EVALUATION PLAN

Introduction

The Nourish & Flourish (in Spanish, *Alimenta y Florece*) project's evaluation plan guides the project in evaluating performance and impact, and will also support the McGovern-Dole Learning Agenda in the following ways:

- **Monitoring program outputs**: Counterpart's monitoring evaluation, and learning (MEL) unit will develop data collection instruments and forms to collect data during the normal course of activity implementation, which will be shared with project partners for joint review and continuous program adjustment. Output data will inform decisions that contribute to the continuous improvement of program activities and endeavours.
- **Learning from program implementation:** The project will use evaluation to generate and document lessons learned and use those lessons to inform program implementation and adaptive management. The section on alignment with USDA's Learning Agenda, below, provides further information on our integration of a Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework into our MEL approach. Integrating various types of information regularly to make decisions will equip the management team to maximize positive outcomes for Nourish & Flourish.
- **Quality control and management**: The evaluation plan will ensure the implementation and verification of data quality standards to support adaptive management and learning. Standardized protocols and procedures will guide data handling, which will be detailed in a data manual and uphold the principles of independence and accountability. See Evaluation Management Section below.

Project Overview

Counterpart will target 401 primary schools in San Miguel and Morazán in Eastern El Salvador with a package of integrated activities including school feeding, nutrition, health, WASH, literacy, and resilient agriculture. By working at a community, municipal, departmental, and national level, Counterpart's systems approach will sustainably strengthen the capacity of a range of critical actors, such as parents and caregivers, teachers, school boards and school feeding committees, private sector, local producers, and government. Through technical assistance, improved coordination, data driven systems and decision-making, Nourish & Flourish will support the Government of El Salvador (GoES) Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT) existing school feeding and health program, Programa de Alimentación y Salud Escolar (PASE) to effectively scale literacy education and school feeding to improve learners participation in the classroom and maximize reading and writing outcomes; reinforce positive social and behavioural practices to sustain learning opportunities for girls and boys through community action; increase engagement of parents and caregivers in children's education; enhance sustainable school feeding operations through Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) with producer organizations and strategic private sector partners; and align to critical policies and strategies that directly contribute to realizing MINEDUCYT and the GoES school feeding strategy and wider educational reforms, including the Office of the First Lady and the Crecer Juntos Institute, which has been facilitating inter-ministerial coordination.

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Activities and Anticipated Results

Activity	Anticipated Results
Activity 1: Provide School Meals	Increased access to food (MGD 1.2.1.1, 1.3.1.1), Reduced Short-term Hunger (MGD 1.2.1), Increased economic and cultural incentives (MGD 1.3.1), increased student enrollment (MGD 1.3.4), and improved student attendance (MGD 1.3).
Activity 2: Rehabilitation of kitchens, storerooms, and water sanitation systems	Increased engagement of local organizations and community groups (MGD 1.4.4), Improved school infrastructure (MGD 1.3.3), Increased access to requisite food prep and storage tools and equipment (MGD 2.6), and Increased access to clean water and sanitation services (MGD 2.4).
Activity 3: Increase the skills and knowledge of teachers and school directors	Increased Skills and Knowledge of Teachers (MGD 1.1.4), Increased Skills and Knowledge of School Administrators (MGD 1.1.5), and Improved quality of literacy instruction (MGD 1.1).
Activity 4: Promote reading in and out of the classroom	Better access to school supplies and materials (MGD 1.1.2) will support achieving higher literacy scores.
Activity 5: Creating safe, inclusive and well-governed school environments	Increased engagement of local organizations and community groups (MGD 1.4.4), Increased skills and knowledge of school administrators (MGD 1.1.5), Increased student enrollment (MGD 1.3.4), and increased community understanding of the benefits of education (MGD 1.3.5). Overall, these intermediate results will contribute to Improved student attendance (MGD 1.3).
Activity 6: Building partnerships and strengthening the capacity of municipal, departmental, and national school feeding government actors	Increased Government Support (MGD 1.4.3), Improved Policy and Regulatory Framework (MGD 1.4.2) and Increased Capacity of Government Institutions (MGD 1.4.1).
Activity 7: Strengthen community-level health, nutrition, WASH and dietary practices	Improved knowledge of health and hygiene practices (MGD 2.1), Increased knowledge of nutrition (MGD 2.3), Increased access to preventative health interventions (MGD 2.5), and Increased engagement of local organizations and community groups (MGD 2.7.4).
Activity 8: Build commodity management and food safety capacity	Increased knowledge of safe food prep and storage practices (MGD 2.2), and Increased access to requisite food prep and storage tools and equipment (MGD 2.6).
Activity 9: Build market linkages between farmer associations and Education Centers	Improved cost-effectiveness of procurement (LRP 1.1.1), improved timeliness of procurement (LRP 1.2.1), improved cost-effectiveness of delivery (LRP 1.1.2), improved timeliness of delivery (LRP 1.2.2), improved cost-effectiveness of distribution (LRP 1.1.3), improved timeliness of distribution (LRP 1.2.3), culminating into improved cost-effectiveness of food assistance (LRP 1.1) and improved timeliness of food assistance (LRP 1.2). Activity 9 will also help attain the following: strengthened local and regional food market systems (LRP 1.3.2) and increased access to markets to sell agricultural products (LRP 1.3.2.3).
Activity 10: Scale community gardens and collective aggregation	Increased access to food (MGD 1.2.1.1 and 1.3.1.1), Increased agricultural productivity (LRP 1.3.2.1), and Increased leverage of private-sector resources (LRP 1.4.4).

Evaluation Approach

The project will undertake a baseline study, a midterm evaluation, a final evaluation, and one special study. Together, they will provide a comprehensive understanding of the project, encompassing its implementation, challenges, achievements, and lessons learned. USDA's priorities and Learning Agenda will guide our evaluation questions and will adopt the evaluation criteria framework recommended by the Organization for Economic Cooperative and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Network on Development Evaluation: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These

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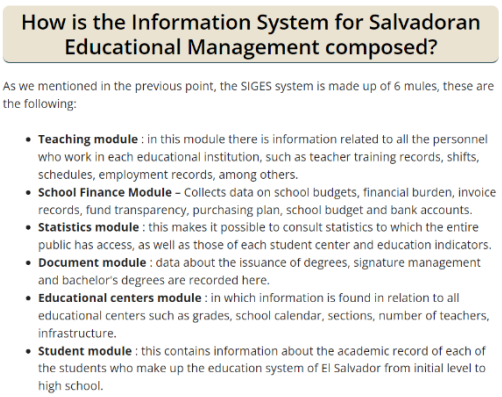
criteria will ensure that the project's relevance, coherence, and sustainability are thoroughly evaluated, ensuring alignment with international standards for development effectiveness.

Methodology

For each evaluation, the project will use mixed methods, collecting quantitative and qualitive data to assess progress and achievements and obtaining contextual information that will inform the questions of *how* and *why*.

Quantitative data collection will involve the project's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and surveys administered to teachers, school directors, students, GoES personnel (MINEDUCYT, Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MINSAL)), parents, school board and feeding committee members, farmer association members, and tienda owners. Secondary data will also be collected from records from schools, government ministries, and implementing partners. Secondary data will include but not be limited to:

Screenshot from the SIGES portal of the available modules:



How is the Information System for Salvadoran Educational Management composed?

As we mentioned in the previous point, the SIGES system is made up of 6 mules, these are the following:

- **Teaching module** : in this module there is information related to all the personnel who work in each educational institution, such as teacher training records, shifts, schedules, employment records, among others.
- **School Finance Module** – Collects data on school budgets, financial burden, invoice records, fund transparency, purchasing plan, school budget and bank accounts.
- **Statistics module** : this makes it possible to consult statistics to which the entire public has access, as well as those of each student center and education indicators.
- **Document module** : data about the issuance of degrees, signature management and bachelor's degrees are recorded here.
- **Educational centers module** : in which information is found in relation to all educational centers such as grades, school calendar, sections, number of teachers, infrastructure.
- **Student module** : this contains information about the academic record of each of the students who make up the education system of El Salvador from initial level to high school.

- GoES literacy diagnostics: As of 2022, MINEDUCYT has been implementing a national literacy diagnostic– resembling a rapid EGRA – for students from third to sixth grade.
- Enrollment and other education data from MINEDUCYT's System for Salvadoran Educational Management (SIGES)
- Consumption and distribution data from the GoES existing school feeding and health program, Programa de Alimentación y Salud Escolar (PASE)

Qualitative data collection will include in-depth interviews (IDIs) with cooks, teachers, and school directors; key informant interviews (KIIs) with government representatives at various levels; focus group discussions (FGDs) with school boards and school feeding committee members; and classroom observations.

Sampling

Counterpart will use a mixed-method, quasi-experimental design to compare EGRA scores between a treatment group (students in project schools) and a control group (students from non-project schools), using a Difference-in-Difference methodology (assessing the spread of the differences between groups over time). Control group students will be selected using propensity-score matching (PSM) to ensure comparability.

We will adopt a two staged cluster sampling approach in all three evaluations: baseline, midline and endline. The sample size is calculated for the lowest unit of measure which is students, grouped into intervention and control groups, with clusters of students selected from sampled schools. The sample size was determined using a two proportions test cluster design (calculated using statistical software (STATA) where the assumed difference between the outcomes among intervention vs control clusters is 20%, and using an Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) of 0.5, standard power of 80% and margin of error 5%, with 6 students in each cluster (school sample) selected from grades 2 and 3. The calculated sample size is 288 students from intervention schools and 288 from control schools. Considering an additional 10% allowance for

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non-response, the total required sample is 634 (317 in each arm) and will be drawn from a total of 100 schools including 50 intervention and 50 control schools.

Group	Location	Total Intervention Schools	Sample Schools	Required Student Sample
Intervention Schools	Morazán (82%)	330	41	260
	San Miguel (18%)	71	9	57
	Sub-total		50	317
Non-Intervention Schools			50	317
Total		**401**	**100**	**634**

The proposed sample sizes are presented in the table below and will be reviewed and finalized in coordination with USDA and MINEDUCYT.

Anticipated Sample Sizes

Respondent Group	Proposed Sample Size
Education Centers	100 (41 in Morazán, 9 in San Miguel, and 50 in non-intervention schools)
Students	634 (317 x 2) students participating in the EGRA
School Directors	1 per school
Classroom teachers	1 male, 1 female per school, where possible
School Council members (CDE)	1 male, 1 female per school, where possible
School Feeding Committee members	1 male, 1 female per school, where possible
Cooks and Canteen Volunteers	1 male, 1 female per school, where possible
Municipal/Departmental government officials	TBD, based on availability
Ministry of Education (MINEDUCYT)	TBD, based on availability

Measuring Enrollment & Attendance. Tracking enrollment figures is essential to ensure that the literacy and school feeding interventions are reaching and benefiting the intended project participants. Our team will sign a data sharing agreement with MINEDUCYT, as well as utilize SIGES, the Education Management portal. Counterpart will collaborate with MINEDUCYT at the municipal and department level to monitor enrollment and attendance data to ensure that it is not overstated, particularly accounting for dropouts and migration, and make more informed accurate procurement and distribution decisions.

Measuring Student Competencies: Nourish & Flourish will also closely coordinate with the World Bank's work on strengthening learning evaluation in El Salvador. The project, in coordination with the MINEDUCYT Evaluation department, will review existing EGRA tools to assess the proportion of sampled students that meet grade-appropriate literacy targets in target schools. Nourish & Flourish will improve the generation and use of data for pedagogical decision-making by leveraging existing diagnostic tests administered by MINEDUCYT, and in collaboration with entities like the World Bank support MINEDUCYT in integrating literacy results into the SIGES platform.

Data Collection. Each evaluation will include an EGRA and collect qualitative and quantitative data from teachers, administrators, community members, and government officials at the municipal, department, and national levels. The qualitative component of the evaluation will focus on meeting the McGovern-Dole Learning Agenda need for "process and context evaluations that provide qualitative data to answer the 'why' and 'how'" given that "each system requires a set of complex stakeholder relationships that are often region or country specific and

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therefore difficult to measure and compare." Data collection modules to measure the progression of knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to the various behavior changes in the project's theory of change will be used. They will focus on evolving incentives for household decision making regarding school attendance, teacher perceptions of the "value added" of new techniques, uptake of hygiene practices, etc. Counterpart envisions the use of electronic data collection as much as possible to allow for more timely feedback (to better mitigate risks of missing data, faulty data entry, transcription, etc.) but will have contingencies in place for paper collection.

Tools. Each evaluation will use the following tools which will be finalized in consultation with USDA. Each tool will undergo a validation process involving pilot testing with a sample group to ensure cultural relevance and clarity of questions

Summary of Evaluation Tools Proposed

Tool	Respondent	Purpose
Quantitative Tools		
EGRA	Grade 2-3 students	Assess literacy skills in Spanish at the Grade 2 - 3 level.
Cook survey	Cooks sampled in Education Centers	Assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to secure food storage, hygienic food preparations, food safety in school meals, maintenance of school kitchen/canteens.
Teacher survey	Teacher and/or other school administrators in Education Centers	Assess knowledge and practice of literacy instruction and use of other pedagogical methods, such as lesson planning and instruction.
Student survey	Grade 2-3 students	Assess extent of participation in USDA-funded activities, including school meals, in- class participation levels, use of in-class literacy materials, awareness of nutrition and use of WASH facilities.
School checklist	Teacher and/or other school director, observation in Education Centers	Assess extent of USDA-funded activities and facilities in place in each sampled school, including for example WASH facilities (e.g., water access, bathrooms, handwashing stations), literacy materials, canteen provisions (e.g., storeroom, kitchen, utensils).
Sustainability survey	MINEDUCYT and GoES officials at department and/or municipal level	Examine the structures and processes that can contribute to/have contributed to sustained outputs and outcomes among the target communities, policies and practices that advocate for sustained school feeding and nutrition programs beyond the life of the project.
Qualitative Tools		
IDI, FGDs and KIIs	Teachers, cooks, MINEDUCYT 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 quantitative methods.
Classroom observations	Grade 1-6 classrooms	Observe improvements in literacy instruction, use of materials and reading behaviors and attentiveness among students.

Dissemination: As detailed further below, the baseline, mid-line, and end-line reports will be shared with stakeholders including USDA, GoES (e.g., MINEDUCYT), community, (teachers, mayors, etc.), and be made public and accessibly available per the USDA M&E policy (See Learning below for more information).

Baseline Study

Introduction

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The baseline study will serve as an anchor in time and space for later project MEL activities. Its aims are to 1) Collect information on the project's indicators to obtain a reference when measuring the project's performance during subsequent MEL activities; and 2) Gather information on contextual factors that may slow or accelerate the changes that the project expects to make, to inform real-time decision making. Counterpart anticipates having all data collected within the first six months of the award.

Proposed Baseline Timeline

Activity	Approximate Dates
Draft baseline Terms of Reference (ToR)	November 2024
Identify independent, third-party evaluator	January 2025
Third-party evaluator prepares Baseline Plan, develops data collection tools, selects study participants	February 2025
Baseline fieldwork	February 2025
Data cleaning, analysis and baseline report writing	March 2025
Counterpart review of draft baseline report, evaluator incorporation of feedback	April 2025
Baseline Report submitted to USDA	April 2025
Dissemination event	May 2025

Evaluation questions and focus

The baseline study, as well as latter evaluations, will collect data on indicators and gather qualitative and quantitative information on the current knowledge, practices, and attitudes related to school feeding, nutrition, and health, as well as on the capacity and challenges of key project stakeholders and the various dynamics that underlie the interactions between them. The following evaluation questions illustrate the orientation of the baseline evaluation, which latter evaluations will also utilize:

Relevance

- Do the project's results frameworks present any causal gaps that may jeopardize the project's chances of success?
- Based on the project design, how likely is it that the project will meet its goals?
- How is the new menu accepted at the national, department and school level?
- To what extent is the project design rooted in the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries and stakeholders?
- Has the project paid enough attention to vulnerable populations in its design?
- To what degree is the project relevant to the economic, political, social, and environmental context in which it will be implemented? For example, does it take into account gender or rural/urban disparities?
- Is the program designed to be flexible? Based on the project's CLA Framework, how effective will the project be at adapting to information provided in real time?
- How aligned is the project with the USDA/FAS strategy, policy, and initiatives, particularly its McGovern-Dole Programs?
- How well does the program complement and fit with other ongoing nutrition and literacy programs and projects in the country by USG and non-USG actors?

Coherence

- How aligned is the project with MINEDUCYT's school feeding strategy and overall educational reform?
- How aligned is the project with policies and objectives of MINSAL, the Crecer Juntos Institute, and other national level strategies?

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Effectiveness

- What are the contributing and challenging factors towards the performance?
- Is there a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities by all parties involved into implementation and monitoring?
- To what extent are school based activities such as anti-bullying and reading circles effective and improving the overall school environment?
- Are there relevant monitoring and evaluation strategies in place?
- What are the factors influencing non-USDA funded activities in project schools and their impact? What are the possible consequences on project activities? Has the project sufficiently paid attention to extrinsic risks?

Efficiency

- How efficient is the planned allocation of resources to provide the necessary support to achieve the broader program objectives?
- How efficient is the process for supplying local commodities to Education Centers?
- To what extent is the program likely to achieve objectives related to the efficiency of school feeding activities, especially in terms of procurement, distribution, and delivery? What are the chances that the program will result in cost- and time savings, especially compared to PASE?

Impact

- To what extent is the project likely to generate the results in its Results Framework, and to have a positive impact on the lives of the project beneficiaries?
- Has MINEDUCYT reported that the project has contributed to process optimizations that resulted in cost efficiencies?
- What unintended outcomes and impacts can be envisioned?

Sustainability

- Are there gaps in the sustainability strategy? How could the stakeholders, including other donors' program support, could address these, taking into consideration potential changes within GoES and PASE?
- What commitment has GoES shown regarding school feeding and other investments at Education Centers (e.g., policy, financial resources, human resources, etc.)?
- What progress has been made on sustainably transitioning from a snack to a meal and to 180 days of school feeding per year?
- What progress has been on sustainably ensuing the availability of more nutritious foods in a decentralized school feeding program?
- Are there any indications, at this early stage, how likely the government is to effectively continue the new school feeding model after the project has ended?

In addition to the above, the baseline evaluation is expected to ask specific questions such as:

- What is the percentage of students having difficulties learning?
- How can MINEDUCYT improve plans to meet the needs of vulnerable students?
- What is the current parent/caregiver and community support on student performance and reading behaviours? And to what extent do the parents really understand their children's incentives/disincentives to attend school?

Dissemination

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The evaluation team will share the results of the baseline study with USDA, Counterpart-HQ project staff, GoES, and Counterpart field office staff. Before the baseline report is finalized, Counterpart will hold a workshop with USDA, MINEDUCYT, and the evaluation team to give the opportunity to present their findings and receive feedback. The workshop will help the evaluators verify that they have captured the context and nuances of the situation before project activities begin. Feedback gathered during the workshop will be systematically categorized and addressed in the final report to ensure all stakeholder perspectives are integrated. The final report will be submitted to USDA for final approval. We will then organize a dissemination event with USDA, project partners, national, departmental, and municipal level government, academia, and civil society actors to present our baseline report and findings. We also expect the dissemination event to fulfil the following objectives:

- To review and validate the project's results framework to ensure a clear, common understanding of the project's objectives and causal pathways, and ensure that the project's "causalogic" is sound and grounded in context;
- To confirm the interconnections between project stakeholders and importance for realizing goals in attempt to strengthen coordination among diverse actors;
- To validate and expand on the understanding of contextual factors that may affect project implementation; and
- To introduce the overall timeline, including future data-collection initiatives, to encourage participation.

Midterm Evaluation

The midterm evaluation will provide an independent assessment of the project's progress to date measured against the established indicators and assess the targets achieved. The external evaluator will analyze the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency of the project; document lessons learned; assess sustainability efforts; and provide programmatic recommendations for mid-course corrections, if necessary. In addition to evaluation questions aligned with the OECD DAC criteria, the midterm study will ask specific questions such as:

- How is Counterpart's operational system and capacity contributing to the project's effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact?
- How is the transition from the snack to the meal being received by students, parents, teachers, and local and national level government officials?
- To what extent do teachers and school directors believe that digital content and online reading platforms, such as Fiction Express, an online book platform that enables students and teachers to engage with the author, administer comprehension quizzes, and teachers to track students' progress and attainment (with which the MINEDUCYT has a national contract) are stimulating children in the classroom, fostering an increased culture of reading, and contributing to improved literacy.
- To what extent have key sustainability milestones been achieved toward the graduation plan?
- To what extent is MINEDUCYT willing to adopt and begin to replicate components of the program to other departments and municipalities in the country.
- What strategic recommendations at municipal, departmental, and national level can support adaptive management to improve implementation and have the greatest overall contribution to impact and sustainability?

Timeline, Sampling, and Tools. The midterm evaluation will be conducted in ***year 3*** of the project and will follow the same timeline and sampling design as the baseline evaluation to

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ensure consistency. The questions for the midterm evaluation will be revised based on baseline findings and new questions that may emerge from the various components of the project's Learning Strategy. For example, iterative monitoring could identify feedback from teachers or school administrators that are relevant to the McGovern-Dole Learning Agenda and call for new evaluation questions. Any new questions will be added in consultation with and approval from USDA. The tools described under the baseline study will be adapted as needed and used during the midterm evaluation accordingly.

Proposed Midterm Timeline

Activity	Approximate Dates
Draft Midterm ToR	November 2026
Identify independent, third-party evaluator	December 2026
Third-party evaluator prepares midterm evaluation, revise data collection tools if needed, selects study participants	January 2027
Evaluation fieldwork	January 2027
Data cleaning, analysis and report writing	February 2027
Counterpart review of draft report, evaluator incorporation of feedback	March 2027
Midterm evaluation Report submitted to USDA	April 2027
Dissemination event	May 2027

Final Evaluation

The final evaluation will encompass all data collection from performance indicators and the midterm evaluation. It will cover all aspects of problem identification/program design, implementation (including any adaptations), and management to identify strengths, successes, and challenges. Lessons identified in the project's Learning Agenda will also be incorporated into the final evaluation to produce a summative assessment that meets USDA accountability and transferability needs. The design for the final evaluation will be consistent with the baseline and midline assessments. The preliminary key evaluation questions to be answered during the final evaluation are aligned with questions mentioned in baseline and may be slightly adapted in relation to impact and sustainability questions, as well as based on midterm evaluation results. In addition to evaluation questions aligned to the OECD DAC highlighted above, the final evaluation will ask specific questions such as:

- How and to what extent has the project achieved its stated objectives and expected results, while identifying the supporting factors and constraints that have led to them, including strategies and implementation modalities and partnership arrangements?
- What circumstances, if any, affected the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the project, including intended and unintended results?
- What project investments can the government and community sustain, and are additional resources or considerations required in the long-term?
- What lessons learned and good practices can be scaled and/or applied by PASE/MINEDUCYT to other municipalities and departments in El Salvador?
- What lessons learned and good practices can be scaled and/or applied to other USDA programs in and beyond El Salvador?

Timeline, Sampling, and Tools. The endline evaluation will be completed six months prior to the completion of the project. The tools described under the baseline and midterm studies will be adapted as needed and used at endline.

Proposed Final Evaluation Timeline

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Activity	Approximate Dates
Draft final evaluation TOR	November 2028
Identify independent, third-party evaluator	December 2028
Third-party evaluator prepares midterm evaluation, revise data collection tools if needed, selects study participants	January 2029
Evaluation fieldwork	January 2029
Data cleaning, analysis and report writing	February 2029
Counterpart review of draft report, evaluator incorporation of feedback	March 2029
Report submitted to USDA	April 2029
Dissemination event	May 2029

Alignment with the McGovern-Dole Learning Agenda

Counterpart's Salvadoran MEL team (with support from Counterpart's MEL team) will promote a deliberate, systematic **Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) framework** by generating reliable data on performance, context, best practices, tools, and strategies to regularly explore learning questions and programmatic assumptions about various aspects, including: (1) the effectiveness of school feeding as an incentive for parents to consider early childhood education and keep their children in school; (2) the effectiveness of teacher and school director training in addressing practical and current issues in schools, such as incorporating technology into lesson planning; (3) the impact of nutrition and WASH interventions on health and dietary practices; (4) the effectiveness and efficiency of activities to increase parental and community engagement in education; and (5) the efficiency of management and staffing structures for program implementation, monitoring, learning, and timely decision-making. The team will utilize project indicators as data points and qualitative methods such as to collect in-depth information on attitudes and behavior change. Regular, open communication with USDA and stakeholders and the sharing and collective analysis of performance data will provide the platforms for identifying and addressing potential problems before they become constraints.

Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

The project team will establish an integrated CLA framework connected to the program's MEL plan, spanning the full project lifecycle, and systematically engaging key internal and external project stakeholders in interpreting performance data and contributing to the project's learning agenda. The CLA framework will aid effective adaptive management decisions by timely, regular reporting and analysis of accurate data on meaningful indicators and providing forums for discussion and consensus among decision-making stakeholders. Our learning approach regularly assesses causal pathways toward desired project outcomes, shares knowledge about effectiveness of project approaches, and adjust project strategies to achieve the most effective course of action.

Learning Questions

- To what extent does a meal compared to snack have a marginally significant impact on student enrollment, attendance and performance?
- How do investments in WASH at Education Centers impact student's retention and overall performance?
- Is there evidence that teachers are using evidence-based instructional practices and technology to teach reading and writing?
- To what extent does digital content and new pedagogical approaches have a positive impact on students' literacy rates and overall performance?

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- To what extent do optimized GoES processes for school feeding result in cost-efficiencies and ultimately tangible benefits for students?

Citizen Engagement and Beneficiary Feedback. The project will incorporate beneficiary feedback throughout MEL activities, including: (i) surveys to learn about parents' and caregivers' perceptions of the quality and relevance of Nourish & Flourish activities, especially school feeding and health interventions; (ii) meetings with education stakeholders to discuss improvements in the implementation and design of activities at their level of agency; and (iii) socially and culturally appropriate engagement with marginalized persons and vulnerable communities to ensure that their perspectives and expectations are considered.

Disseminate learning and evidence with key stakeholders. The MEL team will ensure findings from baseline, midline, and endline assessments are shared through dissemination events to contribute to learning. We will engage stakeholders throughout the project in a range of formal and informal opportunities such as partner meetings, virtual events, annual learning workshops, pause and reflect sessions, and by circulating project-related information and deliverables. Stakeholder involvement in planning, development, implementation, and evaluation will establish a sense of shared ownership that will allow project staff, USDA, and stakeholders to work together to confront and remedy obstacles.

External learning events. The Nourish & Flourish team will organize external learning events to foster an exchange of knowledge, build a shared ownership of outcomes, and solicit invaluable feedback. The MEL unit and the Chief of Party will organize and facilitate a series of learning sessions with key stakeholders and decision-makers to generate lessons and make recommendations about sustainability plans and the post-graduation impact of USDA-funding. Participants in dissemination events will be asked to interpret and provide feedback to improve the design of future activities. These sessions will also support shared understanding of the project's performance and spark in-depth technical discussion.

Internal learning activities, such as project review meetings, Learning to Action Discussions (LADs), and Pause and Reflect sessions will be held after each major activity to ensure rapid program adaptation and inform modifications to work plans. Staff will promote learning and exchange across McGovern-Dole project partners through email listservs and virtual collaboration groups (e.g., MS Teams, WhatsApp).

The learning activities include sharing for discussion and interpretation of data and findings from baseline, midline and final evaluations, special research study, and capacity assessments, and periodic review of Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) indicator data. The pause and reflect activities include TOC review-and-revisit sessions with local partners and stakeholders and "Pause, Reflect and Adapt" task force sessions to reflect on how new learning may shift priorities and approaches. Included in the post-award PMP will be a full timetable for all deliverables such as learning activities, and pause, reflect, and adapt activities.

Illustrative Learning Activities

Learning Event	Purpose
Strategic Collaboration Activities	
Annual work plan events	Inform stakeholders of work plan in open session, stakeholders provide feedback, and understand strategic programmatic adjustments due to learning.

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Iterative Monitoring	MEL staff, parents, school administrators, government officials, etc., use participatory approaches to document day to day barriers and successes using Problem Driven Iterative Adaption and Appreciative Inquiry methods.
Learning Activities	
Project Launch Workshop	Provide the project team feedback from stakeholders about the program: start building awareness about the program and create synergies for implementation and future learning.
Evaluation dissemination workshops	Improve understanding of program performance and give stakeholders chance to engage program team in more in-depth follow-up topical sessions.
Annual school-based learning events	Careful reflection on the activities with an analysis of what went wrong/right, and what was unexpected in the activity. Focus on the process and what is learned via the interaction of course materials.
Close Out Workshop	Disseminate program results to ask participants to take it forward: what can they do with it - how can they build on program results; share what we learned as a program as in specific terms of the learning agenda (the three studies).
Pause and Reflect Activities	
TOC revisiting sessions	Use new learning to assess causal pathways, and revise assumptions and TOC.
Pause, Reflect, and Adapt working group sessions	Use new learning to reflect, shift priorities, make revisions, and adapt approaches.

Special Study

To strengthen partnerships and research development in the field of school feeding and food systems, Nourish & Flourish will partner with academia in country (e.g. UNIVO, Universidad Francisco Gavidia, etc.) to conduct a special study. As a part of our learning agenda, the results of our special study will be shared through national learning events to mobilize relevant stakeholders at national, department, and local levels, as well as contribute to USDA's wider learning agenda.

Comparative analysis between USDA food basket and PASE: Nourish & Flourish will transition from the sugary snack that PASE offered for 120 days/year to a more nutritious meal that is provided for 180 days/year and meets the 33% USDA caloric minimum requirement. The proposed special study will compare the USDA Nourish & Flourish school feeding program in the East with the delivery of the PASE snack in non-USDA supported schools.

This special study aims at comparing variations in the two treatment groups, by assessing: students' hunger levels, attentiveness, attendance, learning outcomes (e.g. MINEDUCYT's annual literacy diagnostic and *Conociendo mis logros* tool, a formative assessment instrument on knowledge/cognitive skills), and likelihood to stay in school. This study will also compare the overall costs of both programs and solicit feedback from teachers on how the PASE snack and USDA meal impact student participation and learning. The project will use a quasi-experimental design to select a treatment group from USDA-funded schools with a control group from non-USDA funded schools using propensity-score matching (PSM) and assess outcomes using a Difference-in-Difference methodology (where differences between the groups and over time are calculated). The first round of data collection will occur in Y3 during the midline, while the second round of data will be conducted in Y5 during the endline. Data collection will include observations, MINEDUCYT primary data sets (e.g. diagnostic scores, enrollment and attendance), and KIIs with students and teachers. This study will provide a wealth of practical learnings to inform not only the adaptive management of Nourish & Flourish project, but more

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importantly, provide actionable recommendations to MINEDUCYT for strengthening the PASE program at a national level.

Evaluation Management

The roles and responsibilities of Counterpart staff, partner staff, and independent evaluators are meant to ensure that evaluation management standards are maintained without sacrificing a participatory culture. Counterpart's MEL unit will develop data collection instruments and forms to collect data during the normal course of activity implementation. Standardized protocols and procedures will guide data handling, which will be detailed in a data manual and uphold the principles of independence and accountability. The MEL team will train staff and partners in basic data terminology, data entry, processing, and quality standards. All parties entrusted to collect data for Nourish & Flourish in the targeted regions, such as field agents, will be trained on how to document their activity and safeguard their data and information properly and accurately. Collected data will be entered into the most relevant and functional database (e.g., Excel or SPSS), web-based platforms, and DevResults. Counterpart will submit semi-annual reports on a timely basis to USDA.

Selection of evaluation team, and expectations for baseline, midterm, and final evaluation. Counterpart will hire a team of independent external evaluators through a competitive bidding process for the baseline, midterm, and final evaluations. Successful applicants will be hired based on technical and cost elements, as well as the experience of the proposed team. The Terms of Reference (TOR) will clearly outline the purpose and scope of the study, as well as project objectives and indicators, geographical scope, and a suggested methodology. The TOR will ensure that all evaluations will be peer-reviewed by Salvadoran academics, literacy, nutrition, and WASH experts, and shared with both MINEDUCYT and USDA for feedback before a final version is adopted. The successful applicant's eligibility to conduct the midterm and final evaluations will depend on their performance during the baseline evaluation.

The independent evaluators will perform all tasks, including possible procurement and training of an appropriate enumerator firm, designing, creating, adopting, and piloting tools as necessary, and training enumerators if needed. The independent evaluator must have experience with mixed method evaluations using EGRA tools, and experience integrating and contributing to learning strategies. The TOR will ensure that the autonomy of the independent evaluator is in line with 7 CFR Part 1499.13 and other relevant legislation.

While Counterpart will outline a general methodology and orientation in the TOR, the selected evaluation team will be required to develop and send a full methodology to Counterpart for approval and potential adjustments before activities begin.

Roles and Responsibilities. Counterpart maintains a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) unit at headquarters in Washington D.C., which provides ongoing technical assistance to country offices. A Senior Specialist for MEL at Counterpart D.C. will support the McGovern-Dole El Salvador project MEL team, which consists of a MEL Manager and two MEL Assistants. Counterpart's in-country MEL team will have strong oversight of partners and respective staff, who will support the implementation of MEL activities at the school level, continuously collecting data, feedback, and supporting Learning Agenda research. Throughout the evaluation process, Counterpart will coordinate with MINEDUCYT and local government authorities through formal and informal mechanisms while ensuring a constant feedback loop with (and from) USDA and project beneficiaries. Counterpart will facilitate local coordination

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with stakeholders at the municipal and school levels, ensuring regular interaction between these partners and schools.

Base, Mid-Term, and Final Evaluation. For the implementation of the evaluations throughout the activity period, Counterpart will subcontract an external evaluation firm that will manage the data collection process on the ground, including logistics, enumerator training, survey programming, data security and back up, and data quality assurance. Counterpart's Senior Specialist for MEL and the program team will: (1) develop the TOR and evaluation criteria; (2) liaise between the independent evaluator, sub-recipients, and D.C. office; and (3) ensure the overall independence of the evaluator.

Data Quality. Nourish & Flourish will utilize the rich library of tools and resources that project partners have created. All data collection tools will be carefully designed and adapted for the linguistic and cultural context in which they will be employed, and thoroughly reviewed by relevant stakeholders and piloted, as necessary. Training will be provided for all data collectors and for instruments that require multiple coders or evaluators, inter-rater reliability across coders will be estimated. Adjustments will be made as necessary, and data collectors not meeting acceptable standards in collection, storage, or analysis will be released. All data collection initiatives will be planned to allow adequate time for collection, cleaning, and organizing. The MEL team will provide quality assurance on the data collection systems for the impact and performance evaluations. The project team will institute multiple measures to ensure data quality. Data, where feasible, will be collected using tablets to streamline processes, which also reduces errors at data collection and eliminates double data entry. All instruments will be pilot-tested and refined, and procedures for data collection will be defined in written materials and standardized. MEL staff will conduct supervision checks, and to enhance data integrity, mechanisms for triangulation will be instituted. Raw data will be retained for inspection and re-analysis.

Data Verification and Validity. The centralized MEL team will conduct periodic spot checks in the target districts to verify data accuracy for school monitoring data, progress towards other performance indicators, and routine program management data. Through school visits, MEL staff will be able to reassess a small sample of students to validate results reported.

Data Analysis. Data sets will be maintained in SPSS statistics software. To analyse all qualitative data, the project team will develop a coding scheme that will use descriptive and inferential codes. Counterpart's web-based MEL database (DevResults) provides timely and efficient analysis of performance data, including user-friendly visualizations. DevResults not only allows for the seamless sharing of information to USDA and our partners, but it will also serve as a foundational source of evidence to assess trends, gaps, and opportunities for learning events.

Data Storage and Security. Counterpart employs 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. The computing environment is protected from physical and cyber threats using a combination of administrative, physical, and technical controls. Access to data is based on a role-based directory service that implements a "need-to-know" policy. Commercial malware protection software protects all servers, desktops, and laptops that is centrally managed to perform automatic updates and execute weekly scans. The network requires users to provide a username and password for

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access to network file stores and to update their passwords quarterly. Staff using laptops who collect and manage data are protected with whole-drive disk encryption that prevents data access should the laptop be lost or stolen. Protection of personally identifiable information is only accessible to authorized individuals who have been granted access based on a need-to-know basis.

Evaluation Budget

The MEL Budget is $611,612, which represents 3.1% of the total administrative cost (cash portion) of $19,688,400. See the Budget Narrative for more detail (C-2).

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