

## SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN NIGERIA: A VEHICLE FOR NOURISHMENT OF PUPILS

Isa Yunusa

Kano University of Science and Technology

Ahmed Muhammed Gumel

Jigawa State College of Agriculture

Khalid Adegbusi

Sherif Adegbusi

Katsina University

### Abstract

*Malnutrition disorders affect more than 42% of school children in Nigeria and are responsible for 49% absenteeism of primary school age children. School Feeding Program (SFPs) is designed to overcome malnutrition disorders through regular school-feeding to improve the health/nutrition status and the education abilities of school children. This paper reviewed Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program (HGSFHP) as an innovative approach that may boost nutritional status in the public primary schools in Nigeria and their levels of implementation by stake holders. The paper recommends to the Federal Government that the program should be a national policy in order to boost the literacy and health/nutrition status in the country.*

**Key words:** Home grown school feeding and health program, Nutrition, Health, School children

### Historical Background

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Act, in America signed by President Truman in 1946, officially authorized the NSLP, although funds had previously been appropriated for over a decade without specific legislative authority. The 1966 Child Nutrition Act expanded the program and added the School Breakfast Program (SBP) on a pilot basis; 1975 legislation made the SBP permanent; and 1998 legislation expanded the NSLP to include reimbursements for snacks served to students in after-school educational and enrichment programs (Schirm and Kirkendall, 2010).

India also is said to have a long tradition of school feeding program (some since the 1920s) largely by the state governments with some external assistance (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011). India Supreme Court directed the state governments to introduce school feeding program 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 (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011). In Brazil, the school feeding program is in the country's national constitution, and is part of the government's Zero Hunger Program. Covering nearly 37 million children each year, the program 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 (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011).

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 Program (WFP), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other International Development Partners (IDPs), developed the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program (HGSFHP). The program was launched on Monday 26 September, 2005 (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011). The Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program is, therefore, a new project that will support government action to deliver cost effective school feeding program 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 (UNICEF, 2006).

The overall goal of the program in Nigeria is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among school children and enhance the achievement of Universal Basic Education. The primary objectives of the program 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 neighborhoods;
- Enhance comprehension and learning achievements of pupils.

All the above objectives are a drive towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## Introduction

Healthy eating habits among children play a key role in their mental and physical development and also promote growth and reduce many risks associated with both immediate and long-term health problems (Bordi *et al.*, 2002). Appropriate nutrition is a basic human need that remains unmet for a vast number of children; the trend of malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa is disturbing. For the region as a whole, no progress has been made in reducing the prevalence of child malnutrition over the past 15 years, and there are some indications that the situation has worsened. Ethiopia and Nigeria are countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa with the very high rate of malnutrition (Getahun *et al.*, 2001; Adewara and Visser, 2011). Unfortunately the diets commonly offered to young children are of low quality and often lack variety, which is the key to specific nutrient adequacy. They are usually of low energy and nutrient density and as a result, multiple nutrient deficiencies are common in this age group (Ogbimi and Ogunba, 2011).

Malnutrition has continued to be a public health problem in developing countries where the poor socio economic condition has continued to work in synergy with malnutrition (Olusanya, 2010). Malnutrition has been identified to affect the cognitive development of children (Pollitt, 1995; Grantham-McGregor and Ani, 2001). Apart from the adverse effect of malnutrition on the cognitive achievement of school children, malnutrition is also likely to result in poor attendance at school, low health status which will invariably lead to high withdrawal rate (Olusanya, 2010).

The Food Consumption and Nutrition Survey in Nigeria (FCSN 2001-2003) reveal

that the nutritional status in Nigerian children is very poor. The data showed that 42% of Nigerian children were stunted, 25% were underweight and 9% were wasted. Twenty nine (29.5%) of the children under five years of age suffer from vitamin A deficiency while over 27% were at different stages of iron and iodine deficiency (Maziya-dixon *et al.*, 2004).

School feeding is defined as the provision of food to school children (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011). According to Oyefade (2010), there are as many types of programs 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) Program that provides meals. (b) Program that provides high energy biscuits or snacks.
- ii) Take home rations where families are given food if their children attend school.

Although the importance of education had been internationally acknowledged, it is estimated that in developing countries as many as 26% of boys and 30% girls of primary school age are not attending school (United Nations Development Program, UNDP, 2003). According to United Nations' World Food Program (WFP) (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 are a good way to channel vital nourishment to poor children. Having a full stomach also helps them to concentrate better on their lessons (WFP, 2010). 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 (WFP, 2010). The WFP also believes that in the poorest parts of the world, a school meal program can double primary school enrolments in one year. Among the key beneficiaries are girls who otherwise may never be given the opportunity to learn.

In Nigeria, according to Federal Ministry of Education, FME (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 while malnutrition account for over 50% of such mortality (FME, 2007).

### **Conceptual frame work of Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program**

To improve the nutritional status of school children, the Federal Government launched the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health program in September 2005 under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Education. The program aims to provide a nutritionally-adequate meal during the school day (UNICEF, 2006). The pilot phase (Sept, 2005-July, 2006) has involved twelve (12) States in the six geopolitical zones; Bauchi, Edo, Enugu, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Imo, Kano, Kogi, Nassarawa, Niger, Ogun, Yobe and Osun States.

According to the Federal Government's directive, the Federal, State and Local Government were to fund the program 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 (HGSFHP, 2010). The focus of the program 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 program is also aimed at boosting food production and farmers' income since all food must be purchased from locality where schools are based.

### Program Set up/Facilities

The school environment had to be made conducive first by upgrading the infrastructures. New blocks of classrooms were to be constructed through the intervention of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). There will be well equipped and well furnished program secretariat. Committees as stipulated in the National Program Framework were to be inaugurated at the State, Local Government and the School levels. The Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education was to serve as the chairman of the State steering committee (HGSFHP, 2010).

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

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 program is in place, data indicates that the program has also increased attendance and enrolment rates over the years (Akanbi and Alayande, 2011). In Nigeria, worthy of note and disheartening is that out of the twelve (12) pilot States, Osun State is the only state, as at today, still implementing the program. All other states have abandoned it due to reasons best known to them (Adepoju, 2010).

Table 1: Expected Impact of HGSFHP on the MDG

MDG	EXPECTED IMPACT OF HGSFHP	
Eradication of Extreme Hunger & Poverty	Reduction of child hunger	Poverty reduction in communities
Achieve Universal Primary 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, 2007)

According to Garram Children's School (2010) school feeding contributes to the education and well-being of children. A hungry child does not grow, cannot learn as well and faces many health risks in the future. School feeding can bring children into school and out of hunger. School feeding responds directly to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to hunger and poverty (MDG 1), education (MDG 2) and gender equality (MDG 3), and indirectly to child mortality and maternal health (MDGs 4 and 5) (Table 1):

1. School feeding leads to outcomes that are mutually reinforcing, helping to lift households out of poverty to end the inter-generational cycle of hunger. It also facilitates education and particularly for girls, leads to improved food security, health and nutrition, the effects of which all contribute to ending hunger.
2. Providing food for consumption at school can relieve immediate short-term hunger which is very beneficial for learning. Alleviating short-term hunger among children at school helps to improve performance on school tests and promote normal progression from grade to grade in completing a basic education.
3. School feeding helps close the gender gap in schools and helps to empower women by increasing their probability of employment.
4. When girls are educated they are more likely to have fewer and healthier children and to head families that are food-secure.
5. Maternal and infant mortality rates will decrease and better- educated girls will make more informed choices.

**School feeding Programs (SFPs) are generally expected to elicit the following responses:**

SFPs can address some of the nutrition and health problems of school-age children. SFPs and other school-based nutrition and health programs can also motivate parents to enroll their children in school and to see that they attend regularly. Experience shows that properly designed and effectively implemented SFPs can:

1. Alleviate short-term hunger in malnourished or otherwise well-nourished school children. This helps to increase the attention and concentration of students producing gains in cognitive function and learning.
2. Motivate parents to enroll their children in school and have them attend regularly. When programs effectively reduce absenteeism and increase the duration of schooling, educational outcomes (performance, dropout, and repetition) improve.
3. Address specific micronutrient deficiencies in school-age children. Most important of these are iodine and iron, which directly affect cognition. Meeting the iron and iodine needs of school-age children can translate into better school performance.
4. Increase community involvement in schools, particularly where programs depend on the community to prepare and serve meals to children. Schools with their communities behind them are more effective than schools with less community involvement.

**The Sustainability of School Feeding Programs**

Garram Children's School (2010) reported that school feeding programs help keep children in school and create markets for poor food farmers. Thus, it is linking school feeding directly with agricultural development. The scheme, officially known as the Home-Grown

School Feeding program, insists on buying from local farmers the rice, beans, wheat, dairy and other ingredients used to prepare the food children are given in schools. It therefore reduces malnutrition while providing local farmers with the opportunity to sell their produce to participating schools. This provides market incentives to farmers to grow more. They may also save money as they do not have to travel far to markets. Schools are the centre of many villages and communities. School meals connect teachers, parents, cooks, children, farmers, and the local market. Furthermore, it can serve as a platform for Essential Package Interventions; water, sanitation, nutrition, health and hygiene education, school gardens, improved environmental technologies and practices that will be fed into the program to ensure sustainability.

## Conclusion

SFPs have been practiced in many developed and developing countries for several decades. As already indicated, it is therefore a worthwhile exercise in Nigeria so as to enhance nutritional status, increase cognition and learning outcomes, increase enrollments, and reduce absenteeism.

## Recommendations

In addition to the led down guidelines towards successful implementation of SFPs, the following suggestions are proffered;

1. Federal Government of Nigeria's HGSFHP should be back up with a legislative act and to include all the thirty six (36) States including FCT.
2. SFPs should encompass both public and private primary and secondary educational institutions across the country.
3. Qualified food scientists, nutritionist, dietitians and caterers should be involved in running the program and made responsible for the purchase of the needed food items to be cooked in the school.
4. The cooking and serving should be executed under the supervision of the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) and serving should be conducted in a uniform standard measure to ensure serving of standard size meals.
5. Feeding should be well guided by a menu which reflects the nutritional need for energy and micronutrients body requirements of a particular geographical area.
6. School-based deworming of children; an integral part of the SFPs to be conducted once every six month to ensure nutrition and education outcome.

## References

- Adepoju, D. (2010). Report on home grown school feeding and health program in Osun State. (Unpublished Report).
- Adewara, S.O. & Visser, M. (2011). Use of anthropometric measures to analyze how sources of water and sanitation affect children's health in Nigeria. *Environment for Development Discussion Paper Series*. Efd DP 11-02.
- Akanbi, G.O.& Alayande, E. (2011). Home grown school feeding and health program in nigeria: an innovative approach to boosting enrolment in public primary schools – a study of Osun State 2002 – 2010. *The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network.*, 11(2): 20-28.

- Bordi, P.L., Park, J.E., Watkins, S., Caldwell, D. & DeVitis, C.A. (2002). Impact of the environment on food choices and eating habit of school age children. *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management Issues*. 26 (2).
- Federal Ministry of Education (2007). *National guidelines for school meal planning and implementation*. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education.
- Garram Children's School (2010). Proposal for a grant of \$65,000 for school feeding program. In: <http://www.garramchildrenschoolandorphanage.org>.
- Getahun, Z., Urga, K., Ganebo, T. & Nigatu, A. (2001). Review of the status of malnutrition and trends in Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of Health Development*. 15:55-74.
- Grantham-McGregor, S.M. & Ani, C. (2001). A review of studies on the effect of iron deficiency on cognitive development in children. *Journal of Nutrition*, 131: 649-68.
- Home Grown School Feeding and Health. (2010). Available from <http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/pages/HGSF.aspx>.
- Maziya-Dixon, B., Akinyele I.O., Oguntona E.B., Nokoe S., Sanusi R.A., & Harris, E. (2004). Background. *Nigeria food consumption and nutrition survey, summary*, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria. Pp. 9.
- Ogbimi, G.E. & Ogunba, B.O. (2011). Nutritional quality of the lunches of children in day care in Osun State of Nigeria. *African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development*. 11(4): 1-11.
- Olusanya, J.O. (2010). Assessment of the food habits and school feeding program of pupils in a rural community in Odogbolu local government area of Ogun State, Nigeria. *Pakistan Journal of Nutrition*. 9 (2): 198-204.
- Oyefade, S.A. (2010). Administration of home grown school feeding and health program in Osun State. *An unpublished MPA Thesis*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University.
- Pollitt, E. (1995). The relationship between undernutrition and behavioral development in children. A report of the International Dietary Energy Consultative Group (IDECG) workshop on malnutrition and behavior, Davis, California. December 1993. *Journal of Nutrition*, 125 (8 suppl): 22115-22845.
- Schirm, A. & Kirkendall, N. (2010). Panel on estimating children eligible for school nutrition programs using the American community survey. *National Research Council*. pp. 19-141. <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12917.html>.
- UNICEF. (2006). *Information fact sheet*. p. 2.
- United Nations Development Program. (2003). *Human development report*. New York.
- World Food Program. (2010). School meals. Available at [http://www.wfp.org/schools\\_meals](http://www.wfp.org/schools_meals).

### Author Information

\*Yunusa Isa<sup>1</sup>  
Gumel Muhammed Ahmed.<sup>2</sup>  
Adegbusi Khalid  
Sherif Adegbusi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biochemistry, Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil. PMB 3244, Kano State, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Animal Health and Production, Jigawa State College of Agriculture, Hadejia. P.M.B. 013 Hadejia, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computer Science, Katsina University, P.M.B 2137, Katsina State, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding author e-mail: [isayunusa@yahoo.com](mailto:isayunusa@yahoo.com)