens to promote local self-reliance and sustainability; and the construction or improvement of classrooms and water/sanitation systems to accommodate increased enrollment levels. Other donations to WFP school feeding projects during the two years of GFE totaled almost \$1 billion.

The PVOs reported more than \$15 million in local and outside donor support, which helped fund complementary programs in health, water, sanitation, agriculture, nutrition, teacher training, and the environment. Also contributing to the success of these projects were in-kind contributions from parents and community members, and substantial support from local and national ministries of health and education in the host countries. Parents and communities often contributed local foods and kitchen or construction labor, and host governments provided funds, services, or both.

## LESSONS LEARNED, BEST PRACTICES TO SHARE



Vietnam

Governments of developing nations, as well as the international education and food aid community, can take advantage of lessons learned and best practices identified through GFE and other food for education programs. These lessons and practices can be replicated in future projects. The following four areas capture the collective experiences of all funded projects and cover the actions taken when implementing or complementing school feeding programs.

### 1) Strengthening program sustainability:

- Target areas within a country where food is scarce to achieve the greatest improvements in enrollment, attendance, and community involvement.
- Involve host governments and local entities early in the planning and implementation of the program to ensure a continuing commitment.
- Leverage resources from multiple donors to build upon existing development programs in the targeted area.
- Involve parents and community members in supporting local schools and to increase their commitment to education.
- Require counterpart contributions from parents and/or municipalities.
- Plan for a phase out. The transition toward sustainability and the cessation of assistance should be a part of the initial program design.



Bangladesh

### 2) Using food creatively to support educational programs:

- Offer take-home rations to offset the potential loss of income to families when their children attend school.
- Use food-for-work projects to improve school and community infrastructure.
- Provide food package “payments” to teachers for acceptable levels of attendance.

- Use meal preparation training as an opportunity to educate parents on nutrition and to introduce new foods and recipes. Also educate parents on proper hygiene, sanitation, and environmentally sound and cost-effective cooking practices.
- Establish school gardens to raise new and nutritious produce to augment meals and to introduce nutritious foods, educating parents and children on agricultural production that may sustain them in the future.
- Barter commodities for nutritious variations in diet.
- Promote complementary municipal purchases of local products to stimulate local agricultural production and the local economy.
- Establish income-generating projects, such as poultry raising, egg production, or planting a specific crop such as potatoes, and channel some of the proceeds or surpluses back to the schools.

### 3) Involving parents and local government in support of schools:

- Organize and train parent-teacher organizations to leverage additional resources and make school improvements on their own initiative.
- Encourage parent-teacher and community organizations to take over many responsibilities traditionally carried out by teachers alone, thus freeing the teachers to concentrate on their students.
- Involve local and national government officials in community events and program promotion to maintain governmental support and good public relations.



Uganda

### 4) Integrating health, nutrition, and environmental education:

- Recognize that because multiple issues affect school attendance and performance, a successful project must consist of several integrated components, involving families, communities, and teachers.
- Incorporate complementary health, water, sanitation, and infrastructure interventions.
- Promote solar water disinfection (SODIS) education and de-worming programs where needed.
- Hold “community fairs” to expose the entire community to health, nutrition, dental hygiene, and food safety education, and to promote good environmental and agricultural practices.

## AREAS FOR FUTURE FOCUS

Based on USDA's experience with the pilot GFE program, six areas merit increased attention or emphasis in food for education programs.

### 1) Targeting girls:

The GFE program had good overall success in benefiting females, although some projects were less successful in reaching this target group. In most countries, the dropout rate for female students begins to rise in fifth grade and continues to increase into secondary school. Future projects should concentrate on effective methods to reach this segment of the population.



Dominican Republic

### 2) Addressing gender equity:

Observations in the field and reports from PVOs are mixed. Under the GFE program, women became community leaders for the first time ever in certain areas. In other cases, however, women appeared to be doing most of the volunteering in food preparation and management. In Eritrea, only the girls were observed carrying food to the schools. Other projects did develop gender equity curriculums and reached out to both males and females in the community to support the program. All projects need to address this area consistently.

### 3) Improving data collection and baseline planning:

Baseline data was often found to be inadequate or inaccurate for a number of reasons. With the exception of the WFP-assisted schools, which were previously monitored and required to keep such records by WFP, schools did not have an infrastructure in place to gather this information prior to the introduction of the program. In many cases, school officials felt pressure from local and national administrations to present attendance and enrollment records in such a way as to qualify the schools for certain subsidies or other forms of assistance. As a result, the baseline information was sometimes inflated, skewing the comparisons necessary to accurately assess the impact of a GFE project. Before feeding begins in future programs, teachers and school administrators should be trained on proper record-keeping procedures for enrollment and attendance.

### 4) Planning commodity use:

Evaluators found that the donated commodities have a greater impact when they directly reach the beneficiaries. In many countries, when the commodities were

introduced to the local market, prices came in lower than anticipated due to market fluctuations, resulting in inadequate funding to meet project goals.

**5) Expediting commodity deliveries:**

Delayed commodity deliveries disrupt project planning, create false expectations, and disappoint the community. Delaying project implementation also has a negative effect on enrollment and attendance. USDA, transportation companies, and feeding program operators should work individually and collectively to emphasize on-time delivery.



Benin

**6) Planning the exit strategy:**

Establishing a clear exit strategy from the start is of paramount importance to the sustainability of a project. Organizations submitting proposals for participation in the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program are required to specify how they intend to phase out their involvement, turning control over to the host government or local entities. Cooperating sponsors such as International Partnership for Human Development in Moldova, Mercy Corps in Kyrgyzstan, and the government of the Dominican Republic have demonstrated their commitment to this concept and set an example of how to pursue an exit strategy in other projects. The World Food Program conducted an in-depth study and has issued new guidance on planning for sustainability and the phasing out of external aid for school feeding projects.



Uganda

# GFE Projects Conducted by Private Voluntary Organizations

## Numbers Enrolled and Average Change in Enrollment

PVO PROJECTS	No. of Male Students	MALES	No. of Female Students	FEMALES	No. of Total Students	TOTAL CHANGE
<b>CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA</b>						
Bolivia (two projects)	110,880	5.51%	109,120	5.08%	220,000	5.29%
Dominican Republic	25,636	4.31%	22,364	4.30%	48,000	4.31%
Guatemala (two projects)	50,208	7.10%	46,056	5.34%	96,264	6.10%
Honduras	2,943	11.60%	2,785	13.82%	5,728	12.63%
Nicaragua	10,161	17.43%	9,839	10.22%	20,000	13.33%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>199,828</b>	<b>6.45%</b>	<b>190,164</b>	<b>5.45%</b>	<b>389,992</b>	<b>5.89%</b>
<b>ASIA</b>						
Bangladesh	114,776	27.70%	105,578	20.00%	220,354	24.00%
Kyrgyzstan	29,799	2.62%	30,201	2.92%	60,000	1.92%
Vietnam	173,011	-3.62%	156,989	-4.32%	330,000	-3.96%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>317,586</b>	<b>8.28%</b>	<b>292,768</b>	<b>5.20%</b>	<b>610,354</b>	<b>6.71%</b>
<b>EAST AFRICA AND MIDDLE EAST</b>						
Eritrea	35,350	9.20%	21,143	12.12%	56,493	10.09%
Lebanon	6,274	5.17%	6,726	2.70%	13,000	3.81%
Uganda	20,962	-6.53%	22,038	-5.37%	43,000	-5.94%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>62,586</b>	<b>3.65%</b>	<b>49,907</b>	<b>3.13%</b>	<b>112,493</b>	<b>3.24%</b>
<b>WEST AFRICA</b>						
Benin	7,052	9.50%	2,948	10.52%	10,000	10.35%
Congo (Brazzaville)	76,732	6.81%	74,876	8.23%	151,608	7.49%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>83,784</b>	<b>7.04%</b>	<b>77,824</b>	<b>8.32%</b>	<b>161,608</b>	<b>7.67%</b>
<b>EASTERN EUROPE</b>						
Albania (three projects)	27,297	6.40%	24,206	4.61%	51,503	4.59%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	28,987	15.32%	26,013	10.43%	55,000	2.53%
Georgia	6,932	-1.30%	7,268	3.30%	14,200	2.00%
Moldova	164,075	4.77%	157,451	9.31%	321,526	6.00%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>227,291</b>	<b>6.11%</b>	<b>214,938</b>	<b>6.26%</b>	<b>442,229</b>	<b>5.31%</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR PVO SCHOOLS</b>	<b>891,075</b>	<b>6.89%</b>	<b>825,601</b>	<b>5.69%</b>	<b>1,716,676</b>	<b>6.04%</b>

*The above figures include 21 of the 26 PVO projects, including the project conducted by the government of the Dominican Republic.*



Bhutan

# GFE Projects Conducted by the World Food Program

## Average Change in Enrollment

WFP PROJECTS	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL CHANGE
<b>CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA</b>			
Colombia	17.1%	16.8%	16.9%
Dominican Republic	1.1%	1.4%	1.2%
El Salvador	1.8%	2.4%	2.1%
Honduras	5.5%	4.8%	5.1%
Nicaragua	9.8%	8.4%	9.1%
Peru	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>
<b>ASIA</b>			
Bhutan	1.5%	3.6%	2.4%
Cambodia	6.7%	8.5%	7.5%
Pakistan	-	32.3%	32.3%
Tajikistan	3.2%	2.9%	3.1%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>
<b>EAST AFRICA</b>			
Ethiopia	16.1%	17.7%	16.7%
Kenya	0.0%	0.3%	0.1%
Mozambique	8.5%	7.9%	8.2%
Tanzania	26.6%	26.2%	26.4%
Uganda	9.7%	13.2%	11.2%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
<b>WEST AFRICA</b>			
Cote d'Ivoire	9.0%	10.4%	9.6%
Cameroon	17.0%	27.4%	20.5%
Gambia	9.3%	12.5%	10.8%
Ghana	6.7%	15.4%	10.4%
<b>Total for Region</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR WFP SCHOOLS</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>

*The above figures include 19 of the 22 WFP projects.*



**Congo (Brazzaville)**

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