



Kingdom of Cambodia

Nation Religion King

Royal Government

**Policy on School Feeding
2024-2035**

Prepared by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

September, 2024

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PREFACE

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has a vision to reach high middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2050. To achieve this vision, the Royal Government has identified five key priorities including people, roads, water, electricity, and technology.

Enhancing human capital is essential for driving diversification and achieving inclusive, sustainable economic growth. High-quality and healthy human capital is a vital national asset that enhances economic value, fosters cultural values, and generates innovative ideas, ensuring sustainable, long-term growth and prosperity in socio-economic development.

In this regard, the Royal Government, through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, has implemented various policies and reform programs aimed at ensuring quality education that is equitable and inclusive while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. The National Social Protection Policy Framework outlines essential components of the school feeding program as part of the social assistance system, serving as a long-term investment. This program has been crucial in reducing malnutrition and enhancing the health and well-being of the population.

Acknowledging the importance of further strengthening and expanding the school feeding program's achievements to build a solid foundation, the Royal Government has decided to implement a school feeding policy for 2024-2035. This policy aims to enhance cooperation and clarify the roles and responsibilities of ministries, institutions, the private sectors, and stakeholders to ensure a cohesive and mutually supportive approach.

The Royal Government strongly believes that all ministries, institutions, the private sectors, development partners, and stakeholders will effectively support and implement the school feeding policy for 2024-2035.

Phnom Penh, September 05, 2024

Prime Minister

Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet

1. Introduction

Eliminating hunger and reducing poverty are critical global challenges prioritized in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. These issues have adversely impacted the physical, mental, and emotional development of individuals, particularly children from low-income families who are especially vulnerable to the uncertainties posed by global crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, and climate change.

To build a resilient society and eradicate poverty, the Royal Government, development partners, Non-Governmental Organizations, and stakeholders have been actively collaborating to develop strategies and interventions aimed at addressing emerging social challenges.

School feeding is a strategic global intervention that helps reduce hunger and eradicate poverty. This initiative aims to provide nutrition to children in schools to ensure their full development and contribute to human capital development for a future focused on building a resilient and prosperous society. According to the World Food Programme's 2020 report, four out of five countries worldwide have implemented school feeding policies, with over 90% of program funding sourced from national budgets. As a result, approximately 388 million children or 80% of the world's school-age children—benefit from these programs. The majority of whom reside in low-income and middle-income countries.

Recognizing the significance of school feeding, the United Nations World Food Program has initiated and implemented various programs in collaboration with governments worldwide to develop relevant policies and guidelines. These efforts aim to expand the reach of school feeding initiatives. Additionally, the World Bank has provided both technical and financial support to help establish school feeding as a crucial social safety net in response to the global food crisis. In fact, more than 100 countries are utilizing school feeding programs as a policy intervention to address health, education, well-being, and other issues related to the growth of the general population and children, particularly those facing food security challenges.

Many Asian countries have integrated school feeding programs into their national development initiatives to achieve their development goals. For instance, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) has been implementing school lunch programs since 1953, aimed at encouraging parents to send their children to school during the early stages of the country's development. This initiative covers primary, secondary, and special education institutions, focusing on improving children's health, promoting traditional eating habits, and enhancing the overall health of the Korean population.

Thailand launched its school lunch program in the 1950s to combat acute malnutrition among its population. Since 1993, the Royal Government of Thailand has ensured that students receive lunch every school day. The goals of the school feeding program include improving

food security, reducing short-term hunger, addressing malnutrition, and enhancing eating habits and overall well-being for millions of children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

Japan has achieved the largest scope of school feeding programs. Primary and secondary schools nationwide implement student lunch programs guided by expert nutrition lists. The program aims to teach children healthy eating habits from an early age, helping them understand the importance of nutritious food while providing essential nutrition to support their growth and development.

In Laos, school lunches are provided to kindergarten and primary school students every school day to ensure access to education and promote continued learning. By 2022, the school lunch programs expanded to cover numerous schools, contributing to enhanced food security and improved nutrition for children, as well as supporting better sanitation practices within schools.

Indonesia launched its school feeding program in 1991 by providing snacks to students. This initiative has promoted nutrition, personal hygiene education, and deworming efforts. Since 2015, Indonesia has transitioned from snack delivery to full meals, implementing this new program in targeted primary schools at least three times a week.

Evidence from the implementation of school feeding programs across various countries highlights their significant impact on improving nutrition, health, education, and numerous socio-economic benefits. The World Bank's research on the priority of combating infectious diseases shows that investing in the development of children and adolescents during the first 8,000 days is critical to the development of human capital. This study underscores the importance of supporting children's growth from the first five years up to age 18, as this is when most children are in school. Providing free school meals can enhance access to education and promote equity among all students. Free school meals represent an effective policy option for fostering development, particularly in countries with high enrollment rates.

Recognizing the significance of school feeding, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme, has been implementing the school feeding program since 1999. This initiative started with 64 schools benefiting 37,500 students, with plans for further expansion by utilizing in-kind food supported by the World Food Programme, ensuring that children from low-income families have the opportunity to attend school. In 2014, the Ministry began piloting a home-grown school feeding program using local products. This new model aims to ensure safe, and nutritious school meals while supporting sustainable local economic development. In 2015, the Ministry partnered with the World Food Programme to develop a roadmap for the school feeding program, demonstrating the Royal Government's commitment to nationalizing and managing the program effectively. During the 2018-2019 school year, the Ministry piloted the program in Stung Treng province with financial support from the World Food Programme. Subsequently, the home-grown school feeding program was launched as a national initiative in January 2020

for the 2019-2020 school year, utilizing the national budget in 17 vulnerable districts across six provinces: Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Battambang, Stung Treng, Banteay Meanchey, and Kampong Cham. As a result, the program covered 205 target schools and benefited 52,130 students. As of the 2022-2023 school year, the home-grown school feeding program under the national ownership is implemented in 427 schools across 23 cities and districts in 10 target provinces, benefiting up to 113,319 students, with plans for further expansion into more primary schools.

Research conducted in the context of the Cambodia's school feeding program has demonstrated that the school feeding program significantly increases enrolment, attendance, enhances students' concentration during school hours and improve students' academic outcomes, especially for girls. . The home grown school feeding program plays a crucial role in combating child hunger and malnutrition, ensuring that children receive adequate and consistent nutrition. The Impact Assessment Report of the school feeding program indicates a positive shift in student enrollment: from 81% in 2001 to 98% in 2019, especially in rural and remote areas. In addition, schools that have been implementing the school feeding program show remarkable positive results in other education outcomes. For example, student enrollment rose to 99.2%, the education completion rate increased to 85.3%, and the dropout rate decreased to 4.5%. In contrast, schools not involved in the program had an enrollment rate of only 91.2%, a completion rate of 81.9%, and a dropout rate of 4.8%.

Based on the values and necessities of school feeding, the Royal Government has set out a number of relevant policies and legal frameworks, including the first phase of the Pentagon Strategy, the National Strategic Development Plan, the Education Strategic Plan, and the National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition, Food Roadmap for Sustainable Development, and a Joint Transition Strategy Plan for the Home Grown School Feeding program to national ownership. Additionally, the school feeding program is recognized as a key pillar within the National Social Protection Policy Framework to support the promotion of health, nutrition, well-being, and education of Cambodian children. Finally, it is important to note that the school feeding program can significantly contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. These include Goal 1: End Poverty, Goal 2: End Hunger, Goal 3: Promote Health and Well-Being, Goal 4: Ensure Quality Education and Equity, Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality, Goal 8: Promote Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduce Inequality.

Despite 20 years of experience in implementing the school feeding program in Cambodia, several challenges remain and need to be addressed to ensure the program's effectiveness including 1). Incomplete mechanisms for defining roles, responsibilities, participation, and cross-sectoral coordination, 2). Lack of consistency and coordination in providing complementary interventions, including nutrition education, water, and sanitation programs, deworming initiatives, school or home vegetable garden programs, micronutrient supplementation, and food supplies for student families, 3). Lack of basic mechanisms to mobilize resources and promote community ownership, 4). Lack of capacity development

mechanisms for program implementers at the grassroots level, 5). Lack of mechanisms to fully integrate community agricultural products into the school feeding program, and 6). Lack of minimum standards for food hygiene and safety regulations.

2. Vision

The school feeding policy envisions contributing to the development of human capital by providing education, skills, behaviors, and health support needed to foster a prosperous Cambodian society.

3. Objective

The school feeding policy 2024-2035 aims to provide students with safe and nutritious food to promote their physical growth and cognitive development, thereby enhancing future productivity, gender equality, and inclusion.

The policy applies to all levels of public education institutions, from kindergarten to secondary school.

4. Strategy

To achieve the above vision and objectives, the following key strategies will be implemented:

4.1. Develop Legal Framework and Mechanism

Establishing legal frameworks and policy mechanisms is crucial for ensuring coordination and effectiveness in program implementation, particularly during the decentralization and deconcentration reforms, and public administration reform in Cambodia. The relevant legal documents and frameworks will include sub-decrees, inter-ministerial prakas, decisions made by sub-national authorities, national action plans, and various support mechanisms. This policy will clearly outline the direction for implementing the school feeding program, ensuring consistency among policies, action plans, and budgets for effective implementation. This strategy includes:

- Develop legal documents and mechanisms to ensure the effective policy implementation that is inclusive and equitable, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.
- Promote, disseminate, and encourage the implementation of national policies, legal frameworks, and existing mechanisms, as well as those yet to be established.
- Create a national action plan for school feeding that defines specific activities, timelines, resources, and responsibilities of the relevant ministries and institutions.

4.2. Promote Food Security for Students and Their Families

The school feeding program serves as a vital social safety net, offering numerous benefits such as reducing short-term hunger and improving food security for vulnerable students and their families by providing free meals every school day. This program also creates income-generating opportunities for families, including cooks and farmers. The school feeding program also allows parents or guardians to allocate their funds for breakfast into other essential expenses. This strategy includes:

- Strengthen the mechanisms for targeting schools involved in the program.
- Ensure a timely food supply for students every school day.
- Ensure reduction of family expenses for children in difficult situations.

4.3. Raise Community Awareness

The school feeding program plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive and equitable education, particularly in regions where food insecurity and poverty remain high. The program will help raise awareness in local communities about the importance of food for education, health, and economic development through various initiatives, including:

- Increase awareness of the significance of the school feeding program within the community.
- Showcase the positive impact of the school feeding program on students and families.
- Encourage community and local authorities to support and sponsor school feeding initiatives.
- Extend the school feeding program based on feasibility and the specific needs of the community.
- Enhance equitable and inclusive access to food for all students.

4.4. Promote Health and Nutrition

School feeding is vital for maintaining health and nutrition among students, particularly those in areas with food insecurity and high poverty rates. Providing safe, nutritious, and dietary diversity on daily basis helps improve children's dietary habits. The school feeding program should integrate health education and nutrition initiatives to strengthen students' health, nutrition, and hygiene. This strategy includes:

- Develop and implement nutrition standards tailored to specific contexts and needs.
- Encourage the adherence to food safety standards to ensure the provision of safe meals.
- Promote food diversification within the program and ensure the integration of health and nutrition education in the school feeding program.
- Develop and maintain the necessary physical infrastructure and equipment required for effective program implementation.

4.5. Promote Agricultural and Economic Development in the Community

Utilizing locally sourced food products for school feeding supplies encourages local suppliers and farmers to participate in the program, contributing to the program's sustainability and strengthening the linkage between schools and local agriculture. This initiative will promote the use of agricultural products leading to the economic and social development of the community through the following strategies:

- Raise awareness among local suppliers and farmers about the importance of supplying food for the school feeding program.
- Form a community group to supply agricultural products to the school feeding program.
- Develop and strengthen procedures for selecting community suppliers to ensure quality and reliability.
- Foster a sense of appreciation among students and the community for locally sourced food.

4.6. Strengthen Governance, Partnership, and Cross-Sectoral Coordination

Implementing a school-based feeding program necessitates effective cross-sectoral coordination and the establishment of multi-layered partnerships. Building ecosystems to support implementation will foster joint and continuous development and investment through partnerships, adequate financing, and the integration of digital technologies as new alternatives. This will be achieved through the following strategies:

- Connect relevant sectoral policies with the school feeding program.
- Ensure appropriate budget allocation to support the school feeding program.
- Enhance human resources in information technology to improve management and implementation of the school feeding program.
- Strengthen national and sub-national coordination mechanisms for the management and implementation of the school feeding program.
- Promote the regular and active participation of the private sector, development partners, and communities in providing technical, material, or financial support for the school feeding program.

5. Develop Mechanisms and Action Plans for Policy Implementation

To achieve the vision, objectives, and strategies of this policy, the following institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks need to be established:

5.1. Establishment of Institutional Mechanisms and Legal Framework

To achieve the vision, objectives, and strategies of this policy, the following institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks must be established:

- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport leads and manages the implementation of the school feeding program.
- Establish a committee to oversee and manage the implementation of the school feeding program.
- The organization and functioning of the steering committee and the implementation of the program shall be issued by a Prakas of the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.
- Establish an ad hoc steering and management committee for the implementation of capital / provincial programs to manage and coordinate at the capital / province level. The Steering Committee for the implementation of the Capital / Provincial level program shall be determined by the order of the Governor of the Capital / Provincial.
- Establish an ad hoc steering and management committee for the implementation of programs at the municipal / district / khan level to manage and coordinate at the municipal / district / khan level. The steering committee and management for the implementation of the program at the municipal / district / khan level shall be determined by the order of the governor of the municipal / district / khan.
- Establish an ad hoc steering committee to manage the implementation of local programs to manage and coordinate at the commune / sangkat level and schools. The Steering Committee for the implementation of local programs shall be determined by order of the Chairman of the Commune / Sangkat Council and the school.

These institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks will be effective only if the designated key ministries and institutions possess the necessary capacity and fulfill the following responsibilities:

The National Social Protection Council has the following key responsibilities:

1. Coordinate collaboration between ministries, institutions, and development partners involved in the program.
2. Provide guidance on policy, strategic, and legal documents for program implementation.
3. Monitor, evaluate, and provide advice on progress.
4. Address challenges encountered during program implementation.
5. Prepare reports on the progress and challenges of program implementation for the Royal Government.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport has the following key responsibilities:

1. Lead and manage the implementation of the program.
2. Prepare legal documents for effective program management and implementation.
3. Develop an digital information management system to support program management.
4. Strengthen the capacity of relevant officials at all levels and disseminate information about the program.

5. Develop action plans and budget for program implementation.
6. Prepare and submit reports on the progress of program implementation to the National Social Protection Council.
7. Address challenges related to the implementation of the program.
8. Monitor, track and evaluate the effectiveness of the program's implementation.

The Council for Agricultural and Rural Development has the following key responsibilities:

1. Collaborate to provide training to stakeholders on food security and nutrition
2. Collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to promote vegetable growing in schools to enhance nutrition in Cambodia and
3. Collaborate to monitor, track, evaluate and solve challenges in implementing the program.

The Ministry of Economy and Finance has the following key responsibilities:

1. Review, advise, and make decisions regarding the budget proposal for program implementation.
2. Disburse the allocated budget for the effective implementation of the program.
3. Review and provide feedback on the financial statements and achievements of the program.
4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Interior has the following key responsibilities:

1. Prepare and supplement various legal documents to enhance the efficiency of sub-national administrations in implementing the program.
2. Collaborate in providing training for sub-national administrative officials and relevant stakeholders.
3. Strengthen existing mechanisms within sub-national administrations to monitor and support program implementation.
4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Health has the following key responsibilities:

1. Collaborate in providing training on dietary practices, hygiene measures, and information related to children's nutritional status.
2. Monitor hygiene, food safety, and manage food poisoning concerns.
3. Provide technical support in preparing documents related to dietary practices, hygiene measures and food safety regulations.

4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has the following key responsibilities:

1. Collaborate to establish commodity prices and encourage participation of Agriculture Cooperatives in the program by promoting quality and safe agricultural production activities in target schools to foster community agricultural development.
2. Collaborate to enhance the quality of food safety measures and nutrition guidelines.
3. Collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to provide training on safe agricultural production practices.
4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Planning has the following key responsibilities:

1. Provide data on areas with food insecurity, poverty rates, and households in need using small area calculation methods.
2. Collaborate to provide training on the importance of food consumption and the fortification of food with essential nutrients.
3. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation has the following key responsibilities:

1. Collaborate with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, along with relevant ministries and institutions, to exchange information on beneficiaries of the National Social Assistance Fund.
2. Participate in promoting and improving the living standard of households with valid equity cards to ensure they benefit from the Programme..
3. Collaborate with ministries, institutions, and development partners to promote the income generation for the households with valid equity cards through training and support in agricultural production to supply the Programme..
4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs has the following key responsibilities:

1. Participate in raising awareness about the importance of nutrition for women and children and disseminate educational information on selecting micronutrient-rich foods in connection with the implementation of programs in schools.

2. Promote the production and consumption of agricultural products within the community for target groups of women through home gardening program and the distributing their products at affordable market prices.
3. Collaborate with relevant ministries and institutions through the Commune/Sangkat Women's Affairs Committee to raise awareness and support the implementation of programs and
4. Provide technical support for gender mainstreaming within the framework of monitoring, evaluation, and addressing challenges in implementing targeted programs.

The Ministry of Cults and Religions has the following key responsibilities:

1. Collaborate with schools located in pagodas and communities to provide food to poor students in various ways.
2. Disseminate information about program implementation and promote nutrition and food safety through clergy in communities and schools within pagodas.
3. Encourage community participation in the school feeding program through religious clergy and religious committees acting as social workers and supporters.
4. Collaborate to monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

Municipal Administrations have the following key responsibilities:

1. Collect and summarize budget requests for the implementation of the school feeding program.
2. Mobilize resources, budgets, and materials from relevant stakeholders to support program implementation and
3. Monitor, evaluate, and address challenges related to program implementation.

The relevant ministries and authorities shall provide support for the implementation of the school feeding program in a variety of forms and through any appropriate and feasible means.

5.2. Human Resource Development and Financial Support

To ensure the effective implementation of the school feeding policy, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, along with relevant ministries and institutions, shall focus on training human resources at all levels to develop competencies in management skills, administration, finance, planning, and technical aspects related to the school feeding program.

Furthermore, all costs associated with program implementation must be covered by the national budget and funds from other legal sources.

5.3. Policy Implementation Action Plan

To facilitate resource mobilization and ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the policy, short, medium, and long-term action plans for school feeding will be developed based on evidence and comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders. This action plan must align with the vision of the Royal Government of Cambodia in promoting health and nutrition, education, and agricultural and economic development within the community. Additionally, this must respond to the National Strategic Development Plan and be implemented within the framework of the Royal Government of Cambodia's political agenda.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to implement the School Feeding Policy 2024-2035 effectively and efficiently, it is necessary to have a monitoring and evaluation system along with recommendations to improve its implementation,, focusing on:

- Ensure performance accountability by emphasizing the use of modern technology.
- Define achievement indicators within the monitoring and evaluation framework of the School Feeding Policy 2024-2035.
- Ensure compliance with nutrition and food safety standards.
- Provide regular reports on the progress of policy implementation for the school feeding program.

7. Conclusion

This policy reflects the government's vision and commitment to promoting the well-being of the people, the economy and local agriculture, and education in Cambodia. This policy contributes to achieve the Government's ambition to transform Cambodia into a high middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050.

The successful and effective implementation of the policy requires full support and cooperation ,and coordination among stakeholders at all levels as well as technical and financial resources.

The Royal Government of Cambodia strongly believes that relevant line ministries, institutions at both national and sub-national levels, development partners, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, civil society, private sectors, communities, families, and individuals will work together to promote, support, and implement the Policy on School Feeding successfully.

8. Glossary

- **School Feeding Program** is a programme that provides food to children at school to eradicate hunger, support education and improve children's health and nutrition. This programme can be done in the form of providing food for children to eat in school or providing food to children's families when they come to school regularly.
- **Home-grown school feeding program** refers to the provision of fresh food that is sourced, produced, or purchased locally or in the country with a focus on food safety, - dietary diversity, and nutrition for children at schools, the provision of which can be made in a form of providing breakfast or lunch.
- **Locally sourced food product** refers to products such as rice, fish, meat, milk, vegetables, fruits, and grains, which include micronutrients in the community, are sourced from primary production, and can be purchased for public schools.
- **Dietary diversity** refers to the number of different foods or food groups eaten over a given period. Eating a wide variety of foods is recommended.
- **Human capital** is the combination of knowledge, skills, and health of people that enable them to become productive members of society. Supporting children from an early age with good education and healthy food is critical for building human capital.
- **Targeted schools** refer to public schools that are selected and identified for program implementation.
- **Food safety** refers to the proper handling, preparation, and storage of food in a way that best reduces the risk of becoming sick from foodborne illnesses caused by bacteria, parasites, and viruses.
- **Healthy food** refers to food that helps to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, including preventing micronutrient deficiencies and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer.
- **Nutrition** is about eating a healthy and balanced diet. Food and drink provide the energy and nutrients you need to be healthy. Eating a wide variety of healthy foods is recommended for optimal health.