



Sustainable Financing Initiative

for School Health and Nutrition (SFI)

School Meals Financing Rapid Assessment

Guatemala

April 2022

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1. Introduction

School feeding programmes are amongst the largest social protection programmes in the world, and Latin America stands out as the second region with the largest number of beneficiaries only after Asia. Guatemala's school feeding program started in 1956 with individual efforts from local authorities. It took nearly half a century for the program to be implemented nationwide.

The School Feeding Program in Guatemala has achieved outstanding results. In 2020, it provided food services to around 2.5 million kindergarten and primary school children enrolled in public institutions, which is the target population. The original mandate does not contemplate secondary school, however, the 12-2021 amendment does. The program will be extended to secondary school (12-17 years) starting in 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic provoked school closures across the country, affecting the program's funding and threatening its operation. Nevertheless, the government's quick response ensured the ongoing operation of the program up to these days.

This country's rapid assessment is focused on analyzing the status of the School Feeding Program, paying close attention to the funding levels, institutional arrangements, and the role of international organizations in its implementation and financing.

2. National Context

2.1 Country Profile

Guatemala is the largest economy in Central America with a GDP of \$77.6 USD billion in 2020. A population of 18 million people and a GDP per capita of \$4,603 USD sets them as an upper middle-income country according to the World Bank's classification. During the past two decades, Guatemala has achieved stability in its macroeconomic indicators, such as public debt and budget deficit. On the other hand, unemployment has remained one of the lowest in the region, being 2.2% in 2021. Inflation has followed this stable trend too. In the last decade it has floated around 3% and in 2021 a level of 3.07% was registered. This economic discipline rewarded them with enough fiscal space to bear the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, it experienced one of the smallest GDP contractions of the region, with a decrease of -1.5%, followed by an impressive 7.5% expansion in 2021. However, the outstanding performance in this area has not fulfilled the expectations on human development and equality.

Guatemala remains a very unequal country, with great social challenges ahead. Its latest reading of the Gini Index¹, 48.3, places it as one of the most unequal countries in the Latin-American region, only behind Brazil, Belize, Colombia, and Panama. In 2020, 47% of Guatemala's

¹ 2014. There is no more recent data available.

population lived below the national poverty line (USD 4.57)². It is estimated that poverty will decrease to 45.9% in 2021, indicating that the pandemic increased poverty levels considerably.

On the educational side, the country has also improved during the past two decades, advancing its literacy rate from 69% in 2002 to 81.5% in 2018. This latest observation positions the country slightly more than 10 percentage points below the Latin American and Caribbean average. Furthermore, the education expansion has been accompanied by an improvement in the efficiency indicators. The retention rate³ for primary school children increased from 94.01% in 2010 to 98.59% in 2020 and the attrition rate lowered from 5.99% in 2010 to 1.41% in 2020. Secondary school followed this same trend, with an improvement in both the retention rate, from 92.61% to 95.43%, and in the attrition rate, from 7.39% to 4.57%, in the same 2010-2020 period.

2.2 Nutrition profile

Health data in Guatemala is compiled by the Health Management Information System (SIGSA for its acronym in Spanish) and it is updated to the year 2020. This source provides the latest information available. Nonetheless, the only relevant data for this research included in the system is chronic and acute malnutrition for children under the age of five. Therefore, to provide a complete overview of the nutritional situation of children in Guatemala, international sources were consulted, being 2015 the latest year when most of the information was published.

In 2020, 171,197 children under five years suffered from chronic malnutrition and 24,194 from acute malnutrition. Using the National Statistics Institute population forecasts, it is possible to obtain the total number of children under five years in 2020 and derive percentages to make information comparable with international sources. Thus, 10.34% of Guatemalan children under five years suffered from some type of malnutrition in 2020.

For the 10% figure, data of children under 5 with chronic and acute malnutrition was obtained from the SIGSA. Population forecast for 2020 (disaggregated by age) was obtained from the National Statistics institute. The 10.34% is the ratio of children with malnutrition under 5/total children under 5

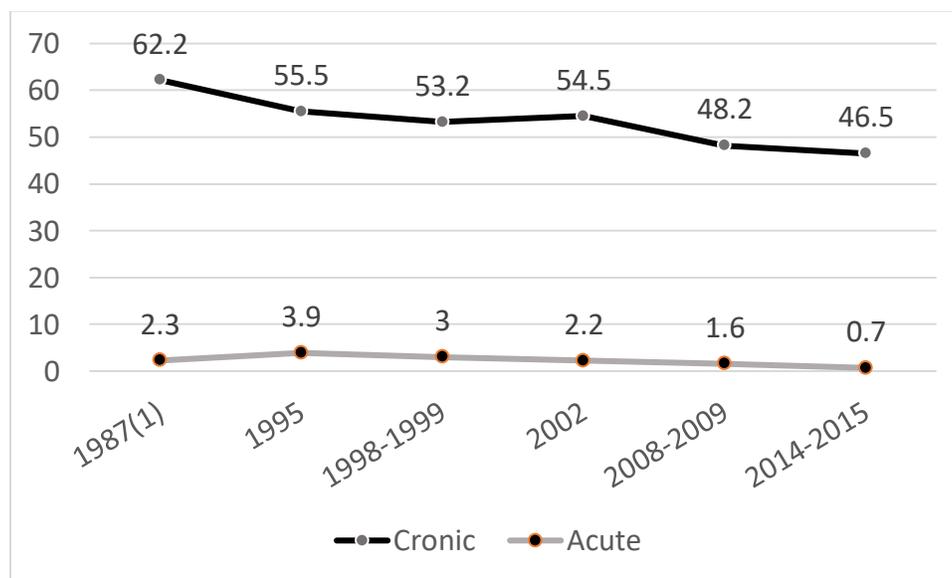
² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview#1> Poverty lines are adjusted by year. In this case we are considering PL of 2020 to have consistency with the last reading of poverty line. In the following comments the PL 2021 will be used. Important to underscore that in this section we are talking about poverty, not extreme poverty (1.90).

³ The retention rate is defined as the ratio between final and initial enrollment. Attrition rate is defined as the ratio between students that drop out and initial enrollment.

For the rest of the indicators, information is available for 2015 and is only applicable for children under 5 years . The prevalence of stunting is 47%, , and the prevalence of wasting is 0.8%. The levels of anemia, undernourishment, and overweight are captured in the National Maternal and Child Health Survey (ENSMI for its acronym in Spanish). Despite the historical improvement and the downward trend achieved in these indicators, Guatemala remains with important gaps in these areas of child nutrition.

To complement the nutrition profile, it is noteworthy to identify the most affected regions in terms of nutritional deficiencies. According to 2015 information from the Centro American Integration System (SICA for its acronym in Spanish), 13 departments and the Capital City present prevalences of malnutrition lower than those found throughout the country, which on average reaches 37.6%. The lowest values correspond to Guatemala City with 13.8%; Escuintla 18.6%; El Progreso 19.1%; Santa Rosa 20.6% and the rest of the municipalities of the department of Guatemala with 20.9%. The remaining departments presented prevalences higher than the national average. The highest prevalences were recorded in Totonicapán, with 59.5%, and Quiché, 55.3%. These estimates are for children of children from 6 to 9 years old.

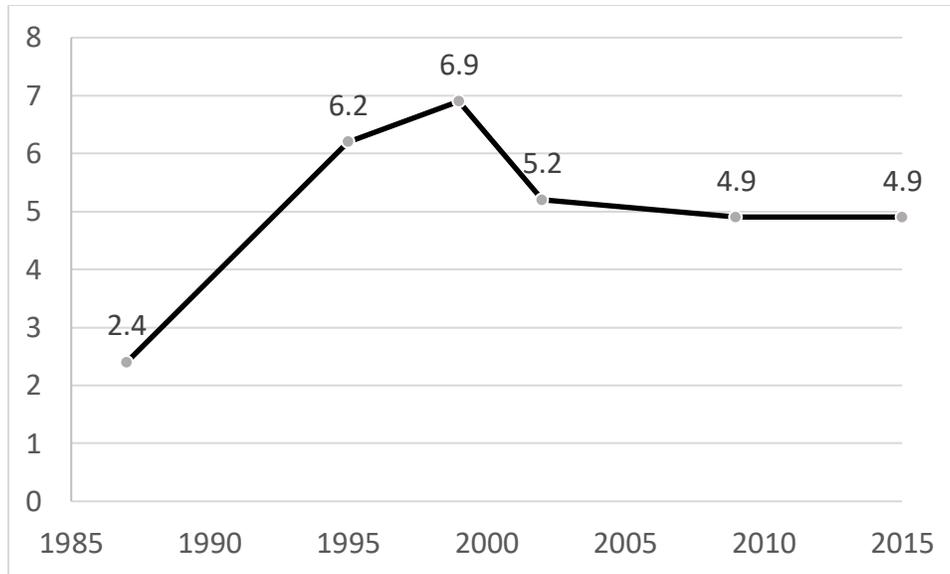
Figure 1. Percentage of children under 5 years with chronic or acute undernourishment, 1987-2015



*Made with data from the ENSMI

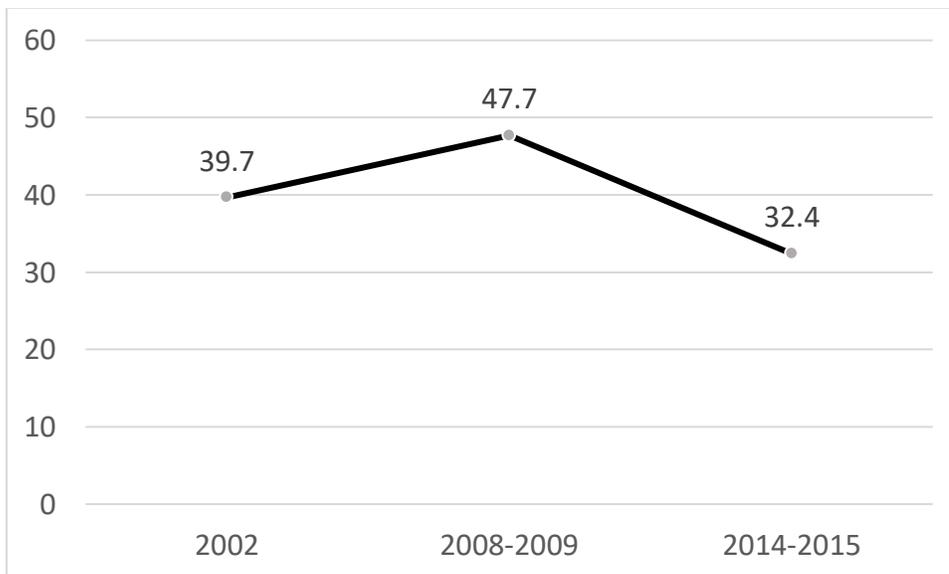
(1) Data from 1987 considers children from 0 to 36 months old.

Figure 2. Percentage of children under 5 years with overweight, 1987-2015



*Made with data from the World Bank

Figure 3. Percentage of children under 5 years with anemia, 2002-2015



*Made with data from the ENSMI

2.3 National School Feeding Policy

Efforts to support the education and nutrition of school-age children began in 1956 at a local level. The World Food Programme (WFP) started operations in Guatemala in 1984 and has supported school feeding programmes' funding and implementation thereafter. In 1995, endeavors were centralized, creating a national school feeding program. Nevertheless, it was until 2017 that the legal framework was homogenized across departments with the creation of

the School Feeding Act (SFA). Its regulation was published in 2018 and later, in 2021, the act was amended.

The SFA was published on October 19, 2017. Its main objective is to “guarantee school feeding, promote health and bolster a healthy diet in the child and adolescent population that attends to public or private learning facilities...”.⁴ The Act creates the School Feeding Program (SFP) and sets that private learning facilities will not be beneficiaries of it. However, private institutions would need to comply with the guidelines and norms of the SFA.

The SFA and its regulation define the actors and tools in charge of deploying and tracking the SFP. These are:

- Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA)
- Parents Organizations (PO)
- Departmental Directorates of Education
- Interinstitutional School Feeding Commission, with representatives from the ministries of education, finance, public health and social assistance, agriculture, and from the secretaries from the presidency and nutritional and food security (the “Commission” henceforth)
- National System of School Feeding Information and Evaluation
- General Comptroller of Accounts

The program is strongly decentralized, and it delegates most of the responsibility to local authorities. The governing body of the SFP is the MINEDUC, through its General Direction for Community Participation and Support Services. MINEDUC Departmental Directorates of Education must consider the program’s financial necessities in its annual programming, but they are not accountable for executing these resources. Instead, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) transfers directly the economic resources to the PO, which are legally entitled before the MoF to manage public funds. The PO then selects the suppliers (farmers) from a MAGA accredited list. To ensure local ownership and participation, the SFA mandates that 50% of the food purchases be from local producers if they are capable of meeting the demand. Criteria mandates to purchase 50% and then 70% of food supplies to local producers, but does not specify if local farmers must be small producers. This percentage should increase to 70% after five years of implementation. Lastly, on the accountability side, the General Comptroller of Accounts will oversee the financial execution of the program to meet the applicable mandates and regulations.

⁴ Congreso de la República de Guatemala, *Decreto Número 12-2021 (Reformas a la Ley de Alimentación Escolar)*, artículo 1, 15 de octubre de 2021, consulted February 18th, 2022.

The role of the National System of School Feeding Information and Evaluation is to gather information about the number, body mass index (BMI) and participation in health promotion activities of schoolchildren enrolled in public education centers in the kindergarten and primary levels. Nevertheless, as of February 2022, the National System had not started operations. On the other hand, the Interinstitutional School Feeding Commission was delegated with the responsibility to undertake annual performance assessments of the SFP and to review the resource allocation per child every two years. Details on funding amounts and sources will be provided in the next sections.

2.4 Educational context

Education in Guatemala is divided into four levels: initial, kindergarten, primary and secondary education. The optimal age range defined by the MINEDUC for each level is set out in table 2. Attendance at school is compulsory for every child until the first “stretch” of secondary education. Afterward, in the non-compulsory second stretch, students are taught professional skills in programs that last two or three years, depending on the path chosen. In this context, the SFA emerges as the State’s response to formalize a legal framework that guarantees infancy’s right to have quality food and education.

School meals are recognized policies that maintain high levels of enrollments and low levels of dropouts. Guatemala is not the exception. Nevertheless, it is complicated to isolate the effects on school meals in the country’s education nowadays, given that the program started more than 20 years ago nationwide. Therefore, there is limited information to make a before-and-after program assessment. Instead, what can be said beyond enrollment and dropouts, is that the program has pursued to fulfill students’ nutritional requirements through determining which type of food is allowed in the school meals⁵. This characteristic was absent before the SFA.

3. Current programmes

3.1 Number of children targeted/reached

⁵ The list of healthy food allowed for the SFP is established in a technical note issued by the MINEDUC. It considers five food groups: foods rich in fats, regulatory foods (minerals and vitamins), proteins, carbohydrates, and natural condiments. The natural condiments are not a food group, but it was considered to enhance taste. To see the full list of approved foods please see https://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEFOCE/documents/NOTA_T%C3%89CNICA_LISTADO_DE_ALIMENTOS_SALUDABLES_PROGRAMA_DE_ALIMENTACION_ESCOLAR_2020_31102019.pdf

The SFA mandates that only children attending public institutions would be benefited from the SFP. The latest information about children’s attendance in kindergarten and primary school is available for 2020 in the statistical yearbook of education.

Table 1. Enrolled students by school level and public or private institutions

| Year | Private | | Public | | Total ⁽¹⁾ <i>(% of the total age group) ⁽²⁾</i> | |
|------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|--|-------------------|
| | Kindergarten | Primary School | Kindergarten | Primary School | Kindergarten | Primary School |
| 2019 | 98,316 | 296,290 | 514,779 | 2,050,608 | 613,095 (82) | 2,346,898 (108.3) |
| 2020 | 95,859 | 300,129 | 501,336 | 2,048,269 | 597,195 (80) | 2,348,398 (107.9) |

*Made with data from the Statistical Yearbook of Education in Guatemala.

(1) MINEDUC defines 5-6 and 7-12 years as the optimal ages to attend kindergarten and primary school, respectively.

(2) To estimate the percentage of children enrolled, information from the population forecast from the National Institute of Statistics was used.

Data shows that total kindergarten enrollment decreased in 2020, the year when the pandemic started in Guatemala. This trend was stronger in public institutions. As a result, outcomes of the SFP were directly affected since fewer students were able to receive food benefits. Values in brackets indicate the percentage of children in school age (kindergarten or primary school) that are actually attending to school. In the case of primary school, there is a considerable number of students older than optimal age who are still studying primary school. Thus, the percentage is >100%.

As the WFP publication about responses from school feeding programmes to COVID-19 points out, it is complicated to obtain the exact number of reached children, because the programme ends with the food delivery to the school and does not ensure that food is finally delivered to children.

3.2 COVID-19 Disruption

Guatemala’s SFP stands out from other school feeding programmes for its rapid capacity to adapt to the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 health crisis. The program was never interrupted, but it had to shift to an even more parents-guided approach, given the nationwide schools' closure.

On March 26, 2020, only two weeks after the first official COVID-19 case was registered, ministerial agreement 825-2020 was approved. The paramount change compared to the previous program's execution was that it allowed PO to purchase food supplies and deliver them directly to children's parents, instead of directing them to the schools. At the beginning of the new implementation, deliveries were closely followed with a few days of coverage (15-20), expecting that the pandemic duration would be relatively short. In 2021, deliveries were augmented to cover up to 30 days of children feeding.

The COVID-19 disruption created unexpected challenges, but also provided important lessons to improve its SFP implementation. The main setback that officers had to face was the sanitary cords built by local communities, which deter providers from supplying goods. Nevertheless, these same logistical threats forced stakeholders to engage more directly with local producers, which had positive outcomes in children's health and the local economy.

3.3 Brief summary of evaluations

The Interinstitutional School Feeding Commission was mandated by the SFA to undertake an annual performance assessment of the SFP and to revise the required funding level per child and day every two years. *[The Commission has already prepared evaluations reports, according to MINEDUC officers. However, they are not published. This section is meant to be completed with information from the abovementioned reports]*

International institutions have also undertaken evaluations on school feeding in the Latin American region, but their conclusions are hardly disaggregated at a country level. WFP, FAO, CARE, and the Movement for Community-led Development performed the most recent assessments. Apart from WFP, their recommendations are based on case studies from SFP in local communities and can be summarized as follows:

1. Monitoring and evaluations are amongst the greatest challenges of School feeding programmes. WFP underscores the general gap that exists globally regarding nutrition outcomes indicators. Furthermore, school feeding programmes tend to overlook funding for monitoring and evaluations.
2. Further training is required in terms of food security and nutrition within local and national authorities.
3. Active engagement of the project's stakeholders creates a shared vision and improves results.
4. Local actors and beneficiaries tend to have a lack of knowledge about the SFP. Specifically, there is a limited understanding of the program's guidelines and the PO's role.

5. Improving the quality and taste of foods could save up to 0.35% of the budget, as a result of avoiding the waste of 561.6 tons of food and according to the FAO Including Gastronomy in the School Feeding Programme report⁶.

4. Public financing

4.1 Level of financing

The level of public financing that must be allocated per child and day to ensure the implementation of the SFP is established in the SFA. The act mandated the MoF to assign, as a minimum, USD 0.62 per beneficiary and day, every fiscal year. Afterward, amendment 12-2021 set a goal to increase the allocation and specified the funding amounts according to the school level. Moreover, it also established that children enrolled in kindergarten and primary school would benefit from a USD 0.90 disbursement per child and day, starting in 2022. The exact amounts of resources per child and day will be binding by 2023 and are presented in table 2:⁷

Table 2. Minimum funding levels per children and day according to school level

| School level | Optimal age range (years) | Minimum funding per children and day |
|---|---|---|
| Initial education | 0-4 | USD 0.62 |
| Kindergarten and primary education | 5-6 (kindergarten) and 7-12 (primary school) | USD 0.90 |
| Secondary education | 13-15 | USD 0.62 |

*Made with data from amendment 12-2021 and MINEDUC glossary of terms

Considering that expected funding levels were already defined by 2018, it is possible to analyze them against actual disbursements in the SFP, using national financial execution reports. Table 3 shows the number of children enrolled in kindergarten and primary education and the expected funding in the 2019-2021 period⁸. The most recent survey on income and poverty is

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb3430en/cb3430en.pdf>

⁷ Despite having specific funding levels for school feeding programmes in initial and secondary education, budgetary documentation shows that the program has only been implemented at the kindergarten and primary education level.

⁸ This period was selected to observe how the SFP behaved before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

the 2014 National Life Conditions Survey (an income-expenditure survey is ongoing and will be published in 2022). The poverty line in 2014 was USD 3.62 and the extreme poverty line was 2.04 USD. When inflation is accounted, the poverty line 2021 is USD 4.70, and the extreme poverty line is USD 2.64 (above the WB poverty line). Therefore, a USD 0.90 transfer represents the 19.14% of the daily income for poor people and 34.09% for the population in extreme poverty. Regarding overall income, the latest information available is for 2019, where the average Guatemalan earned USD 10.85 per day. Therefore, the daily USD 90 transfer represents the %8.29 of the average Guatemalan income (in 2021).

Table 3 . Number of children in kindergarten and primary school and expected levels of financing for the School Meals Program 2019-2021

| Year | Children enrolled in public institutions | | Expected minimum financing (USD 2021) | |
|------|--|------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| | Kindergarten | Primary School | Kindergarten | Primary School |
| 2019 | 514,779 | 2,050,608 | 57,515,340 | 229,110,776 |
| 2020 | 501,336 | 2,048,269 | 53,437,681 | 218,326,124 |
| 2021 | Data unavailable | Data unavailable | NA | NA |

*Made with data from the data from the Statistical Yearbook of Education

*Considering a 200-days scholar calendar.

Table 4 . Spending levels in the School Meals Program 2019-2021

| Year | Observed Spending Level (USD 2021) | |
|------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Kindergarten (% GDP) | Primary School (% GDP) |
| 2019 | 66,102,703.52 (0.0801) | 194,945,107.99 (0.2364) |
| 2020 | 64,133,795.98 (0.0789) | 189,138,554.37 (0.2329) |
| 2021 | 61,184,693.74 (NA) | 180,441,284.46 (NA) |

*Made with data from expenditure exercises reports

4.2 Revenue source

The SFA includes a provision on the SFP financing regime. The first aspect to underscore is that SFP economic resources “must only be used for the purchase of food or inputs”.⁹ The act defines that the SFP funds will come exclusively from the value-added tax (VAT) collection. The resources allocation will come from two different sources within the VAT. The first one is a 0.8% direct transfer from VAT. The second source comes from the Peace Fund, which receives resources directly from the VAT (IVA-PAZ). One percent (1.00%) of the VAT collection is preserved in the Peace Fund, from which zero point five (0.5%) will be allotted to the SPF. Adding these two sources, it can be concluded that the SFP is funded with zero point eight (0.8005%) of the total VAT collection.

Bearing in mind the mandates settled in the SFA and the actual SFP disbursements, the previous financial analysis can be expanded to identify the program’s under or overspending. On the one hand, financing is limited by the VAT collection in a particular fiscal year. On the other, the law establishes a minimum amount to be allotted by children. This may create a disparity between budgetary legal mandates and observed expenditure exercises. There are inconsistencies in the legal framework that governs the SFP. Namely, the law establishes the sources of funding (VAT) and the expected funding amount (enrolled children * transfers per children). If there were full consistency between these two mandates, the percentage of VAT allocated to the SFP would match the minimum funding requirements in function of the number of children who are attending schools.

Table 5 . SPA expected funding according to VAT collection 2019-2021 (USD 2021)

| Year | VAT collection | Expected SFP funding from VAT |
|------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2019 | 2,118,031,245.30 | 16,945,308.978 |
| 2020 | 2,130,719,912.17 | 17,046,824.657 |
| 2021 | 2,428,422,490.97 | 19,428,594.139 |

*Made with data from the Ministry of Finance

Tables 3, 4 and 5 offer an overview of the current funding situation of the SFP. First, the observed levels of financing for kindergarten children in 2019 and 2020 are actually greater than the levels required by law. On the contrary, resources allocated for the school feeding program at primary education are below the mandatory requirements by more than USD 70 million in both 2019 and 2020. Regarding the VAT contribution to school feeding programmes, the percentage established in the law falls far short for the number of pupils and financial needs. In

⁹ Congreso de la República de Guatemala, *Decreto Número 12-2021 (Reformas a la Ley de Alimentación Escolar)*, artículo 36, 15 de octubre de 2021, consulted on February 18th, 2022,

fact, the capital used to sponsor the SFP in kindergarten and primary school represents around 10.5% of the total VAT allocation in every fiscal year for the period analyzed.

While the programme has been successful and the data shows that it could be financially sustainable¹⁰, there are evident disparities in the legal framework that derive on differences between expected and observed funding levels.

5. Donor financing

Historically, the SFP's implementation has relied on the support from different actors other than the PO and the government of Guatemala, such as international organizations, NGOs, and foreign assistance programs. Their role has centered in providing technical accompaniment, in-kind donations and building the capacities needed to ensure the continuity of the SFP. Nowadays, considering that the government of Guatemala covers the full cost of the food purchases, third actors are focused on the program's deployment.

In the field of foreign assistance, one of the most relevant donors is the U.S. government which has implemented the McGovern-Dole Food Program in Guatemala. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in partnership with other organizations such as Project Concern International, Catholic Relief Services, and Guatemala's government. The program provides agricultural commodities, financial and technical assistance to improve education, food security, and the health of school-age children. At the end of 2021, the program amounted to 24 million dollars in assistance to the country.

The government of Brazil has also assisted Guatemala's SFP through Brazil's Ministry of Education and the National Fund for Education Development (FNDE). Along with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the government of Brazil works with other eight countries and their local governments to strengthen their SFP capacities and sustainability. They seek to reinforce the design and implementation of SFP by enhancing the institutionalization of the program and other food security policies.

The World Food Program (WFP) is another major actor that has assisted the SFP in different ways. The MINEDUC reports the in-kind contributions that has received from various actors. Among the most important WFP actions are: cost-benefit analysis of the SFP, donation of

¹⁰ Guatemalan authorities have demonstrated commitment with the program even though its financial necessities considerably exceed what is contemplated in the legal framework. The sustainability argument also rests on the fact that the program has been implemented by the central government since 1995, many years before the SFA was adopted, which pinpoints the continuity of financial flows from various sources to the SFP. To identify where the money is coming from besides the VAT collection, a more complete budgetary analysis is needed, but it falls beyond the scope of this rapid country assessment.

water filters, consultancies to MINEDUC staff to properly implement the SFP and a visual-aid kit that teaches children the importance of healthy eating.

FAO has facilitated its experience and knowledge about strengthening and developing capacities for food and nutrition security policies, as part of the Zero Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (ALCSH). IFAD and the World Food Program have teamed up with FAO to provide school meals with fruit and vegetables by setting up a food chain that links local farmers with schools. Furthermore, these three actors -in cooperation with Guatemalan authorities-, developed a pilot program that links family crops production with the SFP supply chain in 33 schools and coordinated a school feeding congress in Alta Verapaz. The infrastructure facilitated by the organizations' assistance allowed the food chain to continue even with the closing of schools due to COVID-19.

The program has also been benefited from technical assistance. In 2019, MINEDUC and UNICEF partnered to build capacities in the PO. The assistance focused on carrying out a documentary review of the existing material related to the responsibilities of the PO in the implementation of the SFA, as well as coordinating meetings and interviews with the PO parents to design the methodology and collect information for the diagnosis of application of responsibilities in the implementation of the SFA.

There are also other NGOs that have provided schools in some municipalities with food and supplements complementary to those supplied by MINEDUC. Guatemala's SHARE Organization, Mercy Corps, Plan International, and Vision Mundial are among them. Currently, Save the Children and Catholic Relief Assistance continue to work with the U.S. Government as a partner to the McGovern-Dole Food Program in Guatemala.

6. Role of private sector and households

The private sector and households are deeply engaged in the delivery of the SFP. The central role of households in the program is through the PO, who are the entities designated to make the food purchases and oversee their delivery to the educational centers. The PO structure has a general assembly and a board of directors. Members rotate on a five-year basis. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the duties of the PO intensified, as they became responsible for delivering the food directly to the beneficiaries.

The households' functions in the SFP are not only defined by the PO. The SFP regulation establishes activities that contemplate the engagement of parents, such as the pedagogical school gardens. The MINEDUC is mandated to build capacities among parents to sustain the pedagogical school gardens and promote the local sustainability of the program. Furthermore,

nutrition education content should be distributed to parents to replicate good food practices at home, extending the policy's scope to households.

Beyond mandatory and regulated parent participation, households engage with the SFP in other ways. The main reason is that the SFP's funding is exclusively intended for the purchase of food, leaving unattended other steps of the program's deployment. Therefore, the community is -in some way- forced to collaborate to carry out the activities neglected in the planning of the policy.

Due to the decentralized nature of the program, the private sector also plays a significant role in its implementation. The core function of private participants is to be food suppliers. These can be local producers or large firms. However, the SFA promotes local ownership by setting a minimum of 50% of the food to be purchased by local farmers. The private sector also participates in nutrition initiatives through the Nutrition Alliance, which is an organization constituted by civil society and private organizations that seeks to fight chronic malnutrition. However, its efforts in the SFP are atomized and lack a clear mandate within the program's implementation.

7. Efficiency and equity reflection

7.1 Administrative cost of programme delivery

Tracking the program's administrative cost is complicated because the legal framework establishes mandates to secure funding for food purchases but misses a financial plan that enables stakeholders to comply with the SFP properly. As a result, the operation of the SFP heavily relies on the installed national and regional institutional capacity and on the community's engagement (PO, school authorities). Therefore, despite the positive outcomes and spillovers that the society's involvement brings, it is fundamental to channel resources to this field.

Implementation can be divided between central and local actors. The central government oversees the money transfers to the PO, the nutritional requirements that must be met by the purchase of food, the accreditation of small suppliers that participate in the SFP and, in coordination with the local governments, the financial programming considering the number of children enrolled each year. Since the publication of the SFA, no additional funds have been allocated to the participating institutions at this level (MINEDUC, MoF, MAGA). As a result, state workers have had to absorb a larger workload.

Local stakeholders are in charge of the rest of the implementation. PO received transfers to purchase the meals, but they also need to ensure the transportation, cooking and serving of the food. School authorities support the coordination of these activities, however, neither they, nor the parents receive any financial compensation.

Preparing and serving the food demands the largest unattended financial need. This is aggravated by the lack of cooking facilities that many schools experience. According to a MINEDUC officer interview, some schools do not even have running water to wash and prepare the meals. It is clear that the SFP has substantial and unobserved administrative costs and that these must be considered for the program's enhancement.

7.2 Allocation against deprivation and targeting indicators

One of the program's flaws is that it lacks a baseline information about children's nutritional features and school performance, which complicates the effective assessment of the SFP and its effectiveness against deprivation indicators. Furthermore, even though the SFA was published in 2017, students have benefited from school meals far earlier that date and thus benefits have permeated over time.

The SFP target population is all the kindergarten and primary school children enrolled in public institutions. The funding level required per day and child is the same across the country and thus misses to considerate regional and income differences. Consequently, there are children whose household's financial situation would not require government support with school meals. On the other hand, the administrative and planning costs of discriminating recipients could be more expensive than including them in the financial programming.

8. Observations on scope for financing scale-up of programmes

The SFP in Guatemala has improved its operations and attempted to expand its beneficiary basis throughout history. The SFA, its amendment, and regulation represented a milestone in the school feeding legal framework, by setting the minimum standards that ensure proper nutrition and enhance academic performance among kindergarten and primary schoolchildren. On the other hand, there are still areas of improvement that can be addressed with the cooperation of the national and local governments, the international community, and local stakeholders. The following are reflections that could be consider to improve the implementation of the SFP in Guatemala:

- **Coordination between PO and the central government is admirable and could serve as an example to set relationship guidelines between government and other stakeholders.** The level of organization and accountability exhibited by the PO is a major component of the SFP's success before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The PO's original role is to oversee the food's purchases and then deliver them to the Interinstitutional School Feeding Commission. Considering the good results achieved by the PO, they could be considered to take a larger role on the program's implementation.

- **To improve overall results, special attention should be paid to marginalized areas.** The SFP is universal. This approach brings implementation advantages because there is no need to discriminate among beneficiaries, which tends to be costly. However, after reviewing the nutrition and economic data of Guatemala, necessities differ across the population. Regional data about malnutrition in the country can serve as an indicator of where the government should allocate greater resources to the SFP. For example, the districts of Totonicapán and Quiché, which presents the highest malnutrition levels should receive greater support on school feeding programs. This diagnosis could be strengthened if malnutrition data is crossed with drop-out rates. The results would shed light on whether there is a strong correlation between these variables and which districts to prioritize more. The food basket provided by child may be insufficient for the most vulnerable children, considering he or she may need to share it with other family members.
- **Financial resources to meet infrastructure and institutional needs can come from international cooperation.** The central government has the food purchases covered, but it misses to provide resources to comply with the rest of the implementation. This is the biggest defect of the program. Thus, international cooperation from different actors could be coordinated to support the program in these areas. Particularly, there is a necessity to adapt education facilities to serve school meals. Furthermore, government capacities have not been expanded nor improved to deliver the SFP. International actors could assist the MINEDUC and MAGA to enhance the program's implementation and assessment. **There is an apparent need to financially support the SFP implementation, but money transfers may not be the solution.** PO oversee the purchase and distribution of meals in the SFP without any economic compensation. This creates a strong sense of community commitment, especially because the main beneficiaries are the PO children. Nevertheless, this model rests on the parents' willingness and availability to be part of an PO, and there are a considerable number of schools who lack a PO, affecting the SFP implementation. The obvious solutions would be to economically compensate the PO to deliver their mandates, but this could bring adverse effects, according to recent literature on psychology and economics. Therefore, to ensure the longstanding implementation of the program, the preferences of the PO in terms of compensation should be collected without neglecting their engagement with the community.
- **Increasing the number of beneficiaries would imply to include private schools in the SFP, but further analysis is needed to avoid making SFP a regressive policy.** The current approach of the SFP only includes public institutions and its coverage is almost 100%. If the goal is to secure school meals for every Guatemalan child, private schools must be included in the program. However, this could turn it into a regressive policy, transferring resources to those who do not need it. To enhance the program's outcomes, improving quality and implementation should be a priority before extending the number of beneficiaries.

- **There is a disparity between the legal base of funding and observed spending levels on the SFP.** Section 4 is clear in illustrating that the current mandate to fund the SFP is insufficient by a large amount. It considers a %0.8005 transfer from the VAT collection when the actual spending represents 10.5% of the total VAT revenues. On the other hand, expenditure on kindergarten children exceeds expected levels whereas expenditure on primary children falls short. This not only creates disparities between mandates and budgetary operation, but also makes it difficult to track financial information. It is evident that SFP funding comes from sources other than the VAT, but it is not clear if these are earmarked taxes, donations, loans, etc.
- **More funding allocated to evaluations is needed.** One of the mandates of the Interinstitutional School Feeding Commission is to adjust the minimum funding amount required by children/day every two years. This duty is hard to accomplish without the proper data on nutrition and delivery levels. Furthermore, information on the program's returns is essential to attract international cooperation and other sources of funding.

Annex 1. Nutrition Alliance and the SFP

The Nutrition Alliance (NA) assists with the implementation of the SFP with its network of civil society and private organizations. Similarly to the role of international organizations and according to officials from the MINEDUC, the NA supports the with the logistic of the program and in-kind contributions. Their efforts are atomized, making them hard to track. In 2020, the NA and authorities from the National System of Nutritional and Food Security (SESAN for its acronym in Spanish) met, to explore potential cooperation in the “Great Crusade for Nutrition”.

About the Nutrition Alliance

In 2012, 25 private and civil organizations founded the NA aiming to have incidence in nutritional policies in Guatemala. It focuses its efforts in supporting the country to reach the 2021 internal goal to achieve conditions of human development at the community level, emphasizing the nutrition and education of children and young people.

The NA influences the opinion and public policies of the SESAN, so that government, international cooperation, private efforts, and social mobilization ensure that the "1,000-day window" policy is implemented comprehensively throughout the country and thereby combat chronic malnutrition.

The NA has recently partnered with UNICEF and the government of Guatemala to support the efforts against malnutrition. Its work with UNICEF is focusing on complying with Sustainable Development Goal number 2: cero hunger.

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