

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: A Success Story - USDA-FAS McGovern-Dole and Save the Children's PALAM-A Project is Feeding Thousands of School Kids in Sri Lanka

Country: Sri Lanka

Post: Colombo

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News, Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security, Fishery Products, SP3 - Build Demand in Developing Countries through Trade Capacity Building

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Report Highlights:

The USDA/FAS McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is supporting education, child development, and food security in Sri Lanka. The objective of the Sri Lanka McGovern-Dole PALAM/A project is to reduce hunger and improve literacy and primary education, especially for young girls. By providing school meals, teacher training, and related support, the project is helping to boost, and maintain school enrollment and academic performance. This 5-year \$26 million fiscal year (FY) 2018 project with our partner Save the Children is timely, coming during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions and when Sri Lanka is going through major political and economic disruptions.

DISCLAIMER: The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Office of Agricultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Colombo, USDA, and/or the U.S. government make no claim of accuracy or authenticity. The Government of Sri Lanka has not officially endorsed this report.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) – Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is helping to support education, child development, and food security in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka).¹ The program is donating U.S. agricultural commodities, in this case split yellow peas and canned Alaskan pink salmon, as well as provided financial and technical assistance, to support the Promoting Autonomy for Literacy and Attentiveness through Market Alliances (PALAM/A) school nutrition and literacy project.

The key objective of the McGovern-Dole PALAM/A project in Sri Lanka is to reduce hunger and improve literacy and primary education, especially for young girls. By providing school meals, teacher training, and related support, this project is helping to boost, and maintain school enrollment and academic performance. This 5-year \$26 million fiscal year (FY) 2018 project with our partner Save the Children is particularly timely coming during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions and at a time in which Sri Lanka is going through major political and economic disruptions.²

Sustainability is an important aspect of the McGovern-Dole Program. FAS and its partner Save the Children are working to ensure that the communities served by the program will continue the sponsored activities on their own and or with the support from other sources such as the Sri Lankan government and even the local community. McGovern-Dole projects are part of USDA coordinated efforts and collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. State Department, and other U.S. government agencies.

¹The McGovern-Dole Program is named in honor of Ambassador and former U.S. Senator George McGovern and former U.S. Senator Robert Dole in recognition of their tireless efforts to eradicate childhood hunger.

² Sri Lanka president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, declared a state of emergency on May 6, 2022, in the wake of anti-government protests and mass strikes. Protesters seek the ouster of the president, accusing his administration's mismanagement of the economy, which has resulted in food, fuel, and medicines shortages. Increases of domestic and imported foods, electricity, cooking gas, and fuel are driving consumer prices to the highest levels in decades. Sri Lanka is set to experience severe food shortages in the coming months, as domestic agricultural production collapsed due to the lack of farming inputs such as fertilizer, and as imported commodities become expensive and banks struggle with insufficient dollars to finance them.

SRI LANKA, SCHOOL FEEDING, LITERACY, WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The USDA's McGovern-Dole project in Sri Lanka, aims to assist food-insecure school-age children and their families through the donation of U.S. agricultural commodities and technical assistance. In this case, U.S.-origin split yellow peas and canned Alaskan pink salmon are the donated commodities.



The PALAM/A Project, funded by the USDA McGovern-Dole Program, works to improve literacy of school-age children; improve student attentiveness by improving the sustainability of the Sri Lankan government's National School Meal Program and reducing short-term hunger; and improve student attendance by increasing the community understanding of the benefits of education and improving the use and knowledge of good health, hygiene, nutrition, and dietary practices.³

The PALAM/A Project is an initiative between the Sri Lanka government and Save the Children. In 2020, the government of Sri Lanka and the USDA signed a Memorandum of Understanding that committed the full support of the Sri Lankan government for the implementation of this project. The Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Save the Children designed the project together to support and contribute to the Sri Lankan government's policy priorities on children's learning, nutrition, and good health.

WHO IS BENEFITTING, WHAT IS BEING ACHIEVED?

Sri Lanka is a small South Asian developing, middle-income country strategically located near major Indian Ocean sea-lanes; it lies just south of India. Its population of 23.1 million (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022 estimate), is concentrated primarily within a broad wet zone in the southwest, urban centers along the eastern coast, and on the Jaffna Peninsula in the north. Some 4.9 million people, about

³ The National School Meal Program supports 1.1 million students. In recent years it has been budgeted Sri Lankan rupees (LKR) 16 billion (\$29.6 billion) (\$ 1.00 = LKR 202.93, January 3, 2022), with an LKR 30/student allocation.

a quarter of the national population are moderate-to-severe food insecure at present.⁴ The country's growing economic and food crises has spread to millions who are feeling the pinch of food and fuel shortages as prices continue to rise (food price inflation is now at 58 percent).

COVID-19 Impact on PALAM/A: COVID-19 pandemic related closures impacted the 5-year, \$26 million project with Save the Children in Sri Lanka, where the USDA/FAS had sought to provide split yellow peas and canned Alaskan Pink Salmon to benefit 196,000 primary grade students in government-run schools.

In Sri Lanka, schools closed in early March 2020 for the entirety of the school year as well as most of 2021. Due to these closures, students no longer had access to daily meals provided in school via the Ministry of Education's Homegrown School Meal Program and general food insecurity increased within the country.

To address the urgent need, the PALAM/A project pivoted its interventions to provide Take-home Rations (THR) to 876 schools in critical Sri Lanka target districts - Badulla, Killinochchi, Monaragala, Mullaitivu, Nurawa Eliya, Rathnapura, and Trincomalee - with over 106,000 students receiving the emergency support. The THRs were designed as a one-time family ration intended to cover approximately three months of need.



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook.

⁴ World Food Program, Humanitarian Needs and Priorities Plan.

The THR distributions began in June 2021, immediately following signing the USDA/FAS facilitated 4-Party Memorandum of Understanding between Save the Children and the three Sri Lankan government oversight ministries (Education, Health, and Finance). The identified students each received an emergency take-home food ration consisting of five kilograms of yellow split peas and five (418 grams) tins of pink salmon (or over 2 kilograms) between June 2021 and January 2022 - two rounds of THRs were provided benefitting over 105,000 children and their families (over 460,000 individuals). These protein-rich foods provided important nutrients to children while they were out of school and unable to receive meals through the Sri Lankan government’s National School Meal Program during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2021.

The project developed and distributed with the emergency take-home food ration a comprehensive recipe pamphlet that guides parents and guardians on how to effectively use the provided commodities. The full-color USDA-branded pamphlet provides eight recipes in total (four for split yellow peas and four for canned pink salmon). The selected recipes were chosen based on their flavor profiles, nutritional benefits, ease of cooking as well as their limited use of additional ingredients.

Save the Children’s intensive planning and coordination with USDA/FAS, local government officials, and school administrators, as well as community mobilization work directly with parents, resulted in a remarkable 99 percent average attendance (THR retrieval) rate. Through this initial effort spanning 90 days, the USDA/FAS-donated food commodities in the form of THRs benefitting over 105,000 children and their families for a combined total of some 460,000 individuals.



Source: Save the Children.

The PALAM/A project distribution teams strictly adhered to all COVID-19 prevention protocols to ensure both parents and staff were safe. Protocols included the use of full personal protective equipment (PPE) kits by distribution team members. In addition, parents/caregivers coming to receive the THRs

were informed prior to their arrival of safety behaviors and were required to comply with the safety guidelines including the wearing of masks while on-site. Lastly, temperature checks, handwashing/sanitizing upon arrival and maintaining physical distance was mandatory at every point of the distributions.

With the rise of the Delta variant in Sri Lanka in late 2021 and ongoing Covid-19 challenges, Save the Children and the USDA/FAS initiated a second round of THRs that continued to support students and their families in the target districts through mid-January 2022.

Back-to-School Time: With in-school classes resuming at the beginning of the new school year in April 2022, hot school meals are being served to students. The PALAM/A project commenced commodity distribution anew on May 4, 2022, with distributions occurring on May 4, 5, and 9 [Note: the city of Colombo is not included in the PALAM/A project].

May 2022 Distribution

District	JDP	Number of Schools	Number of Students	Number of SMPs
Nuwara Eliya	4	25	2,457	35
Ratnapura	6	36	3,685	57
Badulla	5	48	4,253	61
Trincomalee	4	52	3,904	58
Kilinochchi	3	19	1,002	19
TOTAL:	22	180	15,301	230



Source: Save the Children. Dela Tamil Primary School, Ratnapura.

Donated U.S. Commodity Being Included in School Meals in May



Source: Save the Children.

The PALAM/A project commodity distribution continued through June 2022, with distributions commencing on June 7.

June 2022 Distribution

District	JDP	Number of Schools	Number of Students	Number of SMPs
Nuwara Eliya	13	68	92	6,612
Ratnapura	6	39	65	4,706
Badulla	11	90	127	8,515
Trincomalee	9	97	121	10,642
Kilinochchi	4	37	37	3,549
Mullaitivu	5	52	52	4,200
Monaragala	3	21	39	2,900
TOTAL:	51	404	533	41,124

Despite transportation and distribution difficulties, the PALAM/A project reached 180 schools (approximately 20 percent of the total target) of where the Sri Lankan government’s National School Meal Program and School Meal Providers (SMPs) are active, benefitting over 15,301 students. As of end June, the project is expected to reach over 49,200 children at 487 schools. Through July the project aims to reach a further 194 schools, making a total of 316 schools reached (approximately 40 percent of the total target).

With the announcement of school closures physically on June 20, due to the ongoing fuel shortage, Save the Children rescheduled distributions for that week. Based on the confirmation that schools benefitting from the PALAM/A project were operating physically and serving the school meal, efforts were being made to commence distribution anew beginning on July 27. This was short lived given the government’s July 3 announcement, unexpected or planned, of a week-long school holiday for the week beginning July 4. Consequently, on July 1, Save the Children distributed the food commodities to 351 schools, benefitting 32,455 children.

Attachments:

No Attachments.