

Implementation of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in Nigeria: Examining the Issues, Impediments, and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The Buhari administration launched the National Home-Grown School feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in 2016. The objectives of NHGSFP are encapsulated in the improvement of primary school enrolment, reduction of the rate of school dropout and addressing nutrition challenges common among school children. This article assesses the implementation of NHGSFP in Nigeria against some critical variables namely: effect on school enrolment, funding and fund management, quality and quantity of meals. Primary data were obtained through key informant interview (KIIs) conducted with Enugu state programme manager, food vendors, head teachers and some members of the School Based Management Committees, and through extensive literature search. Findings show that the programme has led to an increase in enrolment in many schools; that it is under-funded, and funds are not remitted regularly to food vendors resulting to irregular feeding of pupils; both the quantity and quality of meals were poor consequent on the inadequacy of ₦70.0 for a meal. In conclusion, although the programme has recorded success in increasing school enrolment, the

above inadequacies constitute impediments to the attainment of the overall objectives of the programme. We recommend that NHGSFP should be strengthened through a separate fund allocation, raising the cost of a plate of meal to N150; capturing pre-primary (nursery) children; and integrating water and toilet facilities in schools into the programme.

Keywords: implementation, national home-grown school feeding programme, Nigeria, impediments, way forward

1. Introduction

School feeding programme is a global practice with over 368 million children receiving school meals in 169 countries (WFP, 2013). It is argued that school feeding programmes are effective in stimulating demand for schooling particularly in settings where school attendance is low and where children come from rural and relatively low socio-economic backgrounds (Kazianga et al., 2009; Kearney, 2010; World Food Programme, 2013).

Research has shown that both acute and chronic hunger affect children's attention span, behaviour in class and educational achievement. Since school children are vulnerable to short term hunger, developed and rich countries also adopt school meals to improve the health and educational status of children. School feeding can be classified into two: In-school feeding where children take their meals in school and Take-home rations, where children who attend school are given food to take home to their families (World Food Programme, 2020). Governments recognize school meals as an essential tool for the development and growth of children, communities, and the entire society hence, its widespread adoption.

In developing countries, 60 million children go to school hungry every day (Karisa & Orodho, 2012). School feeding responds directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2 related to ending poverty and hunger; SDG 3 and 4 which advocate good health and wellbeing as well as quality education respectively. Studies have also linked school feeding to SDG 5 which deals with the promotion of gender equality (Adelman et al., 2008; Drake et al., 2016; World Food Programme, 2020). NHGSFP addresses the issue of poverty by providing gainful employment to the food vendors. Generally, school feeding programme is targeted to end hunger, at least on short term basis. Perhaps, this explains why the Kenyan programme is specifically captioned "Njamarufuku Kenya" (eradicate hunger in Kenya) (Drake et al., 2016). Meals served in schools cushion children from hunger and when it is in the form of take-home ration, other members of the family partake in the meals. According to Oladipo (2018), many caterers in Osun State Nigeria, serve part of the food to their families before taking it to school. However, a study carried out in Maiduguri metropolis on government feeding programme and hunger reduction shows that the meals do not sufficiently satisfy hunger (Tijjani et al., 2018). This can be attributed to the inadequacy of the meals since the idea of a meal stopping hunger even if temporarily, cannot be contentious.

In respect of SDG 3, one of the key objectives of the programme is to provide at least one balanced diet which contains the micronutrients children require for healthy growth. Malnutrition not only exposes children to infection but also increases the severity of such infection (Chabite et al., 2018). This has been affirmed by Sitali et al. (2020). It is against this

backdrop that a standard menu has been prepared for all the food vendors. Regretfully, this menu is rarely adhered to because of poor funding.

SDG 4 advocates inclusive and equitable quality education for all with emphasis on all boys and girls completing free primary and secondary education by 2030. The greatest impact of school feeding is not only increasing school enrolment but also making pupils remain in school. This is buttressed by an impact evaluation of school feeding programme in Mali which indicated a 10 percent higher chance of children staying in school as a result of school meals (Stewart, 2018). When pupils are well fed, they are able to concentrate and that enhances assimilation and retention. These are prerequisites for cognitive and psychomotor development which are critical for quality education (Kearney, 2010).

School feeding can impact positively on gender equality by creating enabling environment for girls to participate effectively in school. SDG 5 advocates the elimination of gender disparity in education and equal access to all levels of education to all, including people with special needs. Generally, girls struggle more than boys to access education. In poor households where resources are too lean to keep all children in school, girls are compelled to drop out and either married out or forced into labour to supplement family income. Interestingly, research shows that school feeding programme has led to a reduction in the number of girls forced into child labour (Stewart, 2018). The financial empowerment which the female vendors receive through school feeding programme enables them to contribute financially towards the education of their girls.

Nigeria joined the train of countries engaged in school feeding through its National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) established in 2016. The objectives of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is expected to be fully accomplished within four years which is 2020, hence the need for its assessment.

2. The Problem

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has been in operation since 2016 yet, it is estimated that over 10 million Nigerian children are out of school while 40 percent of the enrolled go to school hungry (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017). Corroborating this, a survey conducted by UNICEF in 2018 indicates that the number of out of school children had risen from 10 million to 13.2 million, the highest in the world. (www.voanews.com>Africa). The rising spade of Boko Haram scourge which has led to a large number of internally displaced persons including children, has also aggravated the out of school problem. The media is awash with releases from the National Social Investment Office on government's achievements on the NHGSFP however, there is widespread complaint about dearth of information on the implementation of the programme (Azimazi Momoh Jimoh & Akhaine, 2018; Ndubuisi, 2017). Furthermore, the insistence of the Federal government to continue feeding pupils who are at home as a result of Covid-19 lockdown at a humungous cost of N679 million a day, has generated negative reactions from the public. Against this backdrop an examination of the implementation of NHGSFP is of interest to both the government and the Nigeria public at large.

3. Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to assess the implementation of the NHGSFP in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are:

- 1 To identify the effect of the programme on primary school enrolment
2. To examine the funding and management of funds for the implementation of the NHGSFP
3. To ascertain the adequacy of the quality and quantity of the school meals
4. To identify the impediments to the effective implementation of the programme.
5. To proffer measures to overcome the impediments and enhance effective implementation of the NHGSFP

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (i) How has the implementation of the NHGSFP affected primary school enrolment?
- (ii) How adequate is the funding and management of funds for the effective implementation of NHGSFP?
- (iii) How adequate are the quality and quantity of school meals for the attainment of the school enrolment and nutritional objectives of the programme?
- (iv) What are the impediments to the effective implementation of the programme?
- (v) What can be done to ameliorate these problems and enhance the implementation of the programme.?

5. Materials and Methods

Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) with the State Project Manager and five members of the State Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. Two schools were randomly selected from the beneficiary schools in each of the six local governments in Enugu North Senatorial Zone namely: Igbo Etiti, Igbo Eze North, Igbo Eze South, Nsukka, Udeni and Uzo-Uwani. Two members of the School Board Management Committee (SBMC) and one food vendor from each of the selected schools were also interviewed. The schools are:

Local Governments / Schools

1. Igbo-Etiti Ekaibite – Basic School Ozalla; Union Primary School Ohodo.
2. Igbo-Eze North – Community Primary School, Onicha Enugu; Central School III Igogoro, Enugu Ezike
3. Igbo-Eze South – Community Primary; School Iheakpu Awka; Township Primary School I, Ibagwa Aka
4. Nsukka – Township Primary School II Nsukka; Community Primary School Ugwu/Agbo, Edem-Ani
5. Udeni – Central School Amalla; Central School I, Obollo Afor
6. Uzo-Uwani – Union Primary School Adani; Community Primary School Nkpologu

Documented information from survey carried out by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) and that of the Premium Times were utilized to complement the field survey results. Other secondary sources include official documents, journals, books, newspaper, and online publications. Data generated were collated and descriptive analysis was adopted.

6. Theoretical Framework

Development of a widely applicable framework for analysing policy implementation has been of concern to scholars over the years. The early writers represented by Pressman and Wildavsky, (1973) concentrated on the complexity of policy implementation by various organs of government. It is argued that the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify the factors which affect the achievement of statutory objectives throughout the process (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). In line with Sabatier and Mazmanian's proposition, the theory of public policy implementation as articulated by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) is considered appropriate for examining NHGSFP. Meter and Horn emphasized the need to classify policies in terms that highlight implementation difficulties.

The critical aspect of Meter and Horn's theoretical postulations is their description of six variables that determine policy performance arising from public policy implementation (Alesch et al., 2012). The variables consist of the following:

- policy standards and objectives which elaborate on the overall goals of the policy decision.
- the resources and incentives made available.
- the quality of inter-organizational relationship
- the characteristics of the implementation agencies especially with regard to the agency's formal and informal linkages with the policy making or policy enforcing body.
- the economic, social and political environment; and
- the disposition or response of the implementers which involves three elements: their cognition (comprehension, understanding) of the policy, the direction of their response to it (acceptance, neutrality, rejection) and the intensity of their response.

The application of the six variables of Meter and Horn's theory to the analysis of the NHGSFP elucidates not only the implementation process but also the challenges encountered in effectively implementing the programme. The policy standard and objectives are clearly articulated in Nigerian Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). The policy focuses on improving educational achievement of pupils, employment creation for the service providers and creating a ready market for local farmers. The resources and incentives made available are captured in the funding of the programme as well as training and provision of utensils and other facilities to the service providers. The sum of ₦5 billion is budgeted annually to NSIP which NHGSFP is a suite programme. In line with Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) proposition on the characteristics of implementation agencies, there is a clear organizational structure of the NHGSFP at the national level with the roles of ministries and agencies clearly

spelt out. For optimal result, ministries of education, agriculture, health, budget and planning as well as the school feeding core team, are to work in synergy.

The effects of the economic, social, and political environments on the program are significant as proposed by Horn and Meter. The Nigeria economy is mono cultural and heavily dependent on crude oil for its revenue. Hence, the economy responds to the vagaries of the world oil market. The country is heterogeneous in culture, religion, language, and educational development across geopolitical zones. Nigeria is a multi-party state. These in addition to politics impede the effective implementation of government policies and programmes. Most public policies are rarely objectively implemented and lack of political will impact negatively on policy implementation.

7. Literature Review

The emergence of school feeding programme has been traced back to Munich Germany in 1790 and France in 1867. Norway commenced the programme in 1897 while in the United States of America, the children's Aid Society of New York began serving lunches to children in vocational schools in 1853. Subsidized milk for school children was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1934 and was provided free from 1944 (Kearney, 2010). School feeding has been increasingly adopted globally with 368 million children receiving school meals from 169 countries. According to World Food Programme (2013) a whopping sum of US \$75 billion was invested each year on school meals and the breakdown is as follows:

- North America – US \$ 45 million
- Latin America and Caribbeans – US\$ 85 million
- Europe and Central Asia – US\$ 27 million
- Middle East and North Africa – US\$ 13 million
- Sub-Saharan Africa – US\$ 30 million
- East Asia and Pacific – US\$ 47 million
- South Asia and Pacific – US\$ 121 million

A World Bank Report provides in-depth study on nine school feeding programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the report, 1.5 million school children are fed each day in Kenya while 8.8 million South African students receive mid-morning meal. In Botswana the National School Feeding Programme has been on for 45 years. This is said to have brought about growth in both school enrolment and attendance. In Cote D'ivore, the school meal programme is acclaimed for having sparked behavioural changes among school children, including hand washing, good eating habits, nutritional and hygiene practices (Drake et al., 2016).

The Kenyan programme captioned “Njaa Marufuku Kenya” (eradicate hunger in Kenya) integrates community food and nutrition security with school feeding and is also geared towards agricultural development. However, the Home-Grown School Meals (HGSM) Programme which is under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology specifically aims to tackle low school enrolment and attendance, high dropout rates and low academic achievement.

The Brazilian school meal programme dates back to 1954 but has been modified both in scope and objectives. At present, its objectives are to contribute to the bio-psychosocial development and educational achievement of students by meeting their nutritional needs and by supporting the formation of healthy habits through food and nutrition education. School feeding in Brazil is a universal right of students enrolled in public basic education granted by the constitution (Sidaner et al., 2013).

Authors argue that while school feeding programmes can influence the education of children and augment nutrition for families of beneficiaries, they are best viewed as transfer programmes that can provide a social safety net and help promote human capital investments (Alderman & Bundy, 2012). Irrespective of the line of argument, school feeding is a widely accepted social intervention for the promotion of the wellbeing of the beneficiaries. Evidence presented in the *State of School Feeding Worldwide* confirms that school meals programmes are sustainable and big business globally; they are near worldwide in application, with approximately 368 million children, about 1 out of every 5, receiving a meal at school every day (Drake et al., 2016).

8. Genesis of School Feeding Programme in Nigeria

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act enacted in 2004 aimed at improving education by introducing compulsory and free education for children in public primary school. Anchoring on the legislative backing of UBE Act, the national Home Grown Feeding (HGSF) and the Nigerian National School Health Policy (NSHP) were introduced in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The NSHP made provision for one nutritious meal a day and good sanitation in public schools. (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017).

The pilot programme was executed in 13 states and the Federal Capital Territory but was not sustainable, having failed within one year in the states except Osun and Kano. Numerous reasons were adduced for the failure of the programme among which are the lack of support for the programme by most ministries; funding; lack of infrastructure; inadequate legal and policy framework to back the programme (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017). The culmination of all these is that the federal government stopped funding the programme in 2008.

President Goodluck Jonathan Agricultural Transformation Agenda initiated in 2014 brought about a renewed interest in home-grown school feeding as a means to promote local consumption, create employment and markets for agriculture. To actualize the objectives, meetings of prospective key actors, relevant ministries and development partners were convened. These comprised of ministries of Education and Health, development partners from Partnership for Child Development, the World Bank, Vitol Melinda Gates Foundation, and operators of the Osun states school feeding programme (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017). However, the Jonathan administration was unable to re-launch the new school feeding programme before it left office in 2015

The National Home-Grown School Feeding programme is an initiative of the Federal government of Nigeria within the framework of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 (Imeh & Johnson, 2017). The programme was officially launched In June 2016 by the

Buhari Administration. Federal government targets capturing 5 million school children by 2020 under the programme. The NHGSFP strategic plan details out the objectives of the programme as follows:

- 1) To improve the enrolment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout rates from primary school which is estimated at 30 percent.
- 2) To address the poor nutrition and health status of many children arising from poverty, which have affected the learning outcomes of the children.
- 3) To stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of farmers by creating a viable and ready market through the school feeding programme
- 4) To create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development

9. Organizational Arrangement for Implementation of NHGSFP

NSIP was moved to the newly created Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development on Oct. 1, 2019, with a view to institutionalizing the programme. (Erezi, 2019). The coordination of the NHGSFP is multi-sectoral with relevant stakeholders ministries collaborating in programme implementation. The ministries involved are those of Education, Health, Agriculture, Justice, Budget and Planning. The Ministry of Trade and Commerce as well as Women Affairs are also supporting ministries.

These ministries make up the NHGSFP team (National Social Investment Office, 2017:9). The programme however, focuses particularly on the ministries of agriculture, education and health across which it intends to generate a positive integrated impact. Local women are employed as food vendors in schools and linked with farmers to supply them the necessary produce. Health workers are engaged to monitor the health status of pupils and ensure that meals are of expected nutritional and hygiene standard. (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017). The organizational structure of the NHGSFP at the national level is presented in figure 1.

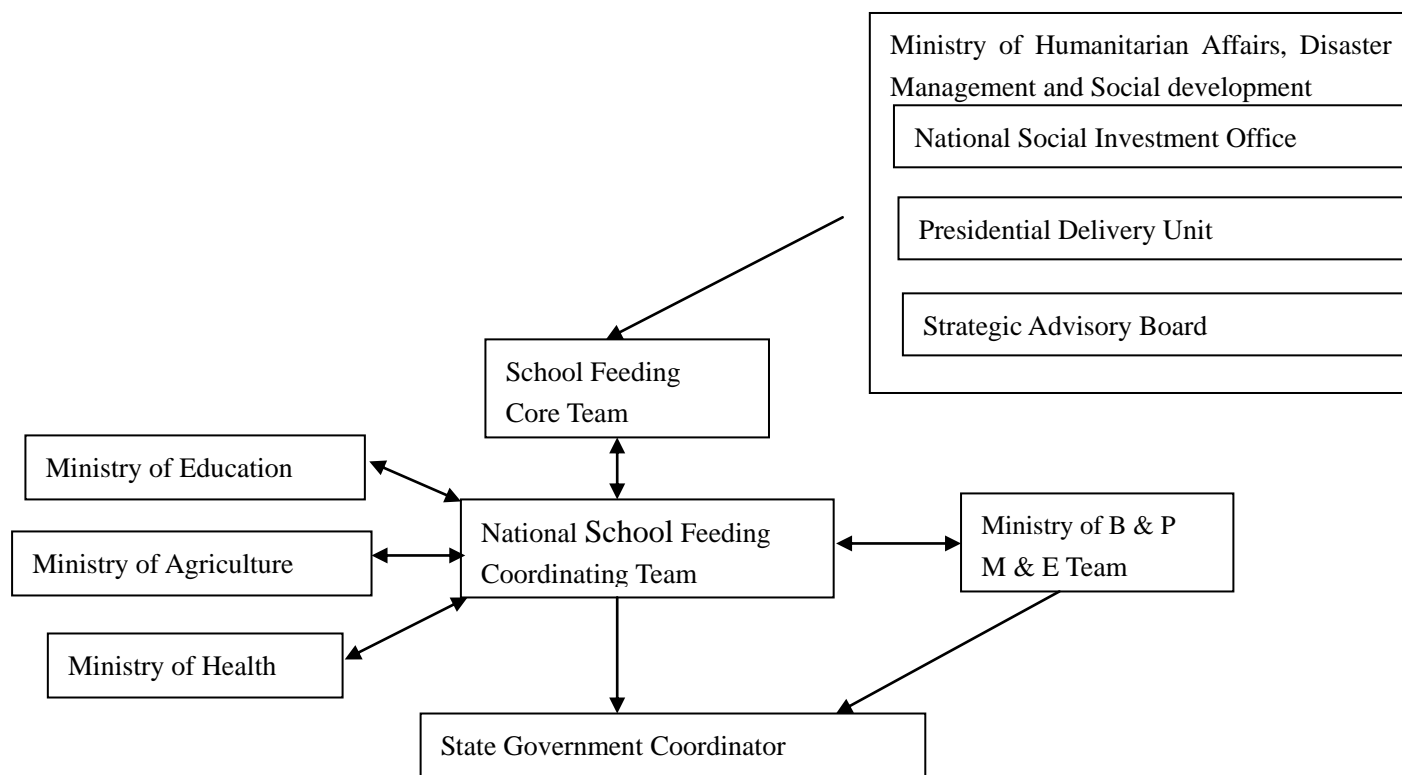


Figure 1. Structure of the NHGSFP at the Federal level

Source: Adapted from Cummings & Kulutuye (2017, p.8)

The framework for the implementation of the programme as contained in the diagram shows that there are three organs crucial to the implementation of the NHGSFP. These are: the National Social Investment Office which coordinates all Social Investment Programmes (SIPs); the Strategic Advisory Board which provides advice on technical and strategic issues, and the Presidential Delivery Unit which performs supervisory and quality assurance role in the implementation of the programme.

The School Feeding Core Team is responsible for scaling up the NHGSFP. The team works in collaboration with federal and state departments and is responsible for designing and developing the implementation guidelines (Alonge & Ige, 2016). The National School Feeding Coordinating Team comprises the desk officers of the main stakeholders ministries together with the Core Team. It is in charge of the implementation of the programme and is headed by a national Programme Manager. The Monitoring and Evaluation Team consists of desk officers from all relevant departments and agencies. It guides the implementation and monitoring of the programme. The state governments are expected to replicate this framework as described. Funds for the management of the NHGSFP are released through the Social Investment Account Unit in the Ministry of Budget and Planning. This unit monitors the use and disbursement of funds while the actual implementation is carried out by the food vendors and farmers who supply them the produce. The state government plays only a small

role in monitoring and evaluation. The First City Monument Bank (FCMB) remits funds to food vendors directly into their personal accounts. The School Based Management Committees (SBMC) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) where available, provide monitoring services at community level.

10. Implementation of the NHGSFP

This section examines the various aspects of the implementation of the NHGSFP and explores the factors that impede its effective implementation. To enhance flow in ideas and presentation, the implementation process and the impediments are discussed under each research objective.

10.1 School Enrolment

Since its inception the programme has achieved a coverage of 35 states, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 9,714,342 pupils being fed in 53,715 government primary schools (Edeh, 2019). This is well above the 5 million pupils targeted for the 4 years implementation period. At least 107, 670 cooks have been empowered while over 200, 000 small holder farmers have been linked to the programme by supplying locally sourced produce and ingredients (Oladele et al., 2020). The programme has been reported as impactful with regard to increase in school enrolment. Field surveys observed widespread acknowledgments by school authorities and stakeholders that there has been significant increase in school enrolment since the inception of the programme. According to the report of a survey conducted by News agency of Nigeria (NAN) in southern Nigeria, it is said to have improved enrolment in Oyo, Ogun and Osun states. The Anambra State focal person confirmed that the programme has resulted in 83 per cent increase in enrolment (Oluwole, 2018). Imo, Enugu, Cross River and Delta States also recorded increase in school enrolment.

10.2 Funding and Fund Management

The NHGSFP is funded by the federal government in line with the Strategic Plan 2017-2020. The federal government provides 100 per cent of the cost of the programme which is limited to primary 1 to 3. Funds are released from the Social Investment Account unit of the Ministry of Budget and Planning. The state government is expected to take up the funding of primary 3-6. The NHGSFP is one of the four suite programmes of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP). The annual budget for NSIP is ₦500 billion from which the suite programmes are funded. According to the Special Adviser to the President on NSIP, N1.7 trillion was budgeted for NSIP from 2016 to 2019. Only N79.98 billion was released in 2016, N140 billion in 2017 and N250.4 billion in 2018 (Igbokwe, 2020). These amount to 15.9 percent, 28 percent and 50.08 percent respectively. Information on disaggregated budgetary allocation to NHGSFP is however not available. A total of N186 billion has been spent on the programme since its inception. According to available information, the expenditure breakdown for 2018, 2019 and 2020 are N63.2 billion; N32.2 billion and N124 billion respectively (Oladele et al., 2020). It is however noteworthy that only N64 billion out of the total sum was spent on direct feeding of the pupils. Funds are remitted directly to the accounts of vendors every 20 days. The cost of a plate of meal is ₦70.00 and this is used to

multiply the number of pupils to determine what a vendor receives.

The above narrative of gross underfunding of NSIP suggests that NHGSFP is also underfunded. The stipulation of a mere N70 for a plate of food in present day Nigeria is a clear manifestation of underfunding. There has been wide spread opinions about the inadequacy of the said amount for a balanced school meal and subsequent call for its upward review (Edeh, 2019; Oladele et al., 2020; Onah & Olise, 2020). The inadequacy of ₦70.00 per meal is under scored by the fact that it is not adjusted for inflation. Since 2016 that the cost was established, there has been a hike in food inflation rate reaching a two year highest of 12.40 in May 2020 (CBN, 2020).

Poor management of the funds further aggravates the problem of inadequate budgetary release. Information gathered through a survey carried out by Nation newspaper in 14 states cutting across most of the geopolitical zones comprising Ogun, Lagos Sokoto, Kano, Cross River, Kaduna, Osun State, Edo, Akwa Ibom, and Plateau. show the prevalence of irregular payments to the food vendors which resulted to break in the feeding of pupils. This was corroborated by Edeh (2019) and Onah and Olise (2020) as well as reports from in depth interview of vendors in select schools in Enugu state. In Kano, it was reported that only 9000 out of 13000 food vendors recruited were paid regularly. A teacher in Lutheran Primary school, Urua Ikpa, Itu local government in Akwa Ibom state, described the programme as a failure as the feeding was very irregular and cooks were not seen for weeks (Oladele et al., 2020). The school feeding programme was on hold for the first term of 2019, as no funds were released to the food vendors. Such are some of the irregularities associated with managing the fund of the programme.

10.3 Quality and Quantity of Meals

A standard menu prepared by a team drawn from the ministries of education and health guides school meal delivery. Food vendors interviewed acknowledged being in possession of the menu. It provides for a balanced meal comprising protein, carbohydrate, vegetables, and fruits. Specifically, food items included in the menu are beans, rice, yams, beef, eggs, assorted fruits and vegetables all aimed at ensuring a balanced meal. Findings, however, show that quite often the menu is not adhered to. Food vendors interviewed in the sampled schools in Igbo-Etiti, Igbo-Eze South and Nsukka Local Governments explain that they do not keep strictly to the menu because ₦70 which is the cost of a plate of school meal cannot provide the required components. Foods like Okpa (a local delicacy), beans and yam feature regularly because they require minimal ingredients. The number of fruits and vegetables they provide depends on the season. However, meat items and eggs are often skipped because they are expensive and cannot be accommodated in a ₦70.00 dish. The vendors complained that the cost of their labour was not factored in since the ₦70 .00 is the cost of the meal. This compels them to reduce the quantity and quality of meals in order to have some compensation for their labour.

The quality of the programme in Niger state was described as disturbing. The food being served was said to be below par and how it was served, as woeful. In many cases it did not go round, leaving administrators to split what should have been given to one pupil. Rice that was

supposed to be cooked with vegetable oil was cooked with palm oil (Times, 2018). Similarly, information gathered from Kano, Delta, Plateau states among others, indicate that meals were generally of poor quality and inadequate in quantity (Oladele et al., 2020). Report from Jigawa state equally shows that the quality of the meal had been compromised. Authorities in some schools visited in Dutse, Kiyawa, Guri Birnin kudu and Gwaram local government areas confirmed that vendors had stopped serving meat, fish and fruits (Times, 2018).

Twelve respondents comprising head teachers and classroom teachers interviewed across the beneficiary schools in Enugu state were of the view that the meals were of poor quality. They explained that the meat and egg components were always very small if at all they are provided. The respondents from Community Primary School Onicha Enugu and Township II Primary School Nsukka in Igbo-Eze North and Nsukka local governments respectively, confirmed poor quality of the meals. The respondents from Igbo-Etiti and Nsukka local governments also explained that the vendors form mini cartels and agree on standard of meals and other forms of collaboration to reduce cost, resulting in poor quality meals. The problem of poor quality of meals, (especially absence of animal protein), smallness of quantity, irregular feeding and deviation from the prescribed menu are all fall outs of poor funding. In a demonstration of commitment, the cooks sometimes apply ingenuity by introducing meals that are cheaper and nutritious. Such meals include okpa (powder of bambara nuts), maize based food popularly known as “Igbangwu or moi-moi oka”. They fortify the maize with vegetables and beans of different varieties. Rather than go for the expensive fruits like watermelon, they provide garden eggs (anyara) as well as paw.

10.4 In Addition to Constraints Associated With the Management of Finance, Other Factors That Impede the effective implementation of the programme include

10.4.1 Poor Information Dissemination and Lack of Accountability

These constitute major flaws in the implementation of the NHGSFP. There is no official bulletin where information on the progress of the programme is published. Most information are in form of press releases hence, the heavy dependence on the print media as sources of information for this study. The inability of the Special Adviser to the President on the school feeding programme to provide information prompted the House of Representative Committee on Public Accounts to request for details of cooks engaged and number of pupils that have benefitted (Channels Television, 2020, June 17). In another development, the House expressed reservations over the N186 billion said to have been spent on the programme, out of which only N64 billion was spent directly on feeding the school children. The Committee then demanded a complete project audit of the programme (Oluwole, 2018).

10.4.2 Limited Scope of the Programme

The non-inclusion of pre-primary (nursery) children creates emotional and administrative problems as manifested in Iva Valley primary schools Enugu. The Head teacher lamented the burden of managing the cries from the nursery classes when other classes were being fed (Oluwole, 2018). There is every reason to believe that the same experience would occur wherever nursery schools exist. It is also common knowledge that a greater percentage of

state governments have not captured primaries 4 to 6 as provided for in the strategic plan. Obviously, these categories of pupils do suffer some level of deprivation.

10.4.3 Poor Monitoring

Monitoring of the programme is the responsibility of desk officers from all relevant departments and agencies in the state. During an interview with the Enugu State Project Manager, it was gathered that the State Steering Committee goes for monitoring on weekly basis while monitoring at the local government areas is done by the Education Secretaries and the School Based Management Committee (SBMC). The vendors interviewed acknowledged that there were instances of monitoring at the early stages of the commencement of the programme. However, the regularity reduced significantly with time. Information gathered through telephone interview with Education Secretaries of Igbo-Etiti, Nsukka and Igbo-Eze South local governments are however, at variance with the information from the State Programme Manager. The Secretaries were unanimous in their response that they have not been involved in any way in the programme.

11. Discussion of Findings

Adequate funding and prudent management of funds are central to effective programme implementation. Against the backdrop of the recruitment of the food vendors from the communities, it is obvious that their financial capabilities are weak. Consequently, the observed irregular payment of these vendors not only disrupts the smooth supply of the school meals but also vitiates the effect of the programme as a means of improving the income of these service providers and farmers who supply the produce. Compromising the quantity and quality of meals as a result of inadequate funding militates against the achievement of the second objective of the programme which aims to address the poor nutrition and health status of the school children and thereby improve their learning outcomes. Regular monitoring is also crucial to enable the relevant authorities identify vendors who default as a result of non-payment and intervene to minimize disruptions in service delivery. There were only a few observed cases of direct linkage between the food vendors and farmers for produce supply. Generally, the food vendors purchase virtually all their foodstuff from the open market, and this does not promote the establishment of the agricultural value chain which is a major sub objective of the programme.

Information is an important resource for programme implementation. The ministry of humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management hosting the programme must put in place facilities for effective dissemination of information to interested publics. There is need to build public trust to minimize apprehension such as is associated with the continued implementation of the programme during the COVID-19 lockdown (Oladele et al., 2020; Oluwole, 2018). The lockdown orchestrated by the government's effort to contain the spread of COVID 19 virus, disrupted the school feeding programme. However, in view of the fact that a key objective of the programme is to provide micronutrients for the healthy development of children, the federal government decided to continue feeding the children at home. Lagos and Abuja were selected as take-off areas. This exercise generated widespread criticisms for focusing on urban areas only. It was also criticized for lack of transparency in

the selection of beneficiaries as well as lack of accountability with regards to over N500 million the operating ministry claimed to have spent on the programme during the period (Onah & Olise, 2020). Adequate dissemination of information enhances transparency and accountability. It also facilitates public acceptability which promotes smooth programme implementation.

The non-inclusion of children in nursery schools is a major flaw in the programme. Research findings show that the first two years of life is a critical period of rapid growth and brain development. It is argued that during this period, nutrition and environmental factors play important roles in growth and cognitive development of a child (Oluwole, 2018). In their contribution, Drake et al. (2016), posit that the pre-school years (1-5 years) is a time of rapid and dramatic postnatal brain development and of fundamental acquisition of cognitive development that is, working memory, attention and inhibitory control. UNICEF equally affirms the submissions of the above researchers and argues that the years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children. (www.unicef.org/dpri/ecd.pdf). Consequently, the federal government cannot claim to be pursuing a programme that targets the health, nutritional and educational improvement of children and exclude children within the critical ages of 1 – 4 years.

The need to extend the school meal programme to the under five years old is further made imperative by the report released on May 13, 2020 on the state of the World's children 2019: Children, Food and Nutrition report, which found that five in 10 children under five are malnourished (stunted, wasted or overweight) (Kazianga et al., 2009). The report also states that 3 in 10 children aged six to 23 months live on poor diets in Nigeria while 13.1 million children are stunted or too short for their age (Oluwole, 2018). Furthermore, in a report released on Feb. 19, 2020, by a commission covered by World Health Organization, UNICEF and the Lancet, Nigeria ranked 174th out of 180 countries in performance on child flourishing.

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for the success of any programme. Since every school is located in a local government, the active participation of the local government team in monitoring is crucial. In addition to enhancing efficiency, it gives the community a sense of ownership of the programme.

Some crucial facilities such as water supply and toilets are lacking in many schools especially in rural communities as evidenced in schools in Nsukka, Igbo-Eze North, Igbo-Eze South and Igbo-Etiti local governments. Sanitation and hygiene are critical to the wellbeing of children and should be integral parts of any programme on health improvement through nutrition.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

The NHGSFP is a laudable programme especially as it directly addresses critical issues related to SDGs 1 (poverty), 2 (end hunger), SDG 3 and 4 which advocate good health and wellbeing as well as quality education respectively. It is commendable that government has far exceeded its target of capturing 5 million pupils by 2020. In terms of number of

beneficiaries, the programme is therefore, considered a success. Similarly, the programme has recorded success in increasing school enrolment. However, against the backdrop of established poor quantity and quality of meals, improving the nutritional and health status of school children which are at the core of the programme remain elusive. The prospects of the programme to achieve its overall objectives are therefore dependent on the ability of both the policy makers and implementers to address the identified impediments. To this effect, the paper recommends as follows:

- i. The N500 billion annual budgetary allocation to NSIP should be disaggregated and the amount that goes to NHGSFP clearly specified. This will enhance transparency and accountability. It is also crucial that funds allocated to programmes should be so released.
- ii. Funds should be remitted to vendors at least one week before the earlier release gets exhausted to enable them to plan ahead of time. It will also minimize break in feeding occasioned by lack of payment. This may require monthly remittance as against the current practice of 20 days.
- iii. It is desirable to engage suppliers separately so that the vendors only carry out the cooking and serving. This entails having a produce collection centre where suppliers will deposit their products and distributions made to the vendors on weekly basis or as appropriate, depending on the nature of the produce. The cooks should be given some stipends for the purchase of vegetables and fruits. This process will ensure uninterrupted supply of produce and better accountability. A determined amount (about N20,000.00) should be paid to the vendors for their labour.
- iv. The net of the programme should be widened to include children in pre-primary (nursery) classes.
Inclusion of Education Secretaries and the SBMC in the monitoring exercise as an aspect of community participation should be enforced. This would also check the abuse of the process by the vendors and suppliers and even school authorities.
The cost of a meal should be increased to about ₦150.00 to reflect the reality of cost of living and food inflation in the country.
- vii. There is need for a functional portal for regular uploading of information on the activities of NHGSFP. This calls for a reactivation of the now defunct portal which is presently devoid of current information. The Social Investment Office should float a newsletter for disseminating information on the four suite programmes.
- viii. Water supply and toilet facilities should be provided to all schools through the appropriate agencies such as the SDGs, UBEC, Ministry of health and donor agencies.

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