

VALUE FOR MONEY DIGEST

School feeding in Kyrgyzstan

DECEMBER 2025



Introduction

This document presents an extract¹ from a Value for Money (VfM) analysis conducted on a school feeding intervention in Kyrgyzstan. The intervention integrated a package of activities, including the procurement of local commodities, provision of school kitchens with requisite tools and equipment, training of school cooks on safe food preparation and storage practices, provision of take-home ration (THR) for school cooks, and distribution of imported commodities from October 2021 - June 2024.

The intervention aimed to improve literacy outcomes and health and nutrition practices in the targeted intervention schools. It was designed to be implemented via a decentralized school kitchen (DSK) model and used a hybrid approach based on the provision of domestic and external/donated commodities. The intervention was implemented across six regions, targeting schools located in remote, rural and mountainous areas.

¹ A full Value for Money report was produced

Overview of the VfM Analysis

The VfM analysis used the 5Es (Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Cost-Effectiveness², Equity) approach³ adopting a mixed method analysis. The Economy (i.e. cost per input and cost categorization) and Cost-Efficiency (i.e. cost per output) components were analysed using [Dioptra](#).

Dioptra is a web-based cost analysis software that helps programme teams to calculate the full cost per output or intervention in a few hours, compare results to existing benchmarks, and review evidence-based strategies to improve reach and service delivery with limited resources.

The analysis considered institutional costs (i.e. from implementing actor), and societal costs (i.e. from local actors as community and Government). The analysis categorized cost by type: direct program costs, direct shared costs and overhead/Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR). Shared and indirect costs were estimated by comparing the proportion of that intervention's costs over the total of program costs

The VfM analysis was developed by Mercy Corps' Technical support, Evidence and program Quality (TEQ), MEL unit.

Value for Money results

Economy

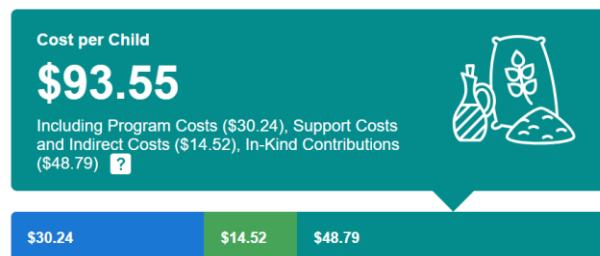
The analysis reported that inputs were procured at the lowest cost for the required quality. Imported commodities were managed centrally, while local products, such as kefir, were sourced through competitive tendering. Inflation and logistical challenges in remote areas increased local delivery costs, but the introduction of a digital procurement system improved compliance

² Cost-effectiveness was not calculated due to lack of comparison data

and cost savings. Materials and Activities represented the largest cost category, reporting an increase from 56% to 78% compared to Year 1 of implementation. This suggests that a higher proportion of resources have been transferred directly to participants.

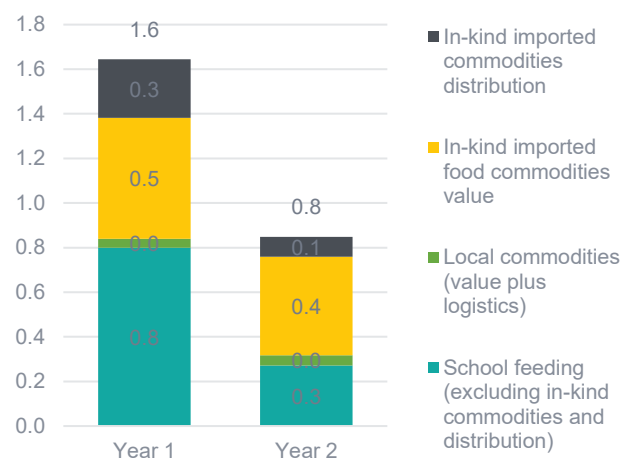
Efficiency

The school feeding intervention reached a total of 257 schools, serving 70,649 children with 7,794,832 hot school meals.



The average cost to reach a child per school year fell to \$94, down by \$39 from Year 1, while the cost per hot meal halved from \$1.60 to \$0.80 (figure below).

Figure 1: Cost per school meal served



The cost of delivering \$1 worth of in-kind food dropped to \$0.20, a 59% reduction. These gains were driven by spreading startup investments over multiple years and leveraging economies of scale. In other words, the programme increased

³ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78a9ee40f0b632476992f1/DFID-approach-value-money.pdf>

reach while maintaining some costs fixed and sustained investment at early stages. Government and parent contributions accounted for 26% of food value, raising the comprehensive cost per child to \$113 per year and per meal to \$1, underscoring their role in sustainability.

Effectiveness

The intervention contributed to achieving 97% of school attendance, suggesting a nutrition improvement status across children consuming nutritious meals. Literacy improved markedly, with Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results showed that children receiving hot meals for one year of intervention were able to read 6.3 more correct words per minute than children from schools not receiving hot meals at the time of assessment. Multi-year programming, as well as community and government contributions, proved to be critical for sustaining these impacts and reducing costs over time.

Equity and Inclusion

The intervention prioritized hard-to-reach schools, with 97% located in mountainous and underserved areas. The programme ensured

and monitored inclusivity and addressed social norms through Social Behaviour Change activities focusing on increase of male engagement in school feeding organization process. Take-home rations targeted vulnerable female kitchen staff, who benefitted from increased accessibility thanks to digital training options. Contributions from parents and government further supported equitable access to meals beyond program resources.

Recommendations

To strengthen impact and sustainability, the programme should integrate nutrition outcome measurements and conduct annual outcome data collection to track progress. Monitoring contributions from government and families would provide a fuller picture of costs and support planning for scale-up. Maintaining multi-year interventions is essential to maximise efficiency and reach. Finally, exploring home-grown solutions could reduce reliance on imports while fostering local economic benefits.



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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

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