



Save the Children®



MIDTERM EVALUATION

MCGOVERN—DOLE INTERNATIONAL FOOD FOR
EDUCATION AND CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM

PROGRAM

Liberia Empowerment
through Attendance,
Reading, and Nutrition (LEARN) II

EVALUATION LOCATION

Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Rivercess,
and River Gee

TIMELINE

October 2021 - September 2026

FUNDER

United States Department of
Agriculture (USDA) McGovern-Dole
International Food for Education
and Child Nutrition (McGovern-Dole)
program

IMPLEMENTER

Save the Children (SC)

PARTNERS

- Mercy Corps
- Liberian Government Officials,
including:
 - Ministry of Education
 - Ministry of Agriculture
 - Ministry of Health

INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR

American Institutes for Research (AIR)



PROGRAM GOAL

LEARN II is a five-year program designed to improve the literacy, health, nutrition, and dietary practices of school-aged children, and to increase knowledge of gender norms and sexual and gender-based violence in 234 schools in Rivercess, River Gee, Grand Bassa, and Grand Gedeh counties.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

As part of LEARN II, SC is implementing 14 activities encompassing literacy and education activities, school, health, and nutrition (SHN) champions, school health clubs, school gardens, and local and regional procurement (LRP). The activities include:

- Providing school meals
- Strengthening local provision of food for school meals
- Establishing school gardens
- Facilitating trainings on safe food preparation and storage
- Building/rehabilitating kitchens and storerooms
- Trainings on good health and nutrition practices
- Distributing de-worming medicine, vitamins, and minerals
- Building/rehabilitating school latrines, wells, and water stations
- Establishing activities to promote literacy via the Read Liberia program
- Facilitating training Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers
- Facilitating training school administrators
- Facilitating training parent-teacher association members
- Raising community awareness on the importance of education
- Capacity building at the local, regional, and national levels



INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

SC selected AIR to design and conduct the project and impact evaluations of the LEARN II project. AIR completed the baseline assessment in 2022 to benchmark key outcome indicators before implementation had started. In 2024, AIR conducted the midterm evaluation to measure the progress of LEARN II implementation across all four targeted counties and provide lessons learned and recommendations to make mid-course corrections. The endline evaluation will follow in 2026, to determine the impact and effectiveness of the project on the LEARN II communities since baseline.

A detailed explanation of the technical design, the findings, and recommendations are provided in the full report which is available upon request.



PROJECT EVALUATION

Methodology

A mixed methods approach to measure the progress of LEARN II over time in 54 schools across the four counties.

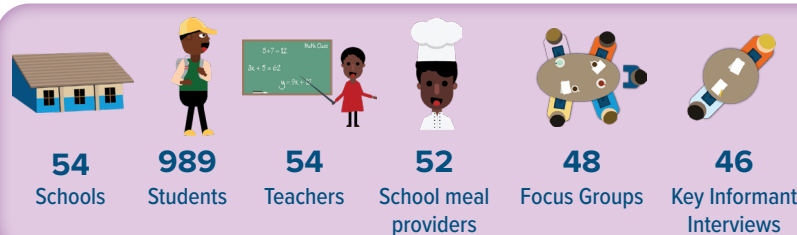
Analysis

A pre-post comparison of baseline (2022) and midterm (2024) values across all four counties, triangulating the survey data with qualitative interviews for the project evaluation, and an assessment to capture changes in the literacy of school-aged children and the health and nutrition knowledge, attitudes, and practices of students, teachers, and school meal providers.

Limitations

Reliance on self-reported data. Although AIR adopted best practices to develop the instruments, some measurement error is possible when collecting data from young children on sensitive topics such as SRGBV.

Student selection bias. The possibility of systemic student absences might induce a risk of sampling bias by selecting only present students potentially excluding students from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



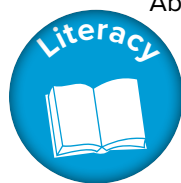
A key success of LEARN II has been school feeding. 64% of students reported eating 3 meals per day, a significant 31 percentage point increase from baseline. Dietary diversity also increased significantly with 18% of students eating at least 4 different food groups the previous day. School meals remain very popular among all stakeholders. In qualitative interviews, participants noted the success of school gardens. Another success includes PTAs taking ownership of their tasks, especially working on school garden initiatives, and supplying schools with food or infrastructure/materials donation.

We are still on local farming for now... As we progress, we will get a farm that will sustain us... We will be able to sell the things and work with PTA to assist us to maintain the farm.

- Community Mobilizer, Grand Bassa



Overall, handwashing knowledge and practice were unchanged from baseline with 26% of student showing adequate knowledge and 12% practicing good handwashing. The availability of handwashing stations at school also declined significantly at midterm.



About half of students (47%) showed a good grasp of letter knowledge, defined as being able to identify at least 90% of the letters in the alphabet. Similar to baseline, 12% of the students were classified as readers, and 2% could read with comprehension which was a significant decrease from baseline.



At midterm, 70% of students said someone at home helps them with their studies while 54% said somebody reads to them. At midterm, there was a noticeable lack of literacy support for students stemming from late or inadequate reading materials, delayed implementation of literacy activities, and limited work with parents and other community members to provide community or household-level literacy support to students in need.



Qualitative data showed that students, caregivers, teachers, and principals overall had good knowledge of the teacher code of conduct but were not clear or confident in the reporting mechanisms available to them. Quantitative data showed that 39% of students were willing to report misconduct despite an increase in students witnessing transgressions at school.



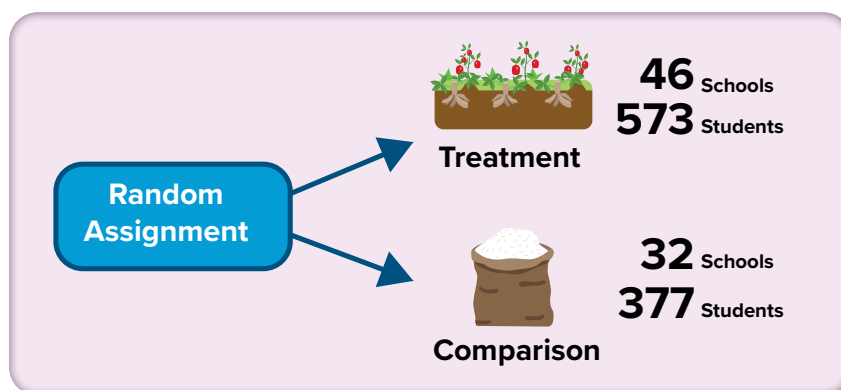
IMPACT EVALUATION

Methodology

The impact evaluation uses a randomized control trial with 46 treatment schools and 32 comparison schools in Grand Gedeh and River Gee.

Analysis

Between baseline and midterm, treatment schools received meals prepared with LRP in addition to meals prepared with U.S. food commodities (USC). At the same time, the comparison group received meals prepared only with USC. After midterm, both groups will receive LRP and USC. At midterm, the impact evaluation estimates the one-year effect of LRP on key student outcomes including dietary diversity, nutrition knowledge, cultural appropriateness of meals, hygiene, and literacy.



Limitation

Baseline student data on dietary diversity score was not available which limits our ability to check that the treatment and comparison groups were balanced in terms of dietary diversity score at baseline, and to include those baseline values in the regression analysis to improve the precision of the treatment effect estimate.



Impact Findings

- The data showed that LRP had an overall positive but insignificant effect on student dietary diversity or meal frequency. However, dietary diversity was significantly higher with LRP for girls and for students in River Gee. The number of meals consumed on school days was also significantly higher among students receiving LRP in River Gee.
- There was a positive effect on student's knowledge of foods that protect from disease but a negative effect on knowledge of foods that help them grow. The positive effects on student nutrition knowledge were driven by boys and by students in River Gee.
- Students had strong negative perceptions of the appearance of their school meals and of the similarity of the school meals to what they typically eat at home. Challenges in setting up processing facilities were overcome by shipping Power Gari from further away than anticipated, however, this led to delays in procuring and sometimes spoiling LRP.
- LRP had a significant positive impact on students' ability to read and comprehend - students in treatment schools were 19 percentage points more likely to read with comprehension relative to students in the comparison schools. The effect was positive for both boys and girls and was moderately larger for boys. The effect was driven by students in River Gee.



“Before, when there was no food on the campus the children would feel reluctant, feel weak, sleep in class and some would go home. But since the food is here, they want to eat it before going home so it keeps them on the campus. The Power Gari gives the children power...”

- Principal in River Gee

BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Track fidelity of implementation systematically at the school level using detailed quantitative data to help contextualize findings and recommendations based on what has happened.

SC should conduct regular assessments to identify and document gaps in implementation and work to fill those gaps. A monitoring and evaluation system that provides detailed school-level data throughout project implementation could be used to track fidelity of implementation and a more refined evaluation of the project's impacts.

Highlight the importance of parental involvement in education and encourage discussions between parents and teachers about engagement challenges.

Together with teachers, SC should develop realistic strategies that parents and caregivers can use to encourage their children to ensure that literacy indicators do not decline further. SC should also consider using social media and other technology to encourage parent engagement.



Ensure schools have adequate materials and infrastructure to maintain a healthy and safe environment, in addition to ensuring higher compensation for school meal providers (SMP).

Like at baseline, midterm data showed that while cooks and storekeepers demonstrate adequate understanding of food safety procedures, they lament lack of materials or poor infrastructure to meet those standards. Job satisfaction among SMPs is low and they do not believe they are fairly compensated for their work. SC can potentially tackle this through advocating for higher pay for SMPs to ensure greater motivation from them to ensure hygiene and cooking of nutritious meals.

Refocus attention on strengthening activities related to SRGBV, including ensuring there are clear guidelines on redressal mechanisms.

Qualitative interviews noted that there was confusion about the appropriate person to report complaints to and that because redressal was rare, complaints were often not raised. SC could hold information sessions clarifying reporting chains and redressal mechanisms, including a clear roadmap for redressing each complaint, to alleviate confusion about the appropriate person to report complaints to.

