**EVALUATION PLAN**

**Introduction**

Counterpart proposes a rigorous Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Plan for the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education project in Mauritania. The MEAL Plan outlines our proposed evaluation approaches and methodology, the project monitoring approach, data collection and reporting for performance indicators, three independent evaluations (baseline, midterm, endline), and special studies. The MEAL Plan also includes our strategy for collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) activities as well as generating and sharing learning with a diverse range of stakeholders. The MEAL Plan includes Counterpart’s approach to evaluation and budget management, to work effectively with external evaluators to ensure independent, credible evaluations. Once the evaluation plan is approved, Counterpart will conduct a MEL workshop to train project staff and MOE officials on project indicators, data collection methods, and reporting requirements. Counterpart will hire an independent, third-party evaluator to conduct the baseline survey to establish performance indicators.

**Project Overview**

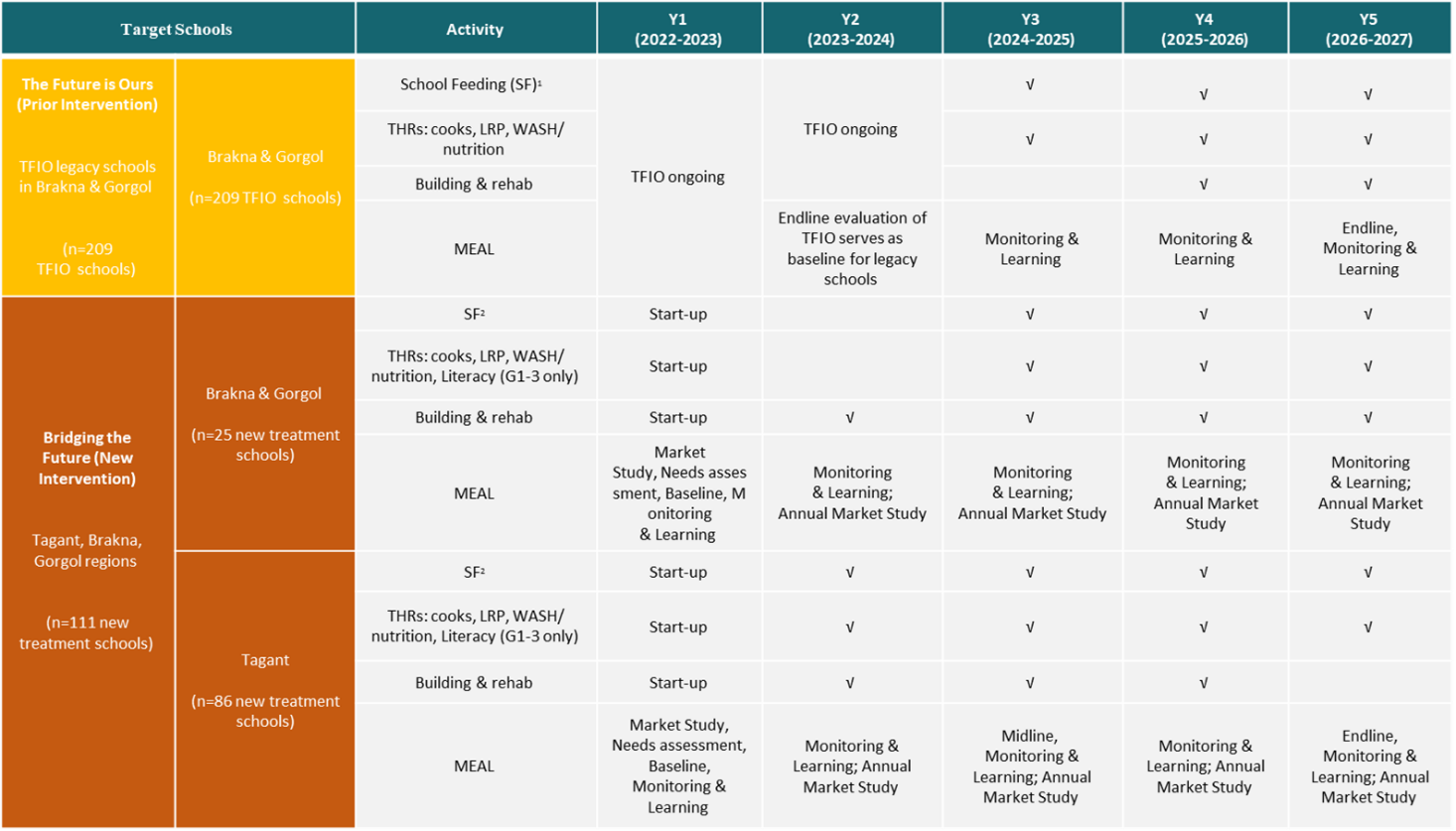
Over life of project, *Bridging the Future* will reach a combined total of 111,071 children in **320 schools** which includes 86 schools in the new region of Tagant, 25 new schools in Brakna and Gorgol, and folding in the 209 schools in Brakna and Gorgol currently supported by the FY19 Award FFE-682-2019/003-00. *Bridging the Future*, FFE-682-2022/014-00, overlaps with the current USDA-funded McGovern-Dole project, *The Future is Ours!¸*(Award # FFE-682-2019/003-00, FY19-FY24) by two years in Brakna and Gorgol. Under the current FY19 *The Future is Ours! (TFIO),* Counterpart supports 75,902 pupils in 209 primary schools in Brakna and Gorgol with school meals, education improvements, and school health interventions. The overlapping projects presents a unique opportunity for a very quick start-up in 111 new schools in the new region of Tagant (86) and Brakna and Gorgol (25) while consolidating the gains made in the 209 “Legacy” project schools under *TFIO*. Counterpart will continue building the MoE’s capacity to implement a nationwide school feeding program and contribute to their goal of broadening coverage of schools with canteens. Activities in the 209 Legacy Schools in Brakna and Gorgol will continue as planned in project years 4 and 5 of *TFIO* (which overlaps with year 1 and 2 of the new project). Upon completion of *TFIO* Award, the 209 Legacy Schools in Brakna and Gorgol will be folded into *Bridging the Future* (in years 3-5 of the FY22 project). Table 1 represents the timeline and relevant activities within each subset of target schools.

**Table 1: Activities in New and Legacy Target Schools**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Project Year (PY)1 (2022-2023)** | **PY2 (2023-2024)** | **PY3 (2024-2025)** | **PY 4 (2025-2026)** | **PY5 (2026-2027)** |
| ***Brakna &Gorgol*** | ***Legacy Schools: 209 schools*** *(under FY19 TFIO)* | Target schools under TFIO only | Target Schools under TFIO only; TFIO ends FY24. | Folded into *Bridging the Future* (Activities 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) | Folded into *Bridging the Future* (Activities 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) | Folded into *Bridging the Future* (Activities 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) |
| ***New Schools: 25*** *(Under FY22 Bridging the Future)* | Baseline evaluation; school selection; implementation of partial intervention package Brakna and Gorgol | *Bridging the Future* Activities  1-5 & 7-14 | *Bridging the Future* Activities  1-14 | *Bridging the Future* Activities  1-14 | *Bridging the Future* Activities  1-14 |
| ***Tagant*** | ***New Schools:***  ***86*** *(Under FY22 Bridging the Future)* | Baseline evaluation; school selection; implementation begins in Tagant | *Bridging the Future* Activities 1-17 | *Bridging the Future* Activities 1-17 | *Bridging the Future* Activities 1-17 | *Bridging the Future* Activities 1-17 |

Overall, *Bridging the Future* will (1) expand the capacity strengthening support Counterpart has already begun with government agencies, school administrators, PTAs and school management committees (SMCs)/COGES to advocate for and secure funding to manage school feeding programs, and oversee nutrition, health, and hygiene improvements in schools; (2) take the literacy interventions tested under *TFIO* to scale in the new schools to maximize pupil reading outcomes across all project schools; and (3) enhance sustainable school feeding operations across all regions and schools. Schools in Brakna and Gorgol will gradually transition to using a larger portion of government-procured commodities by FY 2027. New project schools will be positioned early for sustainability readiness. The proposed rollout, scale-up and phase-out of activities in each region and associated MEL activities are presented in Table 1 on the following page.

***Table 1: Activity & MEAL Rollout, According to Prior & New Intervention***



**Evaluation Approach and Methodologies**

1. **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL) Overview**

MEAL systems and activities link monitoring and evaluation to learning, adaptivemanagement, and accountability**.** Summative evaluations will build on the monitoring data and glean learnings from across all types of evidence and sources. Each evaluation will first identify gaps in learning drawn from monitoring data which will inform evaluation research questions. We will leverage our own data sources, such as *TFIO* project documentation and evaluations, to define and refine evaluation and research questions for the planned special studies. Data collected at evaluation points (i.e., baseline, midterm, endline) will draw from a range of respondent groups—those included in monitoring data and those not—with the intention to bring together multiple perspectives across time to triangulate data. Counterpart will use this evidence to adjust activities.

***Use participatory*, *learning activities to adapt activities*:** The COP, MEAL Director and the U.S.-based Monitoring & Evaluation (MEL) Manager will lead regular internal project team check-ins to discuss the significance of the data, what we have learned, and what adaptations may be necessary to stay on track or make activities more effective. Following the model set forth by *TFIO*, *Bridging the Future* will organize learning and dissemination events every six months that include engagement and participation from government stakeholders and partners to use data for decision-making. The MEL Manager, MEAL Director, and the COP will also gather key staff and MoE stakeholders to help design or validate the questions for the midterm and endline evaluations.

***Disseminate learning and evidence with key stakeholders:*** We will ensure findings from baseline, midline, and endline evaluations are shared through learning events to disseminate and build the evidence base for similar USDA programs. The independent evaluator (IE) hired by Counterpart will be tasked to work with the MEL Manager to facilitate the learning events. Participants in learning events will be asked to interpret and provide feedback on the findings to improve the design of future activities. These sessions will also support shared understanding of the project’s performance and spark technical discussion. The MEL Manager will utilize various internal and external evaluation platforms (e.g., Counterpart’s MEL Exchange Platform, American Evaluation Association, European Evaluation Society, and others) with a focus in three areas: programmatic approaches, metrics, and evidence. Counterpart will share the findings and insights through learning products and various learning events. We will use the midterm learning events to focus on the theme of sustainability planning and activities. The MEL Manager, MEAL Director, and COP will organize and facilitate a series of **Pause and Reflect sessions** with key stakeholders and decision-makers to generate lessons and make recommendations about the sustainability plans.

***Midterm and endline evaluations that address Organization for Economic Co-Operation Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria:*** The baseline study will establish initial values for performance indicators and enable us to set targets. The midterm and endline evaluations will examine OECD DAC evaluation criteria[[1]](#footnote-2): relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. *Relevance* examines “is the intervention doing the right thing?”; coherence examines “how well does the intervention fit?”; *effectiveness* examines “is the intervention achieving its objectives?”; *efficiency* examines, “how well are resources being used?’; *impact* examines, “what difference does the intervention make?”; and *sustainability* examines, “will the benefits last?”

1. **Monitoring**

Counterpart’s monitoring approach is designed to yield data for accountability and learning in equal measure. Counterpart willapproach indicator reporting as an opportunity to embed an efficient and effective CLA model. By using a sample-based approach to monitoring, Counterpart will not compromise *quality* or *type* of evidence to gain a larger *volume* of data. This MEAL approach balances hard-to-measure indicators of impact and effectiveness with numbers of schools from which data are collected. Counterpart’s MEL unit at headquarters in Washington, DC will provide ongoing technical assistance around MEAL activities. A MEL Manager will oversee, manage, and lend support tothe in-country MEAL team. The MEAL team, supported by the program’s field agents at the school and district levels, will lead a robust and practical routine MEAL workflow, supporting the independent evaluator at the three evaluation points, facilitating Learning Agenda research, and embedding the CLA approach into MEAL systems.

The project’s in-country MEAL team will be led by the current *TFIO* MEAL Director based in Nouakchott. The current *TFIO* M&E Officer will manage field agents throughout Brakna and Gorgol to oversee data collection in the 209 schools. A similar structure will be applied for Tagant. Field agents in Brakna, Gorgol, and Tagant will be primarily tasked with school feeding and literacy oversight but will also support on-site data collection. As field agents are well placed to act upon the data being collected, the MEAL approach includes building their capacity to ensure that reflection and response to learnings occur at all levels of the project, including at the school level.

In addition to field agent visits to schools, the MEAL team and program team with government partners and implementing partners will conduct joint school visits on a quarterly basis to collect data through direct observations and surveys. The MEAL Team will conduct periodic spot checks in the target regions to verify data accuracy for school monitoring data, progress towards other performance indicators, and routine program management data. When there are discrepancies, the MEAL staff will work with regional educational authorities to improve valid data collection.

***Complexity Aware Monitoring***: Counterpart’s Complexity-Aware Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (CAMEL) provides a framework for tracking contextual complexities by engaging stakeholders in M&E and learning processes. Because Counterpart implements programs in various contexts where outcomes are influenced by factors that the program may have little or no control, the CAMEL framework looks beyond the intervention by focusing on two questions that drive the complexity-aware monitoring:

* Are we certain that we can solve the problem?
* What is the level of agreement between stakeholders on solving the problem?

To test our theory of change, we utilize two evaluative tools of CAMEL framework:

***Complexity Checklist:*** Through its four dimensions and 25 indicators, the Checklist dissects the nature of intervention, interactions between the institutions and stakeholders, causality and change, and how the project is integrated into the context (embeddedness). The Checklist serves as tool to evaluate the program implementation in complex environments and to assess changes in the context that might necessitate adaptive management. The *Bridging the Future* MEAL team and Counterpart HQ will use the Complexity Checklist on a semi-annual basis to assess changes in context, understand what specific elements can be adjusted or corrected that are within the program’s control, and determine if the design of the program should change in some way.

***Sentinel Indicators:*** Counterpart’s index of sentinel indicators is used as a bellwether, acting as early warning signs when changes are occurring within a complex system. Sentinel indicators are easily communicated, signal the need for further analysis and investigation, and have no targets. The MEAL and program teams will select the appropriate number of Sentinel indicators which will support the monitoring of contextual factors for; Climate Change, Market Activity, Sense of Security in public places, Social Inclusion, and Female Labor Force Participation. While CAMEL is based on complexity-aware *monitoring*, it is the *evaluation and learning* piece of the framework that looks at the wider range of outcomes produced by complex chains, where conventional assessments look at the simple linear chains missing the opportunity to expand the range of outcomes, whether they are positive or negative. This approach requires close cooperation between teams within the program, local partners, beneficiaries, implementing partners, and other donors to generate timely learning and application of that learning for adaptive decision-making.

***Data Quality:*** All data collection tools will be carefully designed and adapted for the linguistic and cultural context in which they will be employed. Tools and instruments created by the MEAL team will be thoroughly reviewed by relevant stakeholders with local language knowledge and piloted as necessary. Administration training will be provided for all data collectors and for instruments that require multiple coders or evaluators through which inter-rater reliability across coders will be estimated. All data collection initiatives will be planned to allow adequate time for collection, cleaning, and organizing. Data, where feasible, will be collected using tablets to streamline processes, however, where electronic data collection is not feasible, paper-based data collection will be employed with an accompanying standardized data entry process and quality control checks. All instruments will be pilot tested and refined. Procedures for data collection will be defined in written materials. Supervision checks will be conducted by MEAL staff and to enhance data integrity, mechanisms for triangulation will be instituted. To avoid double accounting of the trainees a unique code for trainees will be used. Raw data will be retained for inspection and re-analysis.

***Data Analysis:*** Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS software. Qualitative data will be analyzed in NVivo with results reported in a timely manner to inform program staff and stakeholders for adaptive decision-making.

***Reporting:*** Per USDA requirements, Counterpart will submit a finalized performance monitoring plan and evaluation plan within three months of project award; submit external evaluation TORs and reports to USDA for review and approval; submit project performance reports semi-annually that report performance on indicators; and update USDA on any changes to the project’s MEAL plan.

1. **Evaluation**

Counterpart will hire a firm to conduct independent evaluations at baseline, midline, and endline. The continuity of overlapping Counterpart-implemented programs and an intentional evaluation approach will ensure a smooth transition between the current and upcoming McGovern-Dole projects in Mauritania that is designed for longer-term learning ensuring comparability of evaluation results over the two projects’ lifecycles. Counterpart proposes a *nonexperimental performance evaluation* design that measures the project’s progress toward meeting its performance indicators. The rationale for using a nonexperimental design is as follows:

* There is an insufficient number of non-intervention schools in Tagant to form a solid comparison group in that region;
* While the evaluation can examine interesting differences in outcomes between schools in Brakna, Gorgol and Tagant, the regions and school settings are not directly comparable (Tagant has fewer pupils per school and per class, more serious water issues, older school infrastructure, more difficult access to schools, nomadism, and absenteeism in a higher degree, and receives more INGO support);
* The *TFIO* project experienced issues with proposing a group of comparison schools – where the project would not implement interventions – at both the school level and regional education office level. The Counterpart Mauritania team envisions similar issues would be encountered if *Bridging the Future* attempted to enter comparison schools for data collection.

Counterpart will manage evaluations using a phased approach. Phase 1 starts with the IE team taking stock of available performance monitoring data, drafting and refining tools with input from Counterpart, refining research questions with input from Counterpart and USDA, and planning analyses accordingly. Phase 2 focuses on collecting and analyzing primary data to answer the research questions and report against indicators. Phase 3 focuses on interpreting and reflecting on the data, bringing in key stakeholders and adjusting activities.

**Tagant, Brakna, and Gorgol “New” Schools Evaluation Plan:** Counterpart will use a non-experimental performance evaluation design consisting of a pre-, mid-, and post-test to measure the actual progress of schools against the expected progress of schools in the new treatment schools in the three target regions. Pre- and post-test studies examine the effect of a program without the use of either a control or comparison group. The evaluation will compare outcomes in the 111 new project treatment schools over the five-years. Findings from the evaluation will be considered alongside performance data from monitoring activities to help determine the effectiveness of activities and unpack factors behind the performance evaluation results.

**Brakna & Gorgol “Legacy” Schools Evaluation Plan:** In PY3, *Bridging the Future* will continue to work with the same 209 schools currently targeted under *TFIO*. The *TFIO* endline evaluation will serve as the baseline for this group of 209 legacy schools before the *Bridging the Future* intervention begins. Therefore, no baseline assessment for these legacy schools is included in this MEAL Plan or in the budget. Counterpart will use a non-experimental performance evaluation design consisting of pre- and post-test to measure the actual progress of schools in this group of schools. A sample of these 209 legacy schools will be included in the *Bridging the Future* endline evaluation.

Evaluations at three timepoints will be conducted in the new 111 schools, including an endline evaluation of both new schools and legacy schools. The IE team will be selected based on their ability to pivot fieldwork and design based on realities at the time of the evaluation, and their familiarity with mixed-methods research and proposed evaluation design. Table 2 below provides an overview of the proposed sampling and tools in the groups of legacy schools and new schools, respectively.

***Table 2. Baseline, Midterm & Endline Summary of Sample & Tools***

|  | **Year 1** | **Year 3** | **Year 5** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| School sample | Baseline: 111 schools  (Census of new schools) | Midline: 111 schools  (Census of new schools) | Endline: 153 schools  (Sample across new & legacy schools) |
| Proposed tools | EGRAs, Surveys, Observations, KIIs, FGDs | Same | Same |
| MGD #1 indicator reporting | Arabic language EGRA, French language EGRA | Same | Same |

***Reading Assessment Tools:*** The *TFIO* evaluation utilizes an Arabic and French language EGRA to measure project impact on pupil reading comprehension using MGD 1 indicator requirements. The proportion of pupils who can by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text per minute in Arabic and French at the end of the second grade is the benchmark used to report against MGD#1 indicator. There are also two custom indicators measuring the percentage of students who, by the end of two grades can read 20 correct letters per minute in Arabic and French. The *TFIO* evaluation will report the change in percentage of pupils reading at this benchmark at midterm and endline. Note: this is a proxy — not direct measure —

The *Bridging the Future* project will utilize the existing Arabic and French language EGRA tools—and adapt them as needed—to measure the literacy skills among Grade 2 pupils in oral and written subtasks in each language. EGRA will include subtasks designed to (1) report against the required MGD#1 indicator of reading ability at the end of two years of schooling; and (2) to inform project interventions. To report against McGovern-Dole Standard Indicator #1, “*Percent of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text,*” Counterpart will discuss with the GoM and IE—based on *TFIO* midline data and international best practice—whether the current benchmark used to report to MGD #1 under *TFIO* should be retained or if a different benchmark should be established. Additional surveys, observations and qualitative tools are further described under baseline study.

1. **Market Study**

Please refer to the Commodity Management section of the proposal for more information.

1. **Baseline Study**

Counterpart will use *TFIO*’s endline evaluation (estimated completion date is April 2024) as the legacy schools’ baseline measure to avoid duplication and interruption of implementation activities that would arise if there was a separate baseline assessment. The *TFIO*’s project endline evaluation will serve three distinct purposes: (1) to measure impact of the current project, (2) to establish a baseline measure for this group of schools under the new project, and (3) to generate lessons learned for transferring to *Bridging the Future*’s implementation in all three target regions.

For new schools in Tagant, Brakna, and Gorgol, Counterpart will contract an IE to conduct the baseline prior to the start of interventions. The baseline evaluation will serve to (1) establish values for indicators with non-zero baseline values against which to measure future progress against expected results and (2) to establish questions to test the project ToC. Findings from the independent baseline will be used to revise life of project yearly targets for the project’s performance indicators and will be used as a reference to measure performance every six months of the fiscal year and in the midterm and final evaluations. Project leadership will also use baseline findings to re-examine the ToC, refine the program design with input from the project’s component leads and COP, and answer the questions in the project’s learning agenda.

Counterpart’s MEL Manager will draft and share the baseline evaluation terms of reference (TOR) with Counterpart HQ for input before sharing it with USDA. The TOR will outline the scope of work, instructions and criteria for applications. The IE will be responsible for performing all tasks including finalizing the mixed-method performance evaluation methodology and design, creating, adapting, and piloting tools as necessary, training and selecting enumerators and/or experienced local data collection firms. Counterpart will ensure the autonomy of the IE and will include a base period for the baseline evaluation and optional periods for the mid/final evaluation to provide risk protection in the case of poor performance. The baseline study will include EGRAs and quantitative and qualitative tools administered to a range of respondents, including pupils, teachers, school administrators, PTA and SMC/COGES members, and cooks.

**Baseline Evaluation Questions:**

1. Student reading proficiency, behaviors, attitudes and background (EGRA)
2. What are linguistic, home and socio-economic factors associated with reading performance?
3. What are teachers’ classroom performances and instructional competencies in reading? (Observation)
4. What is the relationship between teacher performance in reading instruction
5. and student learning outcomes?
6. What is school director and deputy director performance, behaviors, attitudes and background?
7. What is community support for school; engagement with children and reading activities?
8. What is the school involvement in extra-curricular and student support activities; interaction with parents and community?
9. What is the prevalence of students with disabilities (i,e, hearing, visual, etc.)? How can MOE better plan for how to best meet the needs of vulnerable students?
10. What are baseline levels for indicators?
11. What are the influencing factors in project schools from non-USDA funded activities and their impact?
12. What are mitigating factors to uptake of project activities?

**Timeline (See Table 3):**

**Table 3: Proposed Baseline Study Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Dates** |
| Draft baseline ToR | November 2022 |
| Identify independent, third-party evaluator | January 2022 |
| Third-party evaluator prepares Baseline Plan, develops data collection tools, selects study participants | January 2023 |
| Baseline fieldwork | February- March 2023 |
| Data cleaning, analysis and baseline report writing | April 2023 |
| Counterpart review of draft baseline report, evaluator incorporation of feedback | April 2023 |
| Baseline Report submitted to USDA | April 2023 |
| Dissemination event | May/June 2023 |

**Sampling**

The baseline sample will be based on a two-stage random cluster sampling plan. In the first stage, schools will be selected at random, followed by the selection of pupils, teachers, school administrators, PTA and SMC/COGES members, and cooks from sampled schools. The sample size for the sample unit (pupil) was calculated using a continuous outcome measure. Stata statistical software was used to calculate the sample size with the standard 80% power, 5% significance level, and an ICC of 0.30. The required baseline sample size is 1,665 pupils, or 15 pupils in each of the 111 treatment schools in Y1. See Table 4 for sample sizes for other respondent groups.

**Table 4: Anticipated Additional Sample Sizes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Respondent Group** | **Proposed Sample Size** |
| School administrators | In each of 111 treatment schools in Y1 |
| Grade 2 classroom teachers | Teacher in sampled class |
| PTA members | 1-2 in each sampled school |
| School Management Committee members | 1-2 in each sampled school |
| Cooks | 1-2 in each sampled school |
| MEN district officials | 3-4 per cluster |
| Ministry of Education, GOM regional officials | 5-10 identified in collaboration with USDA |

As noted, the endline evaluation of the *TFIO* project will serve as the legacy schools’ baseline measure for the new phase of the project.

**Tools**

The baseline study will utilize the following tools to meet the purpose listed:

**Table 5. Summary of Evaluation Tools Proposed**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Tool** | **Respondent** | **Purpose** |
| EGRA | Grade 2 pupils | Assess G2 literacy skills in Arabic & French |
| Classroom observation tool | Grade 2 classrooms | Observe improvements in literacy instruction, use of materials among teachers, and reading behaviors and attentiveness among pupils |
| Cook, food preparer survey | Cooks and food preparers in sampled primary schools | Assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to secure food storage, hygienic food preparations, food safety in school meals, maintenance of school kitchen/canteens, and benefits from THRs. |
| Head teacher survey | Head Teacher or other school administrators in primary schools | Assess knowledge and practice of efficient management of food storage, preparation, inventory management and school feeding, including sourcing local commodities for school feeding in addition to USDA food aid commodities. |
| Pupil survey | Grade 1-6 pupils | Assess extent of participation in USDA-funded activities, including school meals and awareness of nutrition and use of WASH facilities. For G1-3 only: in-class participation levels, use of in-class literacy materials |
| Community Survey | Parents of students | Assess their children’s engagement with literacy and after-school activities, awareness of nutrition and WASH, parent perceptions of USDA-funded activities. |
| School observation checklist | Head teacher or other school administrator, observation in primary schools | Assess extent of USDA-funded activities and facilities in place in each sampled school, for example WASH facilities, literacy materials, canteen provisions, and staffing. |
| Sustainability survey | MOE officials at cluster and/or regional level | Examine the structures and processes that can contribute to sustained outputs and outcomes among the target communities, policies and practices that advocate for sustained school feeding and nutrition programs beyond life of project |
| Qualitative methods (FGDs, KIIs) | Teachers, MEN officials, parents and/or community members | Capture experiences in and benefits from participation in USDA-funded activities. Reach a wide range of respondent groups to capture perspectives not feasible through surveys. |

1. **Midterm Evaluation**

The purpose of the midterm evaluation will be to assess progress to date against indicators and in implementation; assess the relevance of the interventions; provide an early signal of the effectiveness of interventions; document lessons learned; assess sustainability efforts to date; and discuss and recommend mid-course corrections, if necessary.

The preliminary key evaluation questions to be answered during the midterm and final evaluations are organized according to OECD DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact.

**Midterm & Final Evaluation Questions**

***Relevance:***

1. To what extent do the project’s interventions meet the educational, socio-economic, cultural, and political needs of beneficiaries?

***Coherence:***

1. To what extent have project interventions adapted to meet the changing needs of beneficiaries since baseline?
2. To what extent are project interventions aligned with the education strategy outlined in the *Plan National de Développment du Secteur Educatif* [[2]](#footnote-3)?

***Effectiveness:***

1. To what extent has the project achieved its goals and targets?
2. Which interventions contributed most significantly to the expected results or objectives?
3. What value do beneficiaries place on project activities (inputs) and resulting outputs and outcomes? Which interventions are more effective than others? In what contexts and why?
4. To what extent does the project complement other projects/interventions in the region and with other stakeholders?

***Efficiency:***

1. To what extent have project resources (inputs) been maximized?
2. Are there alternative approaches or use of resources that could yield the results?

***Sustainability:***

1. What progress has been made to reach graduation milestones?
2. Is there evidence of improved contextual factors (political, social, cultural) that contribute to sustainability of outcomes?

***Impact:***

1. What were the expected and unintended positive and negative effects of the intervention on children, communities, and institutions? How have these effects change relative to the design of the project?
2. How does the intervention contribute to:
   1. Improved literacy of school-aged children? (MGD SO1)
   2. Increased use of health, nutrition and dietary practices among pupils and families, including the most vulnerable and at-risk groups? (MGD SO2)
   3. Improved effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement? (LRP SO1)
3. What do beneficiaries and other stakeholders involved in the project perceive as the effects of the intervention on themselves?

**Timeline, Sampling, and Tools**

The midterm evaluation will be completed by April 2025 and will mirror the schedule described for the baseline evaluation. The midterm evaluation will utilize the same census approach to collecting data in all treatment schools as baseline, pulling a new cross-sectional sample of respondents. Respondent groups will be sampled in the same way as described for baseline. The tools described under the baseline study will be adapted as needed and used at midterm.

1. **Final Evaluation**

The final evaluation will collect data on all performance indicators and will seek to assess if the project achieved planned results, identify strengths, successes, challenges, and lessons learned related to implementation and sustainability for the GoM, USDA, Counterpart, and other relevant stakeholders. The final evaluation will include a representative sample of both “new” and “legacy” schools from Tagant, Brakna, and Gorgol regions.

The preliminary key evaluation questions to be answered during the final evaluation are aligned with those mentioned above for the midterm evaluation and may be slightly adapted in relation to impact and sustainability questions, based on midterm evaluation results.

**Timeline, Sampling, and Tools**

The endline evaluation will be completed by April 2027, or six months prior to the completion of the project.

The endline evaluation will build upon the *Bridging the Future* midterm sample for “new” schools across the three target regions and on *TFIO* endline sample in Brakna and Gorgol.

Stata statistical software was used to calculate the sample size with the standard 80% power, 5% significance level, and an ICC of 0.30. The required sample size is 1,224 pupils, or 8 pupils in 153 treatment schools.

The tools described under the baseline study will be adapted as needed and used at endline.

**Alignment with the McGovern-Dole Learning Agenda**

The following LA questions will be addressed through a desk Study on engagement for school feeding sustainability and policy change, further described under “Special Studies”:

1. What are the key institutions (i.e. international, national, provincial/district and local stakeholders) and governance structures required to effectively deliver, implement, and sustain school meal interventions? What relationship structures among these institutions yield the most successful and effective school meal programs?

2. What community-level systems of governance and management are required for the successful implementation and sustainability of school meal programs?

3. Which components of school meal programs, including food production, procurement, and preparation of meals, are the most sustainable in terms of operational efficiency and why? Does the cost-effectiveness of these programs change over time and if so, how and why?

4. What variables impact the resiliency of school meal program community support systems and in what ways?

5. What types of incentives (and in which contexts) are the most effective at securing local or national government investment into school meal programs?

## Learning

Counterpart’s MEAL strategy for this project integrates data and analysis from performance monitoring, evaluations, special studies, and CLA activities to support the project’s learning and generation of an evidence base for future USDA programs. This data will be pushed to the project’s cloud-based MEL system where automated analysis, via Microsoft PowerBI, will generate reports and interactive dashboards. The COP and MEAL Director will work together to ensure that data and lessons learned are used formatively to influence ongoing activity modifications. CLA activities that support learning are embedded throughout the MEAL Plan: Pause and Reflect sessions, evaluation workshops, and staff-wide participation in M&E activities. The leadership team will champion and support reflection and data use among project staff engaging Counterpart HQ as needed to build capacity for data literacy throughout the project. The COP, MEAL Director, and MEL Manager will foster the utilization of program results as best practices for other programs and contexts. Additionally, HQ Senior Communications Director will work with the *Bridging the Future* team to highlight success stories and share other findings via Counterpart social media sites.

**Special Studies**

***Desk Study on engagement for school feeding sustainability and policy change:*** *Bridging the Future* will review secondary data from *TFIO* as well as data and reports from other country contexts to answer the following questions:

* “What models of collaboration among local and international actors (donors, private sector, academia, NGOs) are effective in supporting policy change regarding school feeding?”
* What kinds of partnerships with the private sector and/or host country governments are the most effective at ensuring program sustainability? Among successful partnerships, who are the key players and what are their roles? In what contexts do private sector and/or government partnerships work best and which contexts may be more challenging?
* “What is the minimum level of national or local government support that is necessary for a new school feeding program to be effective and durable?”
* “What are the long-term outcomes, both direct and indirect, of interventions related to school feeding and other key infrastructure components in creating strong education systems?”
* What is the cost-effectiveness of different school meal modalities, nutritional composition of meals and products, local procurement, and new technologies?
* What are the long-term impacts (five or more years) of school meal programs on local agriculture production and food safety and what variables affect these changes?

***GoM environmental policy effects on school enrollment*** Over the life of the project,*Bridging the Future* will examine correlations between school enrollment numbers and government policies to consolidate school populations related to environmental factors – including changes in access to water. Given the low student enrollment rate in Gorgol (68%) and presence of nomadism and transhumance movements, Counterpart aims to uncover whether GoM policy on population movement and consolidation of pupil populations has the added positive effect of increasing overall student enrollment. Methods will include consultations with the government and policy document review triangulated with school enrollment records.

**Evaluation Management**

The roles and responsibilities of Counterpart staff, partner staff, and independent evaluators are designed to ensure that standards of autonomy are maintained without sacrificing a participatory culture. The project will rely on ICT and informational management systems for systematic and accurate data management. Counterpart is accountable to USDA, project beneficiaries, and stakeholders regarding data management.

A MEL Manager will provide technical support tothe in-country MEAL team. The MEAL team will support the independent evaluator on the three evaluation points. Throughout the evaluation process, Counterpart will coordinate with local government authorities through formal and informal mechanisms while ensuring a constant feedback loop with (and from) USDA.

While the IE is an autonomous actor in line with the above policies and regulations, evaluations will be supported by Counterpart in terms of:

(1) TOR development, evaluator selection, and provision of project monitoring data

(2) Quality control and learning potential of evaluation design

(3) Facilitating communication between the independent evaluator, sub-recipients, and HQ

(4) Maintain a risk register of threats to the quality and utilization of evaluation findings

(5) Ensure the overall independence of the evaluator

***Risk Management:*** The selected IE will be required to take reasonable measures to mitigate any potential risks to research participants and the delivery of the evaluation. Therefore, the IE will be required to propose contingency to mitigate any occurrence of each of the identified risks, including COVID-19, health-related, and logistics-related risks, and specific safeguarding risks for both children and adults and mitigating strategies.

**Ethics**

Evaluation and research will adhere to international good practices related to research ethics and protocols, particularly regarding safeguarding children and vulnerable groups. This includes giving due consideration to the following:

* Administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect the confidentiality of those participating in research
* Safeguards for those conducting research
* Do No Harm safeguards for children participating in research, including child-safe physical safeguards as well as emotional/psychosocial safeguards
* Appropriate time allocated to engage with children participating in the research
* Parental or caregiver consent concerning data collection from/about children
* Age - and ability - appropriate assent processes based on reasonable assumptions about comprehension for the ages of children they intend to involve in the research
* Appropriate spaces and methodologies tailored in consideration of unique needs of girls and boys, including those with disabilities and for vulnerable adults
* Appropriate language and communication for different ages and the disabilities of children involved in the research.

Counterpart respects internationally accepted ethical standards for human subjects’ research as well as OMB’s "Standards & Guidelines for Statistical Surveys."

***Data Storage and Security:*** In the home office, network servers are housed in limited-access data centers. Access to data is based on a role-based directory service that implements a “need-to-know” policy. In field offices, password protected data will also have identifiers removed as sensitive data in paper formats will be stored in locked file cabinets in rooms that are accessed by keys. Laptops used by staff who collect and manage data are protected with whole-drive disk encryption that prevents data access should the laptop be lost or stolen. *Building the Future* will employ a comprehensive information security program to reduce risk associated with leaks and disclosure of confidential information that can impact the confidentiality, availability, and integrity of systems and data. No personal identifiers will be used with respondents of surveys, pupil assessments, or other data collection instruments.

**Evaluation Budget**

Counterpart has allocated 3% of the total program budget direct costs (excluding salaries and commodities) towards Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning activities. Activities related to (1) M&E Design and Monitoring (start-up workshop, quarterly/annual partners meetings and visits, adaptive management activities) and (2) Learning (program orientation events, learning events and dissemination, learning agenda events) have been allocated to specific activities costs. The following table presents high-level activities and allocated amounts.

1. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/fr/content/plan-national-de-developpement-du-secteur-educatif-2011-2020-mauritanie> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)