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Education Editor



EDUCATION

Payment delays disrupt school feeding in Sokoto

By Abubakar Auwal, Sokoto

elay in releasing fund is said to be disrupting the implementation of the school feeding programme in Sokoto State, Daily Trust has learnt.

No fewer than 2,236 cooks provide meals to 216,906 pupils across the state under the programme.

However, it was gathered that only primary one to three pupils are so far benefitting from the programme handle by the Federal Government as that of the state government was yet to kick off.

According to the arrangement, the Federal Government would feed primary one to three pupils while states are responsible for feeding primary four to six pupils.

The programme, which commenced in the state in October last year, was disrupted two times by funding delay.

It would be recalled that the programme was suspended for some weeks few weeks after its takeoff which was attributed to some problems faced by some states.

It is yet to resume in many schools across the state metropolis and in other local government areas since the commencement of the academic term (previous) as money was not released to many of the vendors.

Checks by Daily Trust revealed that at Yakubu Mu'azu Model Science Primary School, only one of the 15 cooks received her money and three out of the eight assigned to Bafarawa Model Primary School received theirs while several others have yet to receive their payment as at July 25, 2019.

However, the Programme Manager, Musa Girkau explained that the delay was caused by the recent census of schools conducted by the National Bureau for Statistics for the national headquarters of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme where there was disparity between their figures and 'ours' which needed to be harmonized.

Girkau, who spoke through his Technical Assistant, Mustapha Abdullahi, assured that the programme would soon resume in the schools as the issue had been resolved.

Daily Trust reliably gathered that interference by head teachers was another challenge facing the programme.

In one of the metropolitan schools,



■ Cooks at Bafarawa Model Primary School

a cook who sought anonymity told our reporter that she was forced to incorporate the head teachers in implementing the programme.

"They forced us to give him part of the money which he is using to buy ingredients for us despite the fact that we were told not to give anybody anything by the Programme Manager," she stated.

"It started during the former headmaster and when the new one was appointed we were asked to maintain the status quo," she said.

Another investigation revealed that some of the cooks were being threatened by officials of the Local Education Authority to give them some percentage of the money paid them or risk being replaced.

Daily Trust learnt that some politicians were mounting pressure on the manager, especially shortly before the elections, to remove some people perceived to be sympathetic to a particular opposition political party in the state from the list of the cooks and replace them with the loyalists of the ruling party in the state.

The pressure, according to our checks, was coming from politicians in the local government areas who felt only supporters of the ruling party in the state should be recruited for the job, but this was said to be vehemently opposed by the manager who is enjoying the backing of Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal.

"The governor asked us to recruit people on merit not on party lineage and he has never interfered in our activities," a source told Daily Trust.

However, the Technical Assistant described their threat as empty because no one has the power in the whole state to sack or replace any of the cooks.

He explained that the fund was usually released to the cooks either on monthly or bi-monthly basis and remitted directly into the accounts of the cooks from the national headquarters.

The cooks also complained about reduction in what was agreed they were to be paid. According to them, they were initially being paid N110,000 but which has been reduced to N96, 000 without corresponding reduction in the number of pupils being fed and with no explanation.

"I feed over 126 pupils and the money is reduced to N96,000 from N110, 000 without any explanation," one of the cooks said

Daily Trust learnt that before the current disruption, the children were being fed pap with akara balls on Mondays, sweet potato with meat on Tuesdays, rice with eggs on Wednesdays, rice with beans on Thursdays and biscuits with juice drinks on Fridays.

The headmaster of Bafarawa Model Primary School located along Zuru road, Malam Isa Garba, said parents who had earlier withdrawn their children from school scampered to return them because of the programme.

"Some parents have withdrawn their children probably because of poverty but are now scampering to bring them back because of the home grown feeding programme," he said.

According to him, the school which before the commencement of the programme had 1,064 pupils in primary one to three now has 1,175.

He noted that the management of the school, in collaboration with the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) and Parents Teachers Association (PTA), had been trying to ensure that the increase in the number of pupils did not affect the quality and quantity of the food being served the pupils.

"For instance, we are buying crates of eggs to ensure that each and every pupil gets one complete egg and we come together to assess the quality of the food and if we are not satisfied we reject it," he said.

He called on the authority concerned to ensure timely release of funds to the cooks, noting that delay and selective payment was hindering the implementation of the programme.

He disclosed that out of the eight cooks deployed to the school, only three were credited with fund that would cover only two weeks. This, he said, was killing the morale of the pupils.

The headmaster of Yakubu Mu'azu Model Primary School, Mal. Muhammadu Chika, who said the school was satisfied with the quality of the food, added that the programme was boosting school enrolment in the state.

A parent who spoke on the programme, Malam Umar praised the Federal Government for the initiative and called on the state government to start its own feeding programme if it is sure that it would be sustainable.

A pupil of Muhammad Bida Model Primary School, Arkilla in Wamakko Local Government Area, Nura Attahiru, confirmed not being fed since resumption about five weeks ago.

He expressed sadness over its suspension, even though he said the meal was only augmenting what he takes before leaving home.

This work is sponsored by Daily Trust Foundation with the support of MacArthur Foundation.

FUNAAB students come 2nd in ENACTUS competition

From Christiana T. Alabi, Lagos

The student entrepreneurship club of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State has won second position in the Entrepreneurial Action for Others Create A Better World For Us All (ENACTUS) competition.

Twelve students participated in the project on girl child education titled 'One Girl, One World' to achieve the feat, winning a cash prize of N300,000.

Explaining the modalities

of the project, the university's ENACTUS team leader, Miss Oluwadamilola Ogunkoyi, a 400 level student of the Department of Animal Production and Health, said her team worked on impacting in the lives of 50 families in Shepeteri community located

in Shaki, Oyo State where girls' education faced challenges.

She said her team's activities included dissuading the families to stop the tradition; and encouraging the girl child to seek for knowledge through formal education.

"We were able to penetrate and educate them, we took videos and got statistics which we presented at the Civic Centre in Lagos where we emerged second among 10 other universities and we were given a cash prize of N300,000," she said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY