

In Plateau, feeding programme spurs school attendance, love - Dr Hamza

From Dickson S. Adama, Jos

Plateau State Focal Person on the Social Investment Programme (SIP) saddled with the responsibility of coordinating the school feeding programme of primary school pupils in the state, Dr. Sumaye Fadimatu Hamza, has said the project is greatly stimulating academic interest in children.

Speaking in Jos, on the successes of the programme, she explained that they have received several testimonies of how children come to school because of the food even when they are sick, adding that some of them also take it home to share with their other siblings.

She said 221, 000 pupils are being fed under the programme in the state, which is costing the federal government about N15 million daily.

Dr. Hamza, who is also the Executive Assistant to Plateau State Governor Simon Lalong on SIP, said the school feeding programme will continue for as long as the government is in power and hoped that subsequent administrations will see its benefit and also carry on from where the present administration will stop.

"Many children are from poor families and were going to school hungry. The performance of such children definitely is not going to be impressive, not because they are not intelligent but because of the circumstances. But with the school feeding programme, their enthusiasm to come to school has been tremendously boosted because they are sure they will have a decent meal in school. Whenever they eat, you will see them leaving some and if you ask them why are you keeping some they will tell you they want to take it to their brother or to their sister.

"Small as they are, they are already thinking of taking a little of their food to their



■ Dr. Sumaye Fadimatu Hamza

siblings at home. So you can see that it is boosting education and children's interest in coming to school.

"This school feeding is also increasing the spirit of care, love and sharing. These are also the values we want to inculcate in these younger ones. Also, some of these children are really facing hardship and besides this meal there is no meal for some of them.

"That is why even when they are sick they tell their parents that they are not staying at home and want to go to school. We have heard testimonies like that from parents. You can see that the feeding programme attracts the children to go to school. This certainly is going to have a long term impact on the children. For us in Plateau State, it is a welcome development and we are very happy that we have keyed into

the programme and our pupils are benefiting," she said.

She explained that the only initial hitch encountered in executing the programme was the opening of bank accounts and sorting out BVN of the cooks, which is a necessary criteria before payments are made to them.

Dr Hamza said that the education department of the participating local governments selected the cooks from communities where the schools are domiciled and that the cooks were subjected to a medical check and other qualification tests before they were engaged.

"The cooks must have a personal valid account and BVN. Any cook that does not fulfil this criteria is dropped and replaced. The list of the cooks are sent to me and I forward to the national office. The national office will now

have to send the name of the cook to National Inter-Bank Settlement System for validation of BVN because they are the custodians of all BVN in Nigeria.

"So if there is a mismatch or if there is wrong name attached to the BVN and the account number, the cook cannot be paid. Only those that have been validated and there is complete matching of name and account and BVN are processed for payment. The School Feeding main challenge is therefore that some of the cooks have never owned a bank account. But we have been able to overcome almost 90 percent of that challenge," she said.

Dr Hamza advised parents and teachers to assist in monitoring the implementation of the programme and report any attempt to undermine it.

Group wants Lalong to support Maje's ambition for speaker

From Lami Sadiq, Jos

The Plateau Proactive Youths, (APY) on Wednesday called on Governor Simon Bako Lalong to support the bid by the re-elected member representing Wase Federal Constituency, Hon. Idris Ahmed Maje, to become the next speaker of the 9th House of Representatives.

The group, in a statement signed by its National Coordinator, Timothy Dungs said the position of speaker of the House of Representatives will put Plateau on a high scale of national politics and facilitate many projects and employment opportunities for the people of the state.

Dungs said Maje, who is going to the House for the fourth time, has demonstrated that good governance and quality representation are possible by embarking on programmes that have positive impact on his constituents.

"He has shown commitment in improving the plight of his people through quality education, health, youth empowerment, infrastructural development and quality representation of the interest of his state at the national stage.

"You cannot take away the fact that Hon. Maje is a leader with compassion for the improvement of the plight of the masses and that was why he was made the chairman of the House Committee on Federal Character in the 7th Assembly and he retained the same position during the current 8th Assembly until his elevation to become the Deputy House Leader late last year."

The group said as chairman of the Federal Character Committee Maje fought consistently to bridge the disparity and imbalances in various states and regions in terms of employment and distribution of infrastructure and brought them in line with the constitutional requirement of federal character thereby distinguishing himself as a man of justice, equity and fairness.

It, therefore, called on Governor Lalong to give Maje all the support as that would accelerate both human and infrastructural development in the state.

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