

**HOME GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING AND HEALTH PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA:  
AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO BOOSTING ENROLMENT IN PUBLIC  
PRIMARY SCHOOLS – A STUDY OF OSUN STATE 2002 – 2010**

**Grace Oluremi AKANBI  
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education**

Abstract

*This paper examined Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) as an innovative approach to boosting enrolment in the public primary schools in Nigeria. It examined how its implementation in Osun State has activated confidence in the public primary schools again. Because the research is historical and descriptive, both primary and secondary sources were used to elicit information. The findings show that since its inception in 2006, there has been a gradual and progressive increase in the enrolment of pupils in public primary schools. This paper, therefore, recommends among others, that the Federal Government should make the programme national so as to boost the literacy level in the country.*

Keywords: Home grown school feeding and health program, Osun State, Public Primary Schools, Federal Government.

**Introduction**

Traditional education that existed in Nigeria before the introduction of western education in 1842 excluded nobody on the basis of class or gender. However, the exclusion of some children from western education based on location, gender, class and religion was corrected to a large extent by the Regionalization of Education in Nigeria between 1955 and 1957. But this correction was almost reverted by the civil war between May 1967 and January 1970. The dual ownership and control of schools (public/private) lasted till 1970 before the Federal Military Government enacted the “School Take over Validation Decree” No. 41 of 1977. This decree reinforced the powers of state government to take over all schools to ensure effective implementation of the national programme on Universal Primary Education (UPE) that was launched in 1976. The UPE was an outcome of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference that produced the National Policy on Education (NPE) which placed a premium on primary education since it is the foundation of all levels of education. Though the UPE scheme of 1976 increased enrolment in the public primary schools from six million in 1975/76 to eight million in 1976/77, and to 12.5 million in 1979/80 (ActionAid 2008) however, for many reasons, including lack of political will, subsequent governments failed to sustain the scheme by building on the social and physical structures already established. The result was a gradual but steady decline in all facets of primary education, especially in the public schools, including enrolment, attendance, quality and quantity of teachers, infrastructure and facilities. Even the military takeover of government in 1983 could not tackle the problems bedevilling the basic education sub-sector, rather it abolished free primary education and private schools started thriving again and those who could afford to pay, shifted to private schools, which was fast becoming a status symbol. Those who are in the middle class retained their children in the public primary schools, while the poor ones withdrew their children from schooling.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) launched in September 1999, which is a product of the Jomtien Conference on Education for All (EFA), was also a reform measure which aimed at addressing inequality in educational opportunity and the distortion in the basic education sub sector. It equally reinforced the implementation of the NPE and ensured access, equity and quality of basic education throughout the country, especially at the childhood level. But it was soon realized that majority of Nigerians were no longer interested in sending their children to the public primary schools due to the appalling conditions on the one hand and the poverty level on the other. This is in line with Friedrich Nietzsche's submission, (quoted in the *Punch*, September 28, 2010 p. 39) that, "In large states, public education will always be mediocre; for the same reason that in large kitchens the cooking is usually bad."

However, the launch of the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) in September 2005, aimed at providing one meal per day to all pupils during school days, has activated the interest of people in the public primary schools again. This paper therefore sets to discuss:

- Home Grown School Feeding and its Objectives.
- World Food Programme and School Feeding.
- Home Grown School Feeding in Nigeria.
- Home Grown School Feeding in Osun State.
- Effects of the programme on school enrolment.

### **Home grown school feeding and its objectives**

School feeding is defined as the provision of food to school children. According to Oyefade (2010), there are as many types of programmes as there are countries, but they can be classified into two main groups based on their modalities:

- i) In-School feeding, where children are fed in the school, which can be divided into two categories namely; (a) Programme that provides meals. (b) Programme that provides high energy biscuits or snacks.
- ii) Take home rations where families are given food if their children attend school.

India is said to have a long tradition of school feeding programme (some since the 1920s) largely by the state governments with some external assistance in 2001. India Supreme Court directed the state governments to introduce school feeding programme in all government and government assisted primary schools. This was the result of a petition from the People's Union for Liberties, a large coalition of organizations and individuals that led to the Right to Food Campaign. (Dreze and Knigdoon 2001 quoted by Oyefade 2010 ).

Also in Brazil, the school feeding programme is in the country's national constitution, and is part of the government's Zero Hunger Programme. Covering nearly 37 million children each year, the programme is among the largest in the world. Its implementations are managed by an independent institution, the National Fund for Development of Education (FNDE), created in 1997, to be responsible for the disbursement of the financial resources for school meals in each municipality.

However, the primary objective of all the programmes is to provide breakfast, mid-morning meals, lunch or a combination (depending on the duration of the school day) to alleviate short-term hunger, increase attention span, facilitate learning, and obviate the need

for children to leave the school to find food. In-school meals also act as an incentive to increase school access.

### **World food programme and school feeding**

The outcome of various educational conferences, especially the Jomtien Conference on Education For All (EFA) in 1990 brought together world leaders in the United Nations General Assembly in New York in the year 2000 to resolve some of the problems of underdevelopment in the world. The over 189 member countries committed themselves to achieve eight goals by 2015, which have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These eight goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve Maternal Health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop Global Partnership for development

Consequent upon this, the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) started working towards achieving several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through school meal programme, with the intention of fighting hunger world wide. The programme directly addresses the goals of reducing hunger by half and achieving UPE by 2015. (Osun State Central Economic Planning Office).

According to United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) (2010), in developing countries, almost 60 million children go to school hungry everyday – about 40% of them in Africa. Among the poor, there is often not enough food at home, and most schools in developing countries lack canteens or cafeterias. School meals, therefore, are a good way to channel vital nourishment to poor children. Having a full stomach also helps them to concentrate better on their lessons. In countries where school attendance is low, the promise of at least one nutritious meal each day boosts enrolment and promotes regular attendance. Parents are motivated to send their children to school instead of keeping them at home to work or care for siblings. The UNWFP also believes that in the poorest parts of the world, a school meal programme can double primary school enrolments in one year. Among the key beneficiaries are girls who otherwise may never be given the opportunity to learn.

The Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme is, therefore, a new project that will support government action to deliver cost effective school feeding programme in sub-Saharan Africa. The project will promote local agriculture and benefit rural farmers by using locally-sourced food, providing regular orders and a reliable income for local farmers, the majority of whom are women, while improving the education, health and nutrition of children.

### **Home grown school feeding and health programme in nigeria**

In Nigeria, according to Federal Ministry of Education (2007), over 90% of morbidity and 80% of mortality in under-5 children arise from four causes: malaria, vaccine

preventable diseases, diarrhea and acute respiratory infections. Malnutrition is an attributable cause in over 50% of such mortality. Moreover for children who survive, the period of childhood involves exposure to other risks, including hunger. It was further observed that childhood preventable illness accounts for 49% of school absenteeism in Nigeria. This situation impacts negatively not just on school enrolment (particularly girl child enrolment), attendance and retention, but also on learning achievement.

In the realization of the central role of nutrition to education, the Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other International Development Partners (IDPs), developed the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP). The programme was launched on Monday 26 September, 2005. Before formally launching the school feeding programme, the former President of Nigeria, Obasanjo, declared: "I foresee a day when Nigeria will be a nation with well-nourished and healthy children, happy and eager to attend school and complete their basic education in a friendly, conducive, attractive and stimulating learning environment". Also during the launching, Ayalew Abai, UNICEF country Representative, said that,

There is abundant evidence to suggest that providing each child with a complete meal, that is adequate in energy, protein, vitamin and minerals, will not only help in making the children ready for effective learning, but will also stimulate increased enrolment, attendance, completion and educational achievement...

<http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/nigeria-174.html>

The overall goal of the programme in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education. The primary objectives of the programme are to:

- Reduce hunger among Nigerian School Children
- Improve the nutritional health status of school children;
- Increase school enrolment, attendance, retention and completion particularly of children in rural communities and poor urban neighbourhoods;
- Enhance comprehension and learning achievements of pupils.

All the above objectives are a drive towards achieving the MDGs, and it is expected that the programme will have positive impacts as shown in table 1 below.

### **Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in Osun State**

Twelve (12) states were selected by the Federal Government as pilot states for the programme and Osun State was one of them. Others are Bauchi, Edo, Enugu, FCT, Imo, Kano, Kogi, Nassarawa, Niger, Ogun and Yobe. The HGSFHP was launched by then Osun State Governor, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola on May 3, 2006. The programme could have been an avenue for raising the literacy level in the country and give opportunity for more children to attain at least basic education. It is, however, worthy of note and disheartening that out of the twelve (12) pilot states, Osun State is the only state, as at today, still implementing the programme. (Adepoju 2010) All other states have abandoned it due to reasons best known to them.

**Table 1: Expected Impact of HGSFHP**

MDG	EXPECTED IMPACT OF HGSFHP	
Eradication of Extreme Hunger & Poverty	Reduction of child hunger	Poverty reduction in communities
Achieve Universal Pry. Education	Increase in School Enrolment, Attendance, Retention, Completion and Achievement	
Gender Equality & Empowerment	Correct gender imbalance through increased girl-child enrolment in schools	
Reduce Child Mortality	Improved nutritional and health status of learners	
Improve Maternal Health	Improved income generation, nutrition and health education	
Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria & TB	Improved nutritional and health status of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) & Improved access to schools	
Ensure Environmental Sustainability	Improved Water Supply, Hygiene and Sanitation & Greening of Schools	
Promote Global Partnerships	Improved networking, team work and collaboration between the school and public/private sector	

Source: *National Guidelines for School Meal Planning and Implementation.* (FME)

According to the Federal Government's directive, the Federal, State and Local Government were to fund the programme with State and Local Government providing the bulk. Up to February 2010, a total sum of N2, 881, 271, 987.00 has been spent on feeding, deworming, equipment and materials out of which the Federal Government has released only N88, 788,460. (*Report on HGSFHP in Osun State, February, 2010*) The focus of the programme in the state is:

- To get every pupil fed with a quantitatively and qualitatively adequate meal each school day.
- To ensure provision of healthy and inviting school environment.
- Provision of health facilities to take care of pupils' health needs and problems.

The programme is also aimed at boosting food production and farmers' income since all food must be purchased from locality where schools are based.

### **Programme Set up/Facilities**

The school environment had to be made conducive first by upgrading the infrastructures. New blocks of classrooms were constructed through the intervention of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). There is a well equipped and well furnished programme secretariat. Committees as stipulated in the National Programme Framework were inaugurated at the State, Local Government and the School levels. The Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education is the chairman of the state steering committee. Over 130,000 each of aluminum bowls with covers, plastic cups and eating spoons were distributed to schools. Also over 3000 serving spoons, 1,600 aprons and scarves were given out to cooks in all the schools. Kitchens for the programme had been constructed and in use in over 90% of the state public schools. Cooks have basic requirements of food vendor certificate and certificate of medical fitness.

## Mode of operation

Food contractors are not involved; the cooks go to the markets in the community to purchase the needed food items to be cooked in the school. The cooks are paid N28.00 per child per day, N38.00 per child on Tuesdays when eggs are served. Cooking and serving are done in the schools under the supervision of School Based Management Committee (SBML), and there is a uniform standard serving spoon in each school to ensure serving of standard size meals.

The feeding started with 124, 956 pupils (KG – Primary 1), but cocoa drink is given daily to the whole school (KG – Primary 6) once a week. The feeding was later scaled up to include Primary 2 pupils. To improve the protein intake, the menu table was adjusted in February 2010 as reflected in table 2 below:

**Table 2: HGSFHP Menu Table**

DAY	FORMER	PRESENT
MONDAY	Rice + Stew +Fish	Maize + Beans + Stew + Fish
TUESDAY	Porridge+Vegetable+Egusi+Egg	Porridge+Vegetable+Fish
WEDNESDAY	Rice&Beans+Vegetable with Egusi+Fish+Cocoa Drink	Rice & Beans +Egusi & Vegetable + Fish + Cocoa Drink
THURSDAY	Beans + Vegetable + Fish	Maize & Beans +Stew + Egg
FRIDAY	Rice + Vegetable + Fish	Rice & Beans + Vegetable + Fish

Source: *Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme Report in Osun State*

As simple as the menu may look, and as low as the cost may be, majority of Nigerians can't afford it; and that is why it has attracted many children to the public school.

## Deworming

In Oyefade's (2010:16) view, school-based deworming is a very low-cost and cost-effective way of improving education outcomes and nutrition. It involves offering deworming tablets once or twice a year to all children in schools in infection endemic areas. This is incorporated into school feeding schedules to reduce the prevalence and intensity of worm infections in children. It also enhances nutritional status, increases learning and cognition and reduces absenteeism.

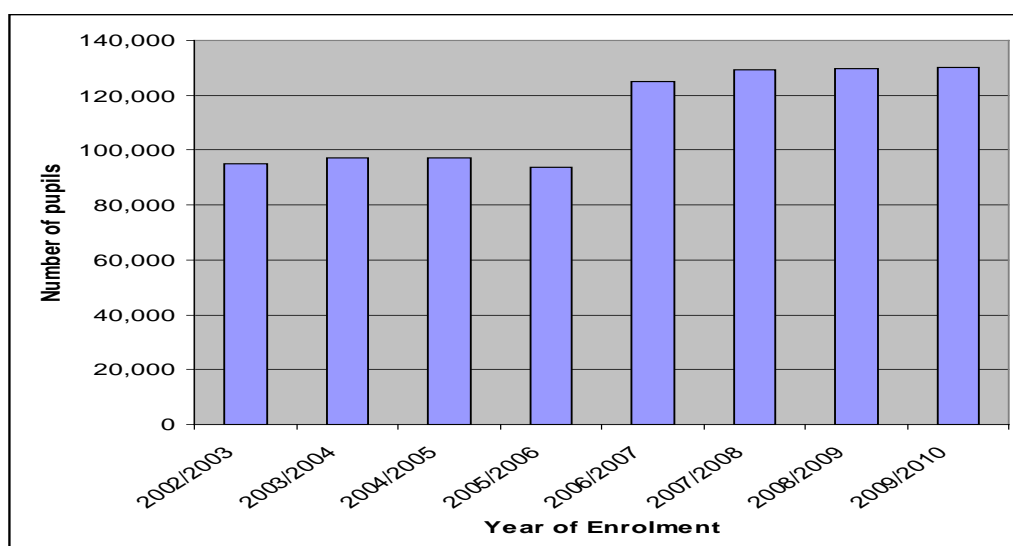
## Effect of HGSFHP on Enrolment in the Public Primary Schools in Osun State

As it is in some of the nations of the world such as Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh, Ecuador where school feeding programme is in place, data indicates that the programme has also increased attendance and enrolment rates over the years in Osun State. Between 2002/2003 and 2005/2006 session before the introduction of HGSFHP, the highest enrolment figure was 97,010; but after the introduction there was an upsurge in the enrolment which has since been maintained up to year 2010 as shown in the table below:

**Table 3: Enrolment Trend in Osun State 2002-2010 (KG. - Primary II)**

S/N	YEAR	NO. OF PUPILS KG. PRY. I & II
1.	2002/2003	95,259
2.	2003/2004	97,010
3.	2004/2005	97,010
4.	2005/2006	93,680
5.	2006/2007	124,956
6.	2007/2008	129,318
7.	2008/2009	129,784
8.	2009/2010	130,000

Source: State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB)



**Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the Enrolment (Table 3)**

From the enrolment data, it could be said that the programme has activated the confidence of the people in the public primary school again. The Head teachers interviewed affirmed that the operation of the programme has resulted in regular and punctual school attendance, reduction in truancy and absenteeism since the pupils are sure of being provided with free meals during break time. Some of the teachers interviewed also expressed joy that there is increased retention and participation in curricular activities by pupils. This is because pupils are served with balanced diet which they may not be provided with in their various homes. They also expressed optimism that the HGSFHP will enhance the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially goal no. 2.

## Conclusion

The HGSFHP is a worthwhile exercise in Osun State. The huge investment in the programme can never be regarded as a waste in view of the positive impacts as revealed in this study. The current food, fuel and financial crises have highlighted the importance of school feeding programme, both as a social safety net for children living in poverty and food insecurity, and as part of national educational policies and plans. Appropriately designed school feeding programmes have been shown to increase access to education and learning and improve children's health and nutrition, especially when integrated into comprehensive school health and nutrition programme.

## Recommendations

In the year 2007, total enrolment in the primary schools in Nigeria, according to Federal Ministry of Education, was 25,772,704; while that of Osun State was 436,334 (1.7%) for the same year out of which only 129,318 (29.6%) were in the Kindergarten, Primary I & II, implying that 70.4% of the public primary school children did not enjoy the school feeding because of lack of fund. Based on this and on other observations in the course of the research, it is, therefore, recommended that school feeding programme should be embedded in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria just as it is in Brazil, and should be operated as a matter of policy.

Osun State should also put a legal instrument in place on HGSFHP to ensure its sustainability by subsequent administrations in the state. Because the programme is capital intensive, financial and technical assistance should be sought from multi-lateral bodies, Foundations and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the World Bank, WFP, UNESCO, UNICEF, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, Partnership for Child Development (PCD), and a host of others.

Healthy environment must be maintained in the state and especially in the public schools to avoid outbreak of epidemics such as cholera, diarrhea and other airborne or waterborne diseases. Mechanism for effective supervision of the programme must be put in place so that the money meant to be spent will not go down the drain. The Federal Government should, as a matter of urgency, make the programme mandatory in all the other states of the federation so as to sustain the trend in enrolment and as well as boost the literacy level in the country.

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AKANBI Grace Oluremi  
DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR PRELIMINARY STUDIES  
EMMANUEL ALAYANDE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
OYO TOWN  
OYO STATE, NIGERIA  
[oluremiakanbi@ymail.com](mailto:oluremiakanbi@ymail.com)