

Towards Understanding Home Grown School Feeding Programme and its Institutional Framework and Roles in Nigeria: A Holistic Approach

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Abstract: This work is titled: towards understanding school feeding programme and its institutional framework and roles in Nigeria: A holistic approach. The purpose of the paper was to provide a comprehensive write-up on Nigerian homegrown school feeding programme. Therefore, this work provided an extensive discussion on the concept of school feeding programme in general. Also discussed herein was aims and objectives of Nigerian homegrown school feeding programme. The historical development of Nigerian homegrown school feeding programme was also exhaustively captured. Also explicated in this work were the types of school feeding from different dimensions, the legal framework of school feeding programme as well as the institutional framework and roles of school feeding programme in the context of Nigeria. The challenges of school feeding programme was also identified; while offering recommendations for improvement of the programme.

Key points: Understanding, Homegrown School Feeding Programme, Institutional Framework and Holistic Approach.

Introduction

The educational sector of every nation plays significant role the development of its human resources. Thus, any focused and committed government of any country needs to embark on certain critical interventions which are aimed at bringing better services to the learners and other stakeholders in the educational sector. One of such very critical and fundamental interventions is the homegrown school feeding programme which was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria as an intervention at the basic level of education. The introduction of homegrown school feeding programme to provide meal to school children is very vital because food is one of the basic needs of humans especially for children. Vanvynckt (2010) admitted that proper nutrition in the formative years of children increases their ability and chances of high enrolment, retention and completion as well as motivate them in school. Therefore, it is in recognition of the value of food as a strong means of improving students' enrolment, attendance, retention, progression, completion and boosting achievement among pupils that the Federal Republic of Nigeria as its social intervention policy initiated the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) in 2004.

Concept of School Feeding Programme

Different scholars have explicated the concept of school feeding programme in different ways based on their individual perception. School feeding programme in general terms, simply represents an approach of using food for the achievement of educational outcomes. According to World Food Programme (2009), school feeding programme is one of the leading programmes which is aimed at increasing food supply and reducing hunger by using locally produced food; thereby promoting school gardens and incorporating agriculture into school curricula. It refers to the provision of meals either at school or take-home food which is geared towards promoting learners' involvement in learning, enhancing their educational outcome and facilitating their nutritional value. School feeding programme is aimed at increasing school enrolment too. This is because it is believed that because poor parents could not provide food for their wards in school, these parents do not enroll their wards into schools. Even the poor parents, who do enroll their children in schools, find it thorny to ensure that their wards attend and remain in school every day till the school closes because they cannot provide food for their children in school everyday throughout the term.

School feeding programme in the opinion of World Food Program (2016) is far more than just food-giving; as it is an investment in the world's poorest children. Oyefade (2014) conceptualized school feeding programme as a social safety net that has been popular in developing countries as an instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Oyefade maintained that school feeding programme is frequently targeted towards populations that are food insecure and reside in areas with high concentrations of families from low socioeconomic status, or towards schools that face poor attendance and enrollment of students. In the same vein, Tomlinson (2007) cited in Adekunle and Ogbogu (2016) see school feeding programme as a social safety net which provides an important new opportunity to assist poor families and feed hungry children. It provides incentive for poor families to send their children to school and keep them there.

School feeding programme constitutes a critical intervention which has been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world to address the issue of poverty, stimulate school enrolment and enhance pupils' performance (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2022). Akanbi (2013) observed that almost 60 million children go to school hungry everyday in developing countries and about 40 percent of them are from Africa. In the same vein, Neeser (2012) admitted that 60 million children go to school hungry every day in developing countries. Thus, providing school meals is therefore vital in nourishing children and promoting enrolment, retention and completion; as parents would be motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for siblings.

School feeding program is one of several interventions of government which can address some of the nutrition and health problems of school age children. It has the capacity to motivate parents to enroll their children in school and to see that they attend school regularly (Ogunode, Ahmed, Gregory & Abubakar, 2020). The programme or scheme tends to effectively reduce absenteeism and school drop outs. School feeding programme also alleviates short-term hunger and malnourishment; thereby promoting well-nourished school children, helping them increase attention span and producing gains in cognitive function and learning, addressing specific micronutrient deficiencies in school aged children. Meeting the iron and iodine needs of school- aged children can translate into better school performance. School feeding programme further increases community involvement in schools, particularly where the program depends on the community to prepare and serve meals (Chepkwony, Bilhah & Kosgei, 2013).

Objectives of National Homegrown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

Generally, the overall objectives of Nigerian homegrown school programme according to FRN (2016) are to:

improve the enrolment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout out rate, address the nutrition and health status of many children and thereby improve learning outcomes, stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of farmers by creating a

viable and ready market and to create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development p. 11.

The Nigerian home grown school feeding programme is aimed at delivering a government-led, cost-effective school feeding programme with a specific focus on the development of smallholder farmers and local procurement to spur growth in the local economy. While focusing on providing food to children, the food-based safety net programme will indirectly also help improve food security in the beneficiary households. The intended benefits of HGFSF will accrue to a wide range of stakeholders. Children will benefit from a hot nutritionally balanced school meal; farmers will benefit from improved access to school feeding markets; and communities will benefit from new jobs across the supply chain such as catering, processing and food handling jobs. Besides the direct benefits, it is intended that HGFSF can act as an important catalyst to drive (i) Agriculture-nutrition policies given the direct nutritional components of HGFSF menus, and (ii) Smallholder market participation with spill-over effects on broader public agriculture commodity procurement. The policy document or the implementation guidelines on the national school feeding and health programme only covers basic class 1-3 (FGN, 2016).

In the opinion of Cummings and Kulutuye (2014), the Nigerian home grown school feeding programme is a multi-sector coordination across various government ministries which include the Federal Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health, Justices as well as Budget and National Planning. The objectives of the school feeding programme focus on three major sectors: agriculture, health and education and the programme intends to generate a positive, integrated impact across all three. It aims to do this by employing local women to work as food vendors in schools, working with farmers so that they can provide the necessary produce to local food vendors, involving health workers to monitor the health of school pupils and ensure they receive a nutritious meal prepared in a hygienic way each day.

HistoryDevelopment of Homegrown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

The historical dimension of school feeding programme as presented herein was approached from two broad perspectives: global/international and domestic/local (the Nigerian context). From the global or international perspective, the history of school feeding programme can be traced to European countries. History has it that school feeding initiatives originated as projects of donors in Europe. Netherland for instance, became the first country to move school feeding programme to a new level in 1900 by incorporating school meals into a national legislation.

The United States of America began the practice of initiating school feeding programmes in Austria as an act of international aid and focused on combating the severe malnutrition of children in the 1940s after the Second World War. Since then, school feeding programmes have become a key part of food assistance, relief emergency and development programmes. In fact, the involvement of the United States federal government in feeding children in schools may be traced back to the Agricultural Adjustment Act (P.L. 74-310) of 1935. Under this provision, the government distributed surplus meat, dairy products and wheat to needy families and schools. It was however in 1946 with the promulgation of the National School Lunch Program that the government decided to institutionalize feeding supplementation within schools throughout the United States (Tomlinson, 2007 cited in Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016).

In Nigerian context, the history of school feeding programme can be traced or linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative and several conferences/initiatives held thereafter by African leaders aimed at eradicating extreme poverty, hunger, achieving universal basic education, promoting gender equality and women empowerment, developing a global partnership for development, tackling issues such as peace, security, good economic, political and corporate governance and to make the continent an attractive destination for foreign investment. Such initiatives include: New Partnership for African Development, Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme and the Millennium Hunger Task Force amongst others (Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Gelli, Jukes and Drake, 2009).

Arising from the above development, Nigeria happened to be one of the twelve (12) pilot countries invited to implement school feeding programme. Thus, the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with the Universal Basic Education Act in 2004, which provided the enabling legislative backing for the execution of home grown school feeding and health programme. Prior to the emergence of Nigerian school feeding and health programme initiative in 2004, the Federal Ministry of Education and Federal Ministry of Health in collaboration with World Health Organization in 2001 took the initial step by conducting a Rapid Assessment of School Health System in Nigeria to ascertain the status of school health. This gave rise to the Nigerian Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016).

Thus, in order to ensure the realization of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education programme and the central role of nutrition, the home grown school feeding and health programme was first initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 by the then President-Olusegun Obasanjo but the programme was officially launched on 27th September, 2005 at Laminga primary school in Nasarawa State. The Federal Ministry of Education was the designated implementing agency for the pilot phase rollout. The pilot phase of the programme targeted 2.5 million primary school pupils and 12 states were selected from the six geopolitical zones. The 12 states were: Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kogi, Ogun, Osun, Bauchi, Edo, Nasarawa, Niger and Yobe states as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (FGN,2016).

However, shortly after the pilot phase of the programme in 12 states of the federation, the programme stopped in 10 states (F.C.T. inclusive) leaving only Osun and Kano States that continued with the programme (Ajani, 2014).The inability of the programme to survive its pilot phase was due to several reasons such as: (i) Failure of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to disburse funds to pilot states as well as non-remittance of counterpart funds from participating states. (ii) Inadequate monitoring and evaluation by both states and federal government. (iii) Inadequate sensitization and advocacy of relevant stakeholders, resulting in low community involvement and participation. (iv). Lack of supporting infrastructure such as water, sanitation and hygiene (that is wash facilities). (v) Institutional structure at Federal level was not made fully operational. (vi). Inadequate policy and legal framework at the states and federal level. (vii) Inability of the Federal Government to continue the funding (FGN, 2006).

Hence, in May 2014, the school feeding programme was again reintroduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria by the then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan by convening a high level National Advocacy Meeting with support from Imperial College London's Partnership for Child Development (PCD), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the World Bank Group and the Vitol Foundation to develop a roadmap for implementing the HGSF programme across Nigeria. At the end of the meeting, the recommendations of the meeting reinforced the need for urgent action to establish the programme across all the 36 states inclusive of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016).However, by the end of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration in 2015, a new national HGSF programme had still not been launched. Despite the change in national government, the political interest in school feeding remained.

Thus, as a component of the Social Investment Programme of President Muhammed Buhari, the Vice President-Yemi Osinbajo on 9th June, 2016, officially re-launched the school feeding programme at Aso Rock.A strategic plan was presented and a federal coordinating team was inaugurated. The government announced that the programme when fully operational, would feed at least 10 million primary school pupils in grades 1 to 3. It also predicted that with state government cooperation, a further five million pupils in grades 4 to 6 would be included (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016).

Types of School Feeding Programme

There are different types of school feeding programmes usually adopted by different countries for different reasons or aims. In the same vein, Oyefade (2014)posited that different countries have one or a combination of the two feeding modalities in place for various objectives. Thus, Oyefade identified two types of feeding programmes (in-school meals and take-home rations).In-school meal

is the type of school feeding programme in which meals are provided to children within the school in order to enhance their participation in learning. Akanbi (2013) defined in-school meals as a feeding modality which provides meals to children through schools. In-school meals have been the most popular modality of school feeding interventions. Akanbi further divided in-school meals into two common categories: programme that provides meals and the programme that provides high-energy biscuits or snacks to generate greater impacts on school enrolment, retention rates and reduce gender or social gaps.

Take-home rations on the other hand, according to Oyefade (2014) refer to the category of school feeding where families are given food if their children attend school. Take-home ration is a feeding programme which is characterized by families being given food if their children attend school. Unlike in-school meal which is aimed at enhancing students' enrolment, attendance, completion and academic performance, take-home ration is geared towards ensuring that parents are motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for siblings.

Legal Framework of School Feeding Programme

This section briefly outlines the main international and domestic legal instruments signed and ratified by Nigeria; giving Nigerian homegrown school feeding programme some legal backings. The school feeding programme is intended to give effect to three distinct rights: the right to food, right to education and right to freedom from disease or right to health. In Nigerian context, Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 gave a very strong legal framework to school feeding programme in Nigeria. The said UBE Act enacted in 2004 by the Federal Government of Nigeria stipulates that all basic education is compulsory and free of charge to children of school age in Nigeria and to promote students' enrolment, retention, completion and achievement etc., Specifically, Section 25 of the UBE Act made provision for a free lunch to pupils by all states primary schools (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2014, Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016).

In African context, Article 14 (1), of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child (ACRWC), 1999, enshrines the provision of food and health to school children as their right; thereby giving legal backing to school feeding programme. From the international perspective, there are also laws that tend have provided some legal frameworks for the introduction of school feeding programme. For instance, Article 24 (2c) of the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC), 1989 specifically recognizes the rights of every child and provides that "states parties shall take appropriate measures to combat disease and malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water". Also, Article 11 (1) and (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1996 enshrines the right to food for every child. Finally, Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948 provided for the right to food for every child (Cummings and Kulutuye, 2014).

Institutional Framework of Nigerian Homegrown School Feeding Programme

The Nigerian home grown school feeding programme has its institutional/governance framework which is aimed at ensuring the smooth operationalization and proper management of the programme. Thus, the institutional framework of the nation homegrown school feeding programme at the national level as outlined by Federal Ministry of Education (2006) is made up of four basic arms: (i) Strategic Advisory Board (ii) School Feeding Core Unit (iii) National School Feeding Coordinating Team and (iv) Monitoring and Evaluation Team. At the local level, it comprises of i. Federal and State Ministries of Education ii. Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture and LGA Departments iii. Local Government Education Authority and iv. School authority in collaboration with SBMC.

i. The Strategic Advisory Board: This board is headed by the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The membership of this board according to FME (2006) cited in Cummings and Kulutuye (2014) is usually drawn from Ministers of the key Ministries (e.g. Education, Health, Environment, Water Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development and Information and National Orientation) and other relevant stakeholders to provide independent advice and guidance on the

strategic direction of the programme and on technical issues. It is anticipated that the programme's effectiveness will be evaluated prior to continued investment beyond 2020 by the board.

ii. The National Home Grown School Feeding Core Team: This unit is domiciled in the presidency and the team is headed by a National Program Manager. The team/unit is basically saddled with the responsibility of providing strategic guidance and facilitating coordination between states and the federal governments and ensuring that all partners commit to a common set of guidelines. It is also charged with the responsibility of supporting state governments to design and implement sustainable and effective school feeding programmes. This team is responsible for designing and developing the implementation guidelines. It also collaborates with states and federal departments. The School Feeding Core Team issues detailed operational guidelines or briefs from time to time to facilitate the effective and efficient implementation of the programme. The team is supported by a National Steering Committee which includes representatives from multiple ministries reflecting the multiple objectives of HGFS as well as private sector and developmental partners (FME, 2006 cited in Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016).

iii. The National School Feeding Coordinating Team: This unit has its membership comprising of desk officers of the main stakeholder ministries (Education, Health, Environment, Water Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development and Information and National Orientation) together with the core team/unit. The National School Feeding Coordinating Team is charged with the responsibility of implementing school feeding programme at the national level (FME, 2006).

iv. Monitoring and Evaluation Team: As the name implies, it is the unit that is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the programme. This team consists of desk officers from all the relevant departments and agencies to guide the implementation and monitoring of the programme (FME, 2006 cited in Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016).

At the local level, FME (2006) cited in Cummings and Kulutuye (2014) identified the institutional framework and roles of school feeding programme to comprise of four organs: i. Federal and State Ministries of Education ii. Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture and LGA Departments iii. Local Government Education Authority and iv. School authority in collaboration with SBMC (FME, 2006).

a. Federal and State Ministries of Education: These ministries perform the following functions: i. Collaborate with other ministries, agencies, parastatals and organizations responsible for driving the process nationally in setting standards, coordination, advocacy, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation of the school feeding service. ii. Ensure quality control in the implementation of the feeding service. iii. Ensure prompt release and judicious utilization of all statutory allocations meant for school feeding as provided in the 2004 UBE law. iv. Encourage the formation and operation of young farmers' clubs (YFC) in schools.

b. Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture and LGA Departments: They carry out the following duties: i. Advocate for necessary political support for the service at all levels. ii. Assist with sourcing of fertilizers to boost agricultural produce for the school feeding service. iii. Coordinate the efforts of farmers to channel and network of farm produce to areas of need. iv. Establish storage facilities for excess grains produced e.g. silos, barns. v. Promote agricultural practices in schools. vi. Make available the services of agriculture extension staff to schools. Provide support to the operation of YFC-simple hand tools. viii. Supply improved farm inputs for crop and animal farming in schools (FME, 2006 cited in Adekunle & Ogbogu, 2016)

c. Local Government Education Authority: This institution ensures the following:

i. Support routine inspection of school to ensure that food sanitation is maintained including safe drinking water and washing of utensils. ii. Address any issues arising from school feeding service with members of school community and SBMC. iii. Support schools in the planning, budgeting, and utilization of resources for school feeding service (FME, 2006 cited in Cummings & Kulutuye, 2014).

d. School Authority in collaboration with SBMC: They carry out the following functions: i. Ensure regular provision of adequate daily meal.ii. Coordinate all activities related to school feeding services.iii. Encourage the formation of functional young farmers' club.iv. Report outbreak of any diseases in the school to the relevant authorities.v. Ensure that nutrition education complement school feeding services (FME, 2006 cited in Cummings & Kulutuye, 2014).

Challenges of Homegrown School Feeding Programme

Despite the numerous benefits of homegrown school feeding programme, effective implementation of the programme in Nigeria tend to be inhibited by so many factors. Olasunkanmi (2021) identified such challenges to include:

i. Inadequate funding:Even though the Federal Government of Nigeria claims to have spent so much money in funding homegrown school feeding programme, more is still needed to fund the programme.Adekunle and Ogbogu1 (2016) reported that government funding of homegrown school feeding programme is grossly inadequate; as classrooms and other school facilities are lacking in schools that are beneficiaries of the programme due to explosion in population of enrolment.

ii. Delay in Payment of Food Vendors:A study carried out by Olasunkanmi (2021) clearly revealed that most of the vendors across Nigeria claimed to have been paid very late. Victor (2020) also reported that the delay in the payment of school feeding programme's food vendors by the federal government in some states have drastically reduced the frequency of food given to the pupils in terms of quality and quantities.

iii.Poor quality of food served to children:Despite the claim by the federal government of huge number of chickens, cattle and metric tons of fish being fed to the pupils, many of children including the teachers as well as parents have reservations about the size of what is served to their children's meal; as either meat, fish or chicken given to the pupils failed to meet up with expectations of the required standard (Olasunkanmi, 2021).

iv. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation:There has been inadequate monitoring and evaluation of homegrown school feeding programme by both state and federal government to establish full progress of the programme. Victor (2020) maintained that school principals as well as school-based management committee that are meant to oversee the programme at the school level sometimes do not do their jobs very well.

v. Inability of some state to domesticate the programme: Even though the programme was re-launched in 2016 by President Muhamadu Buhari's first tenure, a lot of states in Nigeria are yet to domesticate the programme and even enact states laws; giving the programme legal backings at the state level (Olasunkanmi, 2021).

Conclusion

Nigerian homegrown school feeding programme has a long standing history. Even though the proponents of initiatives (African leaders) had good intentions of introducing the programme to eradicate extreme poverty, hunger, achieve universal basic education, and promote gender equality among others, it is still in the 21st century bedeviled with several challenges which have affected the level implementation of the programme. The government of Nigeria is still politicizing the programme; as colossal amount of funds were said to be expended in feeding school children during covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Recommendations

Considering the challenges of school feeding programme as highlighted among others, the following has been suggested for further improvement of the programme.

i. Adequate budgetary provision: The federal government should increase its annual budgetary provision meant for funding homegrown school feeding programme. This is to cater for more schools and also make adequate provision for classrooms and other school facilities.

ii. Prompt payment of food vendors: The federal government and other relevant government agencies in charge of disbursing funds meant for the programme should ensure food vendors are paid in good time to enable to supply food stuffs meant for the children.

iii. Adequate monitoring and evaluation: A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system is needed for the programme to provide an evidence-based framework in order to generate recommendations for better programme decisions.

iv. Domestication of school feeding programme by states: Considering the relevance of school feeding programme, states that are yet to introduce state-owned school feeding programme should emulate the likes of Osun and Kano States which had domesticated the programme long ago. State legislation should also be enacted in order to give full legal backing to the programme at the state level.

v. Civil societies should be actively engage in monitoring the implementation of school feeding programme and thereafter, make their report known to the general public. By so doing, members of the public would be well enlightened about the progress of the progress.

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