

**SPECIAL REPORT**

# Thrills, kicks of Nigeria's school feeding programme



■ Pupils of Okwuani Central School Nnewi line up to collect food

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Officer, Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme, (Osun-Meals), Mrs Caroline Kehinde Olaniyan, told Daily Trust that the federal government had contributed N4bn for the programme from January 2017 till date while the state and local governments spent N10.8bn.

“Because of the school feeding programme, our pupils are not dull. They are active in class. They look healthier and are ready to learn. The daily nutritious meals have improved their mental alertness and performance in class,” she said.

**Inconsistency mars programme in Plateau**

The programme started smoothly in Plateau State but later encountered challenges with complaints emanating from several quarters.

Daily Trust gathered that some of the challenges include inconsistency in supplying food and vendors’ attitude of collecting mobilization funds but failing to supply food. Other challenges include shortages in the food supply compared to the number of pupils, personal hygiene of vendors and quality of food, among other things.

Our correspondent who visited the LEA Science Pilot Primary School, Tudun Wada, Jos, gathered that for a while now the vendors have not visited the school. Since the beginning of this term, the vendors have come only a few times, while the pupils keep expecting them daily.

The Head Teacher of the school, Akutse Kwarkas, said since the term began, the pupils had not been fed up to six weeks.

“The problem with the school feeding programme is that it is on and off. Since this week, for instance, we have not seen any of the food vendors. They said they had finished this particular batch since last week. And again, the number of pupils in this school is more than what the vendors can cope with. Worse still, the vendors said they were only catering for 70 pupils per class, while in many classes, we have between 80 and 100 pupils.

“Nevertheless, whenever they come around we still urge them to share the food meant for those 70 pupils to all the pupils. This is because you cannot give to one and leave the others, that would be unfair, that is the problem,” she said.

She noted that fund disbursement to the vendors is every fortnight, but lamented that they don’t supply the food in accordance with the frequency of disbursement or amounts disbursed.

Kwarkas said a vendor suddenly stopped coming and said she had been transferred to another school, and throughout last term and this term she hadn’t come.

But when she inquired, she said, the school the woman referred to has no school feeding programme, adding that most of the women are not prepared to do the work as they would only collect the funds and disappear.

Some of the pupils, Isaac Arun from Primary 1A, Princess Joseph from Primary 1B, Rabi Isah from Primary 2H and Jacob Musa from Primary 2D said they were missing the feeding and want the food vendors to return. They said they enjoyed the meal period, the fun and queuing up for meals, hence, want everything done to sustain the programme.

One of the vendors, Mrs. Mary Paul, said the major problem was that funds provided by the government are often inadequate. She said they had complained about it and the government promised to do something about it, and had also told the school their challenges. Mrs Paul said they would resume next week with the hope that funds would be provided.

Dr. Sumaye Fadimatu Hamza, the State Focal Person of the Social Investment Programme (SIP), could not respond to calls for her reaction before press time.

**Anambra pupils gleefully go to school**

The programme appears to be boosting school enrollment in public schools in Anambra State.

Daily Trust findings show that public schools which used to have very low enrollment are now taking in more children than ever before.

At the Okwuani Central School Nnewi, the programme has reinvigorated hope, confidence and encouraged massive enrollment from less than 200 to over 451 pupils in the junior primary section.

The Head Teacher of the ASchool, Mrs. Ezeonyeka Stella, told Daily Trust that the programme was behind the new-found encouragement.

She said the school has Primary 1, 2 and 3 with a population of 451 pupils, with three

vendors that supply food. In every meal for instance, they ensure inclusion of vegetables, she said.

They serve the pupils yams on Mondays, jollof rice on Tuesdays, beans on Wednesdays, ‘Okpa’ on Thursdays and Moi Moi on Fridays, she added.

According to her, because of the meals, some parents no longer bother to give their children breakfast before leaving for school, since they know that they would be fed in school before 10 am, leading to increased savings for them.

“When it is time for food, you would see the excitement among the children. For them, coming to school now is exciting and no longer suffering as it used to be,” she said.

According to her, the feeding programme has assisted in minimizing theft among children.

“In fact, a lot of bad behaviours among the pupils are no longer noticeable,” she said as she also called for increased funding in line with prevailing high cost of commodities in the market.

The food vendors said they were trying hard to see that the funds made available to them were effectively used. According to them, the number of pupils taking the meals is higher now than when it started and the cost is becoming difficult to cope with.

Mrs. Ike Esther, the Primary 3 food vendor, said she spends about N100 on each child’s meal but is being paid N50 on each. She said despite the increasing number of pupils and the high cost of food items, she is managing to ensure that she gives quality food to the children.

She also complained of increased number of pupils, saying originally, she was supposed to be feeding 140 pupils but is now feeding over 156.

Mrs. Nkechi Odiobulu, the vendor for Primary 1, said at the beginning she was contracted to feed 130 pupils but now they are 168.

“We need more money to be able to feed these children because things are costly and nobody can get food for N50 anywhere now,” she said.

Mrs. Ngozi Okoye, the vendor for Primary 2, said originally, she was given 130 pupils to feed but the number has risen to 150, and urged the government to increase the funding.

Some of the pupils told Daily Trust that the programme had encouraged them to go to school. Master Oluchukwu Odinaka, a Primary 3 pupil, said he enjoys the food and it helps him remain focused in class.

Ezeike Ebube in Primary 2 said the food

helps keep her in school till closing time, and her parents do no longer worry about giving her money for snacks while in school.

**Mix feelings in Akwa Ibom**

In Akwa Ibom State, the free education from primary to secondary school policy shot up school enrollment and attendance by almost 100 percent, so the introduction of the school feeding programme has not elicited much enthusiasm, but is rather viewed with suspicion.

Daily Trust investigations show that it however has its merits as heads of schools where the programme is being implemented and food vendors welcome the initiative.

The Headmistress of Christ the King’s Primary School, Wellington Bassey Road, Uyo, Mrs Inyang Udo, said children aged 2-3 in Early Child Care (ECC) 1,2,3 and Primary 1,2,3 benefit from the programme.

She said it had increased the population of children in the school, just as it helps to improve children’s health and makes them smart during classes, as they are always very excited during meal time.

However, she noted that the quantity of the food is usually small and called for improvement in the reach, the quality and quantity.

Primary 3 teacher, Mrs Anthonia Obot, said 150 children in her class benefit from the programme but noted that some do not come with their plates, while a few others do not eat because their parents cautioned them against it. She said she had to educate some parents on why they should allow their children to eat the food as it is a federal government sponsored initiative. She added that children were always excited when the food vendor arrives.

Some pupils in Primary 1-3 told our correspondent that though they eat from home before going to school, they also eat the food provided by the vendors. Martina Michael and Blessing Okon in Primary 4A are not excited about the food. They said they eat from home and when they don’t, they come with food of their own.

“My mother says I should not collect the food, I come to school with my food”, Okon said.

Martina Michael, whose mother is a restaurant owner, said: “I don’t collect the food because my mummy says they could poison the food but I have not heard any child complain of stomach upset. I eat from home and I sometimes bring my food”.

One of the three food vendors assigned to the school said she was meant to feed 124 children, but feeds more than that daily.

A vendor said the programme is a blessing as it has kept her employed because she was not able to get a job after graduation. She said she makes a profit of about N30,000 a month from feeding the children.



■ A food vendor serves rice to Primary 3 pupils of Christ the King Primary School, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State