

Continued from page 18

and the coordinating office of the Social Investment Programme in Niger State show discrepancies in the number of schools captured in the programme. While 2,555 schools are captured on the national data, 2,847 schools are on the data provided by the state.

Yunusa Abdullahi Primary School Ibeto is just one school, but on the data of the NHGSFP there are three schools with the same name. Our reporter also verified that there is only one Central Primary School in Ibeto whereas the school is listed two times on the national data. However, the state data list the schools once.

Our reporter also verified that Takuti Nomadic Primary School, Lapai, is not benefitting from the free meals but it appears on the list as one of the benefitting schools.

Poor coverage in rural areas

LEA Primary School, Emi Guni, Bassa LGA of Kogi State is a rural school. Since the school feeding took off in the state, pupils were served meals four times only.

Our reporter learnt that the first time the vendor, Ajara Yusuf, brought the food to the school was February 27, and that the free feeding lasted for only four days.

Official records show that the entire school has 51 pupils, but the woman was allocated 75 pupils to feed, and even the 51 did not get enough food.

Daily Trust on Sunday learnt that vendors had not been consistent in serving the meals at Bassa Model Nursery and Primary School, Gboloko, also in Bassa LGA.

Bassa LGA has 126 public primary schools according to Education Secretary, Abdullahi Ali Baba, but that only 12 were being served the free meals.

At Demonstration Nursery and Primary School, Obangede, Okehi LGA, Kogi State, half of the pupils who are supposed to eat the food are the ones served.

Authorities respond

The National Coordinator of NHGSF, Mrs. Abimbola Adesanmi, in an interview with some journalists investigating activities of the NHGSF across the country, said "Our holistic impact evaluation across the country is scheduled to take place this year because we have spent roughly three years, so we have to check our impact on the pupils."

She doubted if enrollment would drop in a school where food was served on a regular basis, insisting that in most places, they were overwhelmed with the number of pupils who had enrolled because of the free meals.

"Some parents relocate to other places; that is why we have low enrollment in some schools and high in others," she said.

She, however, said it was the purview of the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) to provide infrastructure and ensure the pupils learned in clean environments.

She explained that the poor coverage had to do with how quick the cooks' data was cleaned up and sent to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), saying the process sometimes took time.

Effort to speak with the Nasarawa State Chairman



■ Pupils of LEA Primary School, Matandi, in Magama LGA, Niger State, queue to get rations of free meals

of SUBEB, Mr. Mohammed DanAzumi, on the state of infrastructure in some of the schools was not successful, as he did not reply to text messages sent to his mobile phone number. He also did not pick or return calls.

The Desk Officer, Social Investment Programme in Nasarawa State, Mr. Amos Magaji, declined giving our reporter data. While our reporter was in the state in the last week of March for the investigation, he refused to comment on the issue.

When our reporter sent him some questions through SMS asking for the number of schools feeding under the programme, cooks serving the pupils, the aggregators and what they were aggregating and to comment on other issues concerning the programme in the state, he insisted that our reporter travelled to meet him face to face in Lafia. The reporter did and he promised to forward the information to his mail but has not done it. He also refused to grant our reporter an interview.

After several reminders, he sent a message saying the governor just launched the programme in the state and they were still getting the completed number of vendors to ascertain the exact number of pupils, local government by local government.

The Nasarawa State Focal Person, Aliyu Abdulkadir, did not reply to an SMS sent to his mobile phone, neither did he pick calls placed to his phone when our reporter visited the state late March.

The Unit Head of the NHGSF in Kogi State, Hajia Khadijat Karibo, dismissed the claim that the pupils were fed rotten fish and stale bread. She, however, said she would make effort to correct the teething problems.

She initially declined to provide data on the programme and initially refused to name the aggregator who was supplying the rotten fish, but later sent the name and phone number of the company that was aggregating fish for Lokoja.

The aggregator, FAJR Company Limited, did not respond to an SMS asking for the amount it was paid to supply the fish and to respond to allegations of supplying rotten fish.

When our reporter dialed the phone number, truecaller identified the aggregator as Tanimu Sani Isa Koto. He then asked one Abdul Idris to call our reporter and tell him that he did not know how to practice journalism; that the reporter approached the aggregator wrongly and ended up embarrassing him. He said the reporter did not have the right to ask the aggregator any question.

He sought to meet with our reporter in Lokoja but the reporter declined. He then said he would come to Abuja and see the reporter but when asked if he would speak on behalf of the aggregator, he cut the line.

The following morning, another stranger, who truecaller identified as Hussaini Marafa,

called our reporter and claimed he was the Media Officer of the Social Investment Programme in Kogi State. He said the reporter was unprofessional in his conduct in dealing with the aggregator. He lampooned the reporter for being out to paint Kogi State in negative light and then hung up.

In a previous investigation on the programme covering Benue, Taraba and Plateau states, published December 23, 2018, it was revealed that there were at least three ghost schools benefitting from the programme in Benue State.

A source privy to the operations of the school feeding programme showed our reporter the distribution list for food items in Vandeikya LGA in which there were three ghost schools. The list indicated that NKST Primary School, Abanyi, has 80 pupils, with Philomena Akawe as the food vendor; LEA Primary

School, Maduen, has 77 pupils with Mgunengen Maduen as the vendor, while LEA Primary School, Adamu, was allocated 72 pupils with Tyozenda Teryila as the vendor. Our reporter who was in the local government could not trace the schools and the residents said the schools were not physically on ground.

But Terries Damsa, the Benue State Focal Person for the Social Investment Programme, denied knowledge of the ghost schools. He promised he would root them out once he found out they existed.

The investigation also uncovered three ghost schools in Takum LGA of Taraba State. Findings revealed that the wife of the chairman of the local government, Christy Shiban, was a food vendor at the school and she supposedly fed 61 pupils. The Chairman, Shiban Tikari, did not reply to an SMS sent to his mobile phone number asking for comments on the issue. But during an interview with the National Coordinator of the programme, Mrs. Adesanmi, she denied that Mrs. Shiban was paid any money.

At UBEA School, Nukpoba, our reporter learnt that since Government Day Secondary School Kufai, Amadu, opened in 2007, the primary school ceased to exist.

When contacted, the Focal Person for the Social Investment Office in Taraba State, Beatrice Kitchener, asked the secretary of the programme, Idris Goje, to forward a letter the acting Education Secretary of Takum LGA wrote to them to our reporter.

In the letter, dated October 31, 2018, the acting secretary explained that vendors who were posted to the ghost schools had been transferred to other primary schools because of herdsmen crises in the area. The office did not deny the existence of the ghost schools.

In Plateau State, pupils were underfed and there was poor coverage across the state because many vendors had problems with their BVN and so could not be enrolled.

The free meals for pupils were not served in many schools since the programme took off in June, 2017, even where it started, it was not sustained beyond one month or one term. Only 57.9 per cent, 1,402 out of the 2,420 schools in the state were served food. In 1,018 schools (42.1 per cent of public primary schools in Plateau), pupils did not know how the free meals tasted.

"We have serious challenge of BVN and valid account numbers. These are rural women and they don't know the implication of borrowing account numbers. When their names were sent with their account numbers to the National Inter-Banks Settlement System (NIBSS), there were BVN mismatches and so only 2,006 cooks have been paid stipends," Dr. Fadimatu Hamza Sumaye, the Focal Person of Plateau State Social Investment Programme, offered her defence.

This investigation was done with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting



■ A dilapidated structure at the RCM Pilot Science Primary School, Gudi, Akwanga LGA, Nasarawa State