

# An Assessment Of The Effects Of The Ghana School Feeding Programme On Quality Educational Delivery In Selected Schools In The Karaga Disrict Of The Northern Region Of Ghana

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*Abstract: This study makes an assessment of the impact of the Ghana School Feeding Programme on quality educational delivery in some selected schools in the Karaga district of the Northern Region of Ghana. The study employs a mixed method approach to measure the impact of the programme on enrollment, attendance and retention of pupils in the district. The study reveals a significant increase in school enrollment, attendance and retention of pupils in the district after the introduction of the School Feeding Programme. Further, the introduction of the School Feeding Programme has led to an increase in school enrollment and retention of boys as compared to girls, however, school attendance among girls went higher than that of boys.*

*Other impacts of the programme include; the correction of nutritional deficiencies, children feeling valued and cared for, short term hunger relief, improved literacy rates, reduced inter- generational cycle of poverty, improved health conditions of pupils, employment creation in the district, creation of markets for local farmers and the growth of the local economy. The programme is however challenged with problems of illiteracy among caterers and cooks, cash flow constraints, political interference, poor monitoring and evaluation. It is against this backdrop that the study recommends that the state and other relevant stakeholders take the necessary steps to address the aforementioned challenges confronting the Ghana School Feeding Programme in the district and beyond.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ambition of all nations of the United Nations (UN) to address the challenges resulting from advancing globalization brought about the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. In the formulation of the MDGs, attention has been paid to hunger and poverty as stated in MDG number 1, which is; to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty. The sub-goal formulated hereby is by the year 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger is halved as compared to 1990 (UN, 2005b). School Feeding Programmes (SFPs) are said to among other things, contribute to achieving this first Millennium Development Goal (Ghana Government, 2006a).

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) focuses on the combination of School Feeding Programmes and Agriculture. The NEPAD Secretariat has formulated the comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme

(CAADP), which functions as a framework for the restoration of agriculture, growth, food security and rural development in Africa. In this framework, pillar 3 has a specific focus on increasing food supply and reducing hunger and includes the following objectives:

- ✓ To reduce malnutrition in school going children through diet supplementation via a complete and adequate meal (in terms of caloric and micronutrient content), and
- ✓ To expand local demand for food products and to stimulate production by small holder farms.

NEPAD has formulated an indicator of improvement which is; the provision of basic school lunches that are balanced in terms of calorie and micronutrient content to 1,000,000 children in poor and vulnerable areas throughout the NEPAD member states (NEPAD, 2005a).

The school feeding is an effective social safety net which helps to boost school attendance, cognition and educational achievement. Targeted school feeding, reaches the most

vulnerable children, especially girls, helping to reduce their hunger and keeping them in school. The World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP) have joined in partnership to undertake a study of how to best implement school feeding programmes. More than 60 million children go to school hungry everyday in the world and about 40% of them are in Africa (UN, 2005b).

In 2008, the UN World Food Programme assisted some 22 million children, with school feeding in 70 countries. The World Bank Group recently launched a Global Food Crisis Response Facility that mobilized \$1.2 billion to help countries respond to the food and fuel crises, including scaling-up school feeding programmes (ibid, 2005b).

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) was implemented in September, 2006. It initially covered 138 schools, one in each district of Ghana, to provide one hot meal a day for about 38,000 primary public school children with future plans to eventually expand to cover all primary school children in the country. This first phase of the main programme to be implemented over a 5-year period (2006-2010) was envisaged to cover about 200,000 pupils in the first year and additional 300,000 pupils each year for the remaining years up to about a cumulative 1,500,000 children by the year 2010. The current phase was being embarked upon following the success of a pilot programme that was run for one school-term thus, from September to December, 2005 and covered about 1,800 pupils (Ghana Government, 2005b).

The school feeding programme is being implemented at the district level by the District Implementation Committee (DIC). The DIC is comprised of some members of the District Assembly of the implementing district representatives of Ministry of food and Agriculture, Ghana Health Service and the Ghana Education Service. The DIC is to see to the smooth implementation of the programme in each of the implementing districts. At the community level, the school implementation Committees, including Parent/ Teacher Associations (PTAs) are in charge and each beneficiary school takes charge of affairs at the school level, which to a very large extent check incidence of corruption. At the National level, the final authority for decision making on implementation of the programme resides in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development through the Ghana School Feeding Programme Secretariat, set up by the Presidency to implement the programme. The cooking of the food is undertaken by selected and properly screened female parents of the school children, who are called caterers or cooks. They are to serve locally produced and processed foodstuff which will be sourced locally from the beneficiary community. The programme is a professed national solution, within a broader framework of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), endorsed by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The Karaga District currently has 21 selected schools running the School Feeding Programme. After the launch of the programme in September, 2006, it is reported that there has been an increase in enrollment and retention in the beneficiary schools by 21% (Ghana Government, 2006a).

The Ghana School Feeding Programme aims at reducing hunger and malnutrition in primary school children, increasing enrollment, attendance and retention in primary schools and

boosting domestic food production (Ghana Government, 2006a). There has however been some information of massive corruption bedeviling the school feeding programme since its inception in September, 2006. The main corruption accusations against actors have been against the implementers at the national secretariat, regional and district officers and some caterers. Some have alleged that the caterers connive with some head teachers to inflate the enrollment figures for their own selfish gains. Another worrying phenomenon is the lack of conscious efforts to increase classroom and other educational facilities to commensurate the increased enrollment rates in schools leading to poor teaching and learning.

There are also reported cases by some school authorities that non beneficiary pupils run to beneficiary schools to take advantage of the programme. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to find out the impact of the School Feeding Programme in some selected schools in the Karaga District of the Northern Region, in the face of all these obstacles and challenges.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a cross-sectional ethnographic study which employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The secondary data was mainly collected from existing literature on the School Feeding Programme, where as primary data was collected from interviews and questionnaires with administrators of the programme in the Karaga District of the Northern Region of Ghana. The target population of the study included the Ghana School Feeding Programme administrators in the selected beneficiary schools in the Karaga District. For the secondary data, the researcher specifically reviewed documents and academic reports of the Ghana School Feeding Programme in the district. Data on students' enrollment, School attendance, Retention and Completion as well as students' performance from the selected fifteen beneficiary schools were reviewed before and after the programme.

The researcher adopted a non-probability sampling technique namely, the purposive selection method for the selection of the fifteen beneficiary schools across the district. This was aimed at providing quick results and also to ensure a high margin of convenience. The purposive method was used on the justification that, the selected schools typified or exhibited the true characteristics of interest to the study.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Bar charts and tables have been used to summarize the data obtained from the field and also used for the analysis and discussion on the impact of the School Feeding Programme on enrollment, retention and attendance of pupils in the selected schools. The primary impact indicators of the programme have been identified to include enrollment figures, school attendance, pupils' retention and general performance of pupils.

## GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

A look at Table 1 below shows that fifty four percent (53.8%) of males were interviewed, while the remaining forty six (46.2%) interviewed were female. This representation is inconsistent with the traditional female domination in the Ghanaian population according to the results of the 2010 population and Housing census. This brings to the fore the fact that more efforts would have to be put in by the appropriate stake holders to encourage gender equality and gender mainstreaming projects in the district in particular and the whole of Ghana in general.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Male	57	53.8	53.8
Female	49	46.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Fieldwork August, 2014

Table 1: Gender Composition of respondents

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF RESPONDENTS

The data collected indicates that 28% of the respondents had completed their tertiary education, with fifty five ((54.7%) forming the majority of respondents who had completed their post secondary education while others, forming seventeen percent (17%) of the overall respondents.

The educational background of the respondents shows their ability, competence and qualification to be able to analyze, interpret, understand and measure the effects of government policies and programme interventions on educational achievements. The educational background of the respondents is therefore an important yardstick in measuring the effect of the School Feeding Programme on Quality Educational delivery in the area of the study.

## SCHOOLS' COVERED BY THE GHANA SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME IN THE KARAGA DISTRICT

As regards the coverage of the School Feeding Programme within the Karaga District, the study found that, out of the total of seventy nine (79) basic schools in the district, twenty one (21) were beneficiaries, representing 26.6% while fifty-eight (58) representing 73.4% were not benefiting from the programme. This is a clear indication that there is the need to include more schools from the district into the programme. It also means that government would need more funding to be able to widen the scope of the programme, and also achieve the hundred percent coverage target in the district and beyond. This would obviously lead to the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 2 which is to provide universal basic education to all by the end of year 2015.

## IMPACT OF THE GHANA SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME ON ENROLLMENT BY GENDER

Gender disparities in education remain a global phenomenon although considerable progress is being made to narrow the gaps. From the literature, Ghana has made progress

towards achieving equal access to education but is a long way from achieving gender equality. The situation is worse in Northern Ghana where girls enrollment and completion rates are far lower than the national average. This study found out that the introduction of the school feeding programme in the Karaga district witnessed a sharp increase in school enrollment of boys by 60.4% while that of girls went up by 39.6%. This positive enrollment stride chalked in the district is in the direction of elimination gender disparity in primary schools. This is in line with the dictates of the MDG 2, which aims at promoting gender quality and empowerment of women in our societies.

Also, the significant increase in enrollment has three major impacts according to Bennett (2003), Hall et al (2007). The first impact is the improvement in the nutritional status of school going children and the reduction of malnutrition rates. The second is the improvement in school enrollment, school attendance, retention and cognitive performance of children. The third impact is the effect of school feeding on the demand for locally produced foods. Since many of the nutritional and growth problems occur in the first two years of life, it is appropriate to mention that a life cycle approach is needed to improve nutritional status. Improving nutritional status is thought to require a range of interventions, varying from supplementary feeding for mothers and young children to school feeding and other food based strategies.

The study further revealed that the introduction of the school feeding programme in the district led to a significant increase in school attendance. The attendance rate of boys went up by 34.95 while that of girls went up by 65.1%. This significant increase in school attendance of the girl child in the district is a good step towards achievement of MDG 2. Meeting the education goal will speed progress towards every other Millennium Goal.

The study again revealed that the introduction of the school feeding programme in the district witnessed yet another significant increase in school retentions in the district. The retention rate of boys increased by 75.5% while that of girls increased by 24.5%. With rates of retention, it was clear that the girls were hard hit as compared to the boys. Retention rates among boys appeared to be affected seasonally, thus the rainy season, when most of them accompany parents and guardians to farms. The case of the girl child appeared to be permanent, as her retention issues were related to early marriages. The phenomenon of early marriages was also found to affect retention of the girl child in school.

## OTHER IMPACTS OF THE GHANA SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME IN THE DISTRICT

The GSFP has other equally significant impacts which include the Correction of nutritional Deficiencies, Short term hunger relief, improved literacy rates, Employment creation, and growth of the local economy.

According to the District Nutrition Officer, the foods provided for school feeding are rich in energy, proteins and vitamins. As captured in most studies conducted in low and middle income countries, interventions aimed at correcting nutritional deficiency had positive results. This finding corroborates the finding of Greenhalgh et. al (2007), on school

feeding for improving the physical and psychosocial health of disadvantaged elementary school children.

The study also found that children from beneficiary schools in the district expressed a high sense of humour, motivation, and were well cared for as far as their inclusion in the programme was concerned. This is also supported by the WHO (2006), that a hot meal served at school can be a social event that engages, motivates and stimulates the pupils' academic participation.

The study identified short term hunger relief as yet another impact of the Ghana School Feeding Programme in the Karaga District. This position has been buttressed in the literature by the Hunger Relief Theory which posits that School Feeding leads to short term rises in blood and hence brain glucose levels, which counteracts the negative effect of hunger on concentration, memory, motivation and other psychological prerequisites for learning. The study further found that the Ghana School Feeding Programme in the district, worked strongly to improve on literacy levels of pupils in the district. As a result of the programme, pupils have staged in school and have subsequently become literates with improved living conditions, breaking the cycle of poverty and perhaps giving the next generation of children better opportunities for good nutrition and health.

#### EMPLOYMENT CREATION

From the study the Ghana School Feeding Programme has generated jobs for caterers, cooks and other casual workers in the district. This has gone a long way to improve upon incomes of the workers and better life condition for their families.

The programme also established a marketing relationship between the schools involved and local farmers in the district. There is no doubt that the GSFP is greatly helping to create markets for the local farmers to sell their farm produce in the form of legumes, cereals, tubers, vegetables and other farm produce. This ready market also puts cash into the pockets of the farmers and also prevents post harvest losses, which has been a long standing problem for farmers in the area. The study also found that the local economy of the district has been influenced positively as most of the funds invested into the programme are spent within the beneficiary communities.

#### CHALLENGES OF THE GHANA SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME

In spite of the numerous benefits inherent in the GSFP, the study found that the programme still grappled with some challenges. For instance, 14.2% of respondents mentioned the phenomenon of illiterate caterers and cooks as a problem that militated against the proper functioning of the programme. This category of workers had no formal education and made training and dissemination of new ideas on the programme very difficult.

Delays in the release of funds were yet another challenge that worked against the smooth implementation of the programme. 19% of respondents cited cash flow constraints as a major challenge to the programme. 12.2% of the respondents also talked about the overly publicized arrangement of the

programme. This was a very strong concern among the respondents. According to them, contracts under the GSFP were given out to party cronies without following due procurement procedures and processes. Poor monitoring and evaluation of the programme was also identified as a challenge. It was very obvious from the study that monitoring of the programme was predominantly done by the Ghana School Feeding Programme desk officers only, without the active involvement of other stakeholders like the Ghana Health Service and others. This brought to the fore very serious health and safety concerns. About 9.4% of the respondents also cited limited coverage of the programme in the district as a huge challenge. This created a disturbing situation where pupils run away from non beneficiary schools to beneficiary schools.

Another serious challenge identified by the study was the low quality of food served to the children in the district. About 14.2% of the respondents mentioned this challenge. Poor sanitation was yet another challenge identified in this study. 16.6% of respondents attested to this fact. From personal observations, pupils were often seen eating from unhygienic bowls and most of them did the eating with their hands unwashed. The study also revealed that caterers and cooks on the programme were not medically tested before being contracted, raising very fundamental health concerns.

Again, corruption on the part of the coordinators and facilitators of the programme was a huge challenge that militated against the smooth running of the programme in the district. There was a clear indication that contracts were given to non-existent companies. There were issues of deliberate purchase of unwholesome but cheaper ingredients by some caterers in the district. This was a very serious concern since it could have affected the health of the children who ate food prepared out of such unwholesome ingredients.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that, though the introduction of the School Feeding Programme in the district has brought about a significant increase in school enrollment, school attendance and school retention, there is still a lot to be done to improve on some very critical areas of the programme.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations;

The study found the phenomenon of illiterate caterers and cooks on the School Feeding Programme in the area as a huge challenge. The study therefore recommends that cooks and caterers who are employed by the programme should be given the requisite training to enable them acquire professional skills in the preparation and handling of food. Or better still, only professional caterers should be employed to cook the meals for the children.

Cash flow constraints were also identified as a major challenge that militated against the smooth running of the programme. The study recommends that the Ministry of

Finance should release funds regularly and timely for the smooth running of programme in the Karaga District.

The Ghana School Feeding Programme should be depoliticized so as to bring about efficiency and effectiveness as well as commitment from all stakeholders in the running of the programme.

In order to improve upon the poor monitoring and evaluation of the programme, measures should be put in place to include personnel from the Ghana Health Service to promote the health and safety of the pupils. Furthermore, the low quality of meals served to the children was of grave concern in the study and should be improved upon to enable the programme achieve its stated nutritional objective.

Poor sanitation was yet another challenge which was indentified in the study. It is therefore recommended that hygienic cooking environments be put in place, personal hygiene of the cooks and caterers be promoted, cooks should be medically tested and hand washing facilities be made available to the pupils.

Corrupt practices among staff of the Ghana School Feeding Programme also came up in the course of the study. In order to stop the corrupt practices, the study recommends that contracts under the programme be made open, transparent and the necessary laid- down procurement procedures be followed.

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