

POLICY BRIEF

PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

HOME GROWN SCHOOL
FEEDING PROGRAMME
AUGUST 2019

Prioritising the Interest of Pupils

Ensuring Transparency and Accountability in the Implementation of Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

BACKGROUND

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is one of the components of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) of the Government of Nigeria designed in response to the high level of poverty and its associated challenges in the country. The programme is currently being implemented in 32 states of the federation with over 9.9 million pupils in primary 1 – 3 benefiting in about 53,000 schools.

The programme is designed to provide at least one nutritious meal a day to pupils in public primary schools across the country. It is aimed at improving school enrolment, retention and completion, curb the current dropout rate from primary schools which is already estimated at a high rate of 30%. It seeks to reduce child labour, improve child nutrition and health, and eventually result in better learning outcomes.

Its implementation so far has shown that the benefits are not for only the children, as it has been found to boost the local economy as well as contribute to the creation of new jobs along the food supply value chain.

Effective monitoring by citizens to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of this programme is being conducted in 140 schools in Ogun and 400 schools in Kaduna state by different non-governmental organizations with the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. These

schools constitute only 10% of the total schools in the two states with 1,200 and 4,000 schools respectively.

WHY TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE HGSFP?

With a high level of poverty in the country, a bad reputation of corruption, as well as dwindling and scarce resources in Nigeria; ensuring that resources are well channeled and utilized judiciously for what they are earmarked is critical to the success of the social

At a glance

In Prioritising the interest of pupils who are the primary beneficiaries of HGSFP, the following key issues should be addressed:

- Interference of politicians in the selection of cooks
- Inadequate protein content of meals
- Lack of timetable of funds disbursement and duration of feeding per term
- Ensure timely release of information regarding the start and end date during each term
- Non usage of data collected during monitoring exercises to take decisions towards improving the programme
- The need to use community based groups to monitor the programme in all schools e.g. PTAs and SBMC

investment programme. Without proper tracking of the resources being committed to the programme, its beneficiaries may be short-changed and this may make it difficult to realize the objectives of the initiative, one of which is to address issues of inequality. The huge investment that goes into the school feeding programme coupled with its laudable expected results, no doubt calls for close monitoring that promotes transparency and accountability. The huge size of the programme calls for a monitoring system that is innovative and sustainable, which can be achieved through the use of volunteers. The School Based Management Committees (SBMC) and the Parents-Teachers Associations (PTA) are critical stakeholders in the school system across the country and therefore present useful platforms for achieving sustainable monitoring and tracking of the programme.

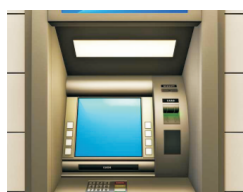
CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HGSFP (March 2018 – August 2019)

Some of the challenges identified with the implementation of the HGSFP over the past one and a half years include:



Interference of Politicians in the process of Cooks' Selection

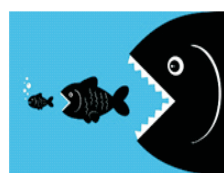
Food vendors have been found to be either members of the political party in power or sponsored by politicians. Such vendors are often rude, absent from duty post without leave, use proxies or challenge the authority of school officials. All these have negative impact on the effectiveness of the programme and seem to suggest that the guidelines for selection of cooks was not followed, which is evident in some cooks not living within the community of their designated school. This makes it difficult for them to keep up with the demands of daily food supply.



Excessive Charges, Delay in Payment and Difficulty in Accessing Funds

Although, the cost per meal is small, the operating bank imposes excessive charges on every inflow and outflow on each cook's account. Irregularity and delay in releasing funds to cooks has also been found to be a clog in the wheel of progress. At least one in every two vendors reported that they experience delay in payment, which has severe implications for uniformity in the delivery of food to the children. Some cooks do not start serving on the day others do, because of delay in accessing funds.

Furthermore, cooks who reside and operate in the rural areas do not have ready access to any of the branches or ATM machines of the assigned banks. They therefore have serious challenges accessing their funds, including having to spend money travelling as far as the state capital to withdraw funds.



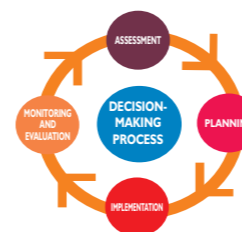
Sub-Contracting

Evidence of sub-contracting was found in different schools across the LGAs where monitoring takes place. The quantity and quality of food that is served to the children often gets compromised as a result of the practice of sub-contracting by registered cooks. Some of the registered cooks are not willing to do the work but got registered anyway, while some registered the names of different cooks; as such they get a cut from whatever is paid to the cooks.



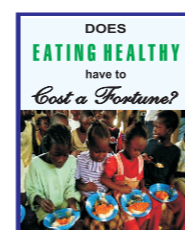
Absenteeism

In monitoring the HGSFP evidence of absenteeism were found, with reports of same directed to the right authorities for sanction. Though, monitoring has helped to reduce this to a minimal level in the schools where monitoring takes place, absenteeism has been linked to sub-contracting, especially where the sub-contracted cook does not reside in the community where the school is located. Some schools are also located in hard to reach areas (areas not easily accessible by cars and can only be accessed by motorbikes). Cooks may not show up at such locations during heavy rains. Absenteeism makes monitoring by community members an absolute necessity.



Monitoring and Use of Data Collected for Decision Making

Reports from schools where community people are not monitoring the programme repeatedly show that standards and guidelines are not often adhered to. Some cooks are said to do whatever they like because no one is checking on them. As stated earlier, only 10% of the schools in Ogun and Kaduna states are closely monitored. HGSFP desk officers also often find it difficult to conduct regular visits to schools because of limited or absence of budgetary allocation for supervisory visits. The implication of this is that they seldom use data being collected by the health teachers in the school for decision making.



Cost of Meal Per Child

The reality of the economy of Nigeria and the cost of food items in some parts of the country make the allocation of N70 per meal per child highly unrealistic, especially in view of one of the objectives of the programme, which is the provision of one nutritious meal per child per school day. The fact is that the actual meal that is served to the child is worth less than N70, as the cook and the protein aggregators also have to make profit from the N70.

Protein Content of Meal:

The protein content of the meals (especially in Ogun state where egg does not feature at all) is quite small and this can be understood in view of the cost of the meal per child.

Research has shown that only 64% of children grow up healthy, implying that nearly one in three children in the country still experience some kind of nutritional deficit. Figure 1 presents data on the impact and status of protein energy malnutrition among Nigerian children. Rather than improve, wasting (low weight-for-height) and stunting (low height-for-age) continue to get worse. For instance, prevalence of moderate wasting which stood at below 15% in 2011 was found to be above 40% in 2017.

Figure 1: Percentage of Nigerian children under-five who are either underweight, stunted or wasting

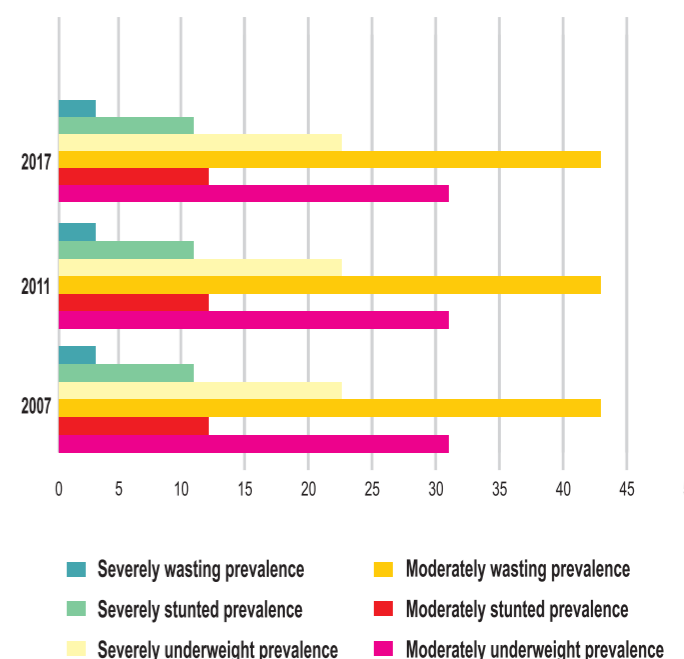
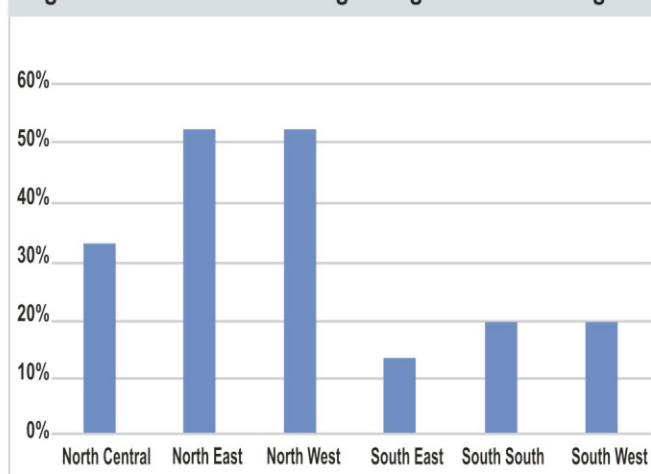


Figure 2 presents data on the prevalence of stunting among children across the six geopolitical zones of the country. The North West where Kaduna state is located is the worst hit in the Northern region, while the South West, where Ogun State is located is the worst hit in the Southern part of the country.

Children require approximately 1 - 1.5 grams of protein per day for every two pounds (approx. 1kg) of body weight, or more precisely, one gram of protein per kilogram per day (1 kg = 2.2 lbs.). The size of protein that is currently being served to children, especially in Ogun State, is not near this standard requirement.

Figure 2: Prevalence of Stunting among under-fives in Nigeria



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Local Government Education Authority (LGEA)

- Ensure that all schools are transparent in the handling of data.
- Use data generated from the daily monitoring of the programme to make decisions that can enable the programme to run well.
- Train and re-train members of the school-based management committees and Parent-Teacher Associations as monitors of the programme in their respective schools.
- Adopt different accountability mechanisms in all schools including use of indicator boards to allow for free flow of information about the programme.
- Develop standard code of conduct and implement sanctions when cooks err.

State Government

- Promote the culture of transparency and accountability in the delivery of the programme. All cooks should have photo identification cards to reduce the unhealthy practice of sub-contracting.
- Ensure that the financial institutions who manage the funds of the programme avoid discriminatory practices in the delivery of their services and respect the rights of cooks just as they do in relation to other customers.
- Monitor financial institutions to avoid the imposition of unnecessary charges on the cooks' inflow from the federal government.
- Ensure that banks create wide opportunities for cooks to have easy access to their funds.
- Allow members of PTAs and SBMCs to monitor implementation of the feeding programme in all schools.

Federal Government

- Revisit the cost per meal in view of the strength of the Naira, as N70 is adjudged low for the provision of a nutritious meal. The cook and protein aggregator are business persons and expected to make profit from the N70.
- Ensure each child is given at least one egg per week as it is easier to ensure compliance with required quantity by suppliers than when children are served with fish or meat.
- Develop cook recruitment guidelines in order to reduce the interference of political party influencers.

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