

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLANS

- **Review meal budgets:** An urgent review of meal budgets currently fixed at N70 per meal per child is grossly inadequate. The review is necessary to attain healthy nutrition for pupils, and enrich meal quality. Children desire to see additional foods on the menu such as fruits, more vegetables and protein to increase nutritional value of meals. Meal budget review can help to make these wishes come true for school children.
- **Upgrade learning infrastructure:** School feeding should be matched with adequate learning infrastructure to enable schools absorb new enrollments and sustain the positive learning outcomes reported. Payments for vendors should be reviewed occasionally in response to the increase in student enrollment.
- **Community engagement strategy is needed:** States should develop a robust communication and community engagement strategy in order to strengthen program acceptance from locals, douse public distrust and enlist community participation in program delivery. Information about HGSF activities should be properly communicated to parents, community leaders, and small-scale farmers in every locality the project is being implemented. States can clear doubts and dispel public distrust through awareness creation and periodically publishing reports of public spending on school feeding. Not only that, communication and grievance procedures should be in place in every school for eliciting feedback that can be used to assess progress and improve results.
- **Link food vendors to local framers:** As opposed to buying food produce from the open market, HGSFP implementers can bolster local food production by linking vendors directly to local farmers where food can be obtained fresh, timely, and at cheaper rates.
- **Make the programme more inclusive:** States should take measures to ensure that no school or pupil is excluded from benefitting from the programme. Again, reviewing meal budgets is critical to ensure food sufficiency and for integrating all pupils into the feeding programme so that no child feels neglected. Also, the inclusion of vital ministries, such as that of health, agriculture and education in the implementation architecture of the HGSFP will heighten the programme's chances of sustainability.
- **Clear criteria for vendor selection, recruitment and reward systems are needed:** States should define a clear eligibility criteria, including coherent selection and recruitment procedures for vendors. They should conduct periodic training for vendors to continuously upgrade their skills and learn best and safe practices. States also need to develop reward and disciplinary systems for deserving and erring program vendors. Bureaucratic bottlenecks that cause payment delays must be removed to prevent irregularities in the delivery of meals.
- **Strengthen monitoring mechanisms:** There is a lot of room for improving the HGSFP's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Efficient supervision of the meal preparation, meal distribution and meal servings is imperative. This is bolstered by the direct participation of head teachers, local governments and key line ministries such as ministries of education, agriculture and health. Project implementers can schedule surprise visits to schools to monitor progress, receive feedback from school authorities and correct anomalies noticed. Finally, monitoring and evaluation teams should incorporate the services of health professionals, like nutritionists, to enforce high standards in hygiene and sanitation.



With 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria (UNICEF: 2017), the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) introduced the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) to provide one hot meal every school day to pupils of public primary schools, with a view toward incentivizing school enrollment, school attendance and completion rates in the country. By sourcing the food cooked for school children from farm produce locally grown by smallholder farmers, the school feeding programme further aims to create employment and bolster the production of home-grown foods.

Consistent with its role as the initiator of the project, FGN is primarily in charge of policy formulation, standards-setting, funding, and exercising oversight to implementing partners in various states of the federation. Funded by the FGN's National Social

Investment Fund (NSIF) managed by the office of the Vice President, the HGSFP targets primary school pupils of classes 1–3, while state governments are to provide counterpart funding to complement the scope and coverage of the program to pupils in classes 4–6. Local food vendors recruited from the communities hosting the participating schools prepare and supply the meals directly to the schools at the rate of N70 per meal, keying into a larger policy objective of stimulating agriculture and creating employment. HGSF is premised on the Compulsory, Free, and Universal Basic Education Act of 2004.

Before FGN introduced the HGSFP in 2016, the Abia Primary School Lunch Program (APSLP) designed to provide free meals to school children in government-owned primary schools was already operational since 2015. APSLP started as a private initiative of the governor's wife, Mrs.

Nkechi Caroline Ikpeazu. With additional funding from the HGSFP, Abia State government expanded the program's coverage to primary schools pupils in classes 1–6 and primary school teachers numbering over 12,000. The Office of the Wife of Abia State Governor, Mrs. Nkechi Ikpeazu, currently coordinates the school feeding programme in Abia State, and she is assisted by the Programme Manager of the Abia Free Meals Initiative, currently headed by Elder Emeka Ahuruonye. In Imo, the Ministry of Happiness and Purpose Fulfillment, currently headed by Commissioner Edna Obioma, coordinates the school feeding programme in the state. However, the office of the Vice President retains overall supervisory responsibility for the school feeding program at the national level.

With support from Trust Africa, SPACES FOR CHANGE | S4C carried

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out an independent evaluation of the HGSFP program in Imo and Abia States in order to assess the performance of the program within states and communicate findings to support the continuous improvement of educational outcomes in the country. In order to achieve an extensive evaluation of the HGSFP, SPACES FOR CHANGE | S4C conducted an extensive review of secondary data sourced from internal and external sources. To fill the gap in the reporting and analysis of publicly-available data, the organization carried out a combination of targeted surveys, key informant interviews and

focus group discussions during which 8,315 pupils, 669 parents, 88 public primary schools in urban and rural areas, 55 head and assistant-head teachers and 43 female food vendors were engaged directly, totaling 9,082 persons across the two states.

In direct meetings with the executive leadership, policymakers, heads of ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in the two states on January 22 and 24, 2019, including town halls with communities, vendors, parents, head teachers, local farmers and other stakeholders with an interest in the welfare of

children and the education sector, S4C delivered evidence-based feedback to project implementers at various levels, highlighting where best practice needs to be consolidated and also, where gaps in implementation needs to be bridged. This policy brief summarizes research findings, highlighting the strengths, gaps and challenges the initiative is facing. It concludes by proffering recommendations for continuously improving educational outcomes through greater performance of the feeding programme.

WHAT IS

WORKING WELL?

■ **Spikes in school enrolment:** Survey findings show a spike in school enrolment. School authorities—head-teachers and classroom teachers—confirmed that overall student population figures have surged in their schools since the initiative started. In one Abia school, student population increased from 305 to 406, and jumped from 300 to 402 pupils in another. Incidents of pupils moving from private schools to government-owned primary schools were recorded, especially in Abia State.

■ **Improvement in school attendance:** The research established that school feeding motivated the children to come to

school, much earlier than before. Pupils were also happy to stay in school, and to play, thanks to the major uptake in their physical wellbeing and strength. Ultimately, the programme has been successful in checking truancy in the schools. However, 92.3% of pupils in the two states indicate they would continue to attend school if the HGSFP is discontinued.

■ **Positive impact on local economies:** Agro-produce and ingredients used in cooking the meals for school children are sourced from local markets, leading to a boost in sales and economic empowerment for local farmers. Similarly, the program created employment for vendors, who in turn

create further employment when they get additional hands to assist them. Multiplier effect on local transportation was also recorded as vendors usually engage the services of transporters—motorcycle, tricycle and bicycle riders and commercial taxis—to deliver cooked meals to schools.

■ **Gender empowerment:** All 43 vendors interviewed across the two states were women. Abia State alone employed 5300 female cooks, while Imo has about 2,345, totaling 7,645 women, known as food vendors. The food vendors are required to have valid bank accounts and also pass all medical tests prior to





covers all school children in government-owned primary schools in classes 1 - 6. Also, 12,000 primary school teachers are fed alongside the pupils. Plans are currently underway to extend the program to junior secondary school students in the state. In addition, the meals were served on time, particularly at midday, between the hours of 10.00 a.m. and 11:00am.

■ **Prospects for food security:** The HGSFP has profound implications for food security. For instance, Abia State Government's proposal to establish a food bank in the state heightens the prospect for food security. To both complement FGN's funding for feeding school children and to ensure meal frequency in schools, Abia State stores and supplies foodstuffs to vendors in the state.

The state makes this happen by depositing foodstuffs at local governments, which will be subsequently shared to the vendors in each locality. Every local government area (L.G.A) has a cooperative for all the registered cooks in the area, and each cooperative is further grouped into clusters, according to the schools. The quantity of foodstuff supplied to each LGA, and onward to the schools, depends on the student enrolment figures in the area and schools respectively.

interviewed in the two states affirmed that their parents no longer give them money for snacks since the HGSFP commenced. Women, especially young mothers, saved time from cooking frequently, increasing the time they have for their businesses and other productive economic activities.

■ **Wide coverage of schools:** The school feeding program currently covers 1, 281 public schools in Imo while about 50 schools are yet to be covered in the state. In Abia, the school feeding program

employment. Therefore, the HGSFP empowered women with access to decent work, control over their own time, deepened financial inclusion and provided women with opportunities to participate meaningfully in economic decision-making.

■ **Time and money savings for households:** Focus group discussions with parents in the two states established that households saved money on snacks, breakfast and lunch as a result of the school feeding programme. About 35% of the school children

WHAT IS NOT WORKING WELL?

■ **Inadequate food rations:** At the ratio of 36.53%, insufficiency of meals topped the list of complaints from the pupils interviewed across the two states. In Imo, 1563 pupils (over 50%) stated that they want more food after each meal. In some cases, enumerators spotted up to three or more pupils sharing an egg or small portions of food. Vendors demanded an increase in monthly payments to enable them serve quality meals and increase food portions.

■ **Quality control:** In both states, meals occasionally included fruits and vegetables, and were low in protein. Focus group discussions with teachers and parents elicited mixed concerns regarding hygiene. Survey responses from 56 out of 4,102 pupils in Abia and 33 out of 3,868 in Imo disclosed frequent complaints of diarrhoea after meals - most especially, potato porridge. Overall, 13.32% of pupils across the two states complained about meal quality, with about 269 students mentioning that these complaints were not resolved. The non-resolution of complaints stems from lack of grievance and feedback mechanisms at the school levels. Vendors prepare the meals independently, mostly in their homes and

deliver at schools. Imo and Abia State governments maintain that food vendors are medically examined for fitness before recruiting them. In Imo, the state's Ministry of Health screened the vendors and also trained them before commencement of the job for health reasons. Both states say they conduct periodic workshops to educate vendors about hygiene and safety practices.

vendors arrive with food to school, putting the children through emotional turmoil. In both states, the feeding programme is yet to reach a number of schools. Complaints from the head teachers of the affected schools to state authorities have not been addressed.

■ **Dereliction of Parental Duties:** Although the project is enabling households, especially mothers, to save time and



Adequate supervision of meal preparation sites and methods will be necessary to enhance oversight and quality control of the meals served to the pupils.

■ **Exclusion of certain classes and schools:** The meals only reached pupils in primary 1-3 in Imo State, excluding those in other classes, such as the nursery and upper primary. The excluded groups felt sad each time

money, the flip side is that some parents are now shifting their feeding obligation to the schools. The survey recorded several responses from children who no longer eat breakfast and lunch at home because of the feeding program. 490 Abia pupils and 515 pupils in Imo interviewed do not eat before going to school. Consequently, fainting in class is now rampant in many of the schools, with attendant effects on child welfare

and development.

■ **Overstressed learning infrastructure:** While the HGSFP has indeed boosted enrollment and attendance rates, and improved learning outcomes in schools, the surge in student population has equally put a stress on the existing educational facilities. The results are overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials and shortage of teachers to deal with the increase. However, as of January 2019, Abia State government has reconstructed and built 340 classrooms to complement existing school facilities in the state overburdened by the increase in student population.

■ **Delay in vendors' payments:** Most vendors interviewed demanded a review of the N70-per meal to N150, considering the high cost of foodstuffs. Sometimes the funds for feeding are disbursed late in the month or completely skipped. These gaps hamper the consistency of the programme. In the end, children are disappointed on days when vendors don't show up with food. Besides the delay in making payments to vendors were other reports relating to irregularities and discrepancies in vendors' remuneration. The discrepancies meant that vendors in cluster schools could not pool resources together to prepare meals, save cost, and enhance both their profits and value-adding capacity. It is important to investigate these differences to ascertain whether or not they are

linked to graft.

Criteria for vendor selection: Abia State authorities state that vendors were employed following application forms completed at the local government offices while Imo recruits female vendors that are indigenes of the communities where the schools are located. Field survey and focus group discussions however establish that there is no defined criteria for vendor selection, with many vendors revealing

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different modalities followed in their selection. Similarly, what informs posting to schools is not clear, fuelling public distrust and claims of political patronage.

■ **Poor coordination between vendors and farmers:** While government says over 100,000 smallholder farmers were linked to the food supply chain, research findings show that some of the vendors buy the food from local markets, undermining

farmer empowerment intended by the programme. There is little or no coordination between food vendors and farmers. Research showed that the HGSFP has not integrated enough smallholder farms. A host of local farmers interviewed were unaware of the existence, scope and benefits of the program. As opposed to buying food produce from the open market, HGSFP implementers can bolster local food production by linking vendors directly to local farmers where food can be obtained fresh, timely, and at cheaper rates.

■ **Community participation in the HGSFP is low,** with the result that local residents lack sufficient information about the program. More so, parental consent was not sought prior to the programme's take-off. This information gap is responsible for the speculations fuelling doubts about government's motive for feeding school children instead of providing free education. For instance, rumours of food poisoning hinged on the federal government's suppression of the Biafra agitation hurt the perception and reception of the programme in some localities, with some parents instructing their wards to avoid the meals altogether. Vendors and teachers addressed this tension by tasting the meals first to inspire confidence. Although this gesture helped to assuage discontent and deepen programme acceptance, this situation would have been avoidable if there were systematic structures for

community engagement in place.

■ **Gaps in monitoring and evaluation:** Although monitoring mechanisms in both states appear fairly robust, evidence from the field showed that these mechanisms are inadequate to ensure meal frequency and compliance to high hygiene standards. Abia has a robust monitoring mechanism starting with the 29-man steering committee drawn from the Ministries of Women

agricultural officers, key members of the School Base Management Committee (SBMC) like the chairman and secretary, one head teacher and a woman leader. Head teachers assist in monitoring the scheme through the use of log books kept in every school where the feeding programme is active. The log book is used to evaluate and record the cooks' quality of service. Vendors are required to sign the log book everyday meals are

adequate information on the basis of which they can effectively monitor and demand accountability from food vendors. In Imo, the monitoring and complaint mechanism starts with the principal to the education secretary in every local government to the coordinator at the local government level to the state's focal person, who then remits complaints received to Office of the Social Investment Program domiciled in the Office of the Vice President.

■ **HGSFP officials at state levels are unpaid:** FGN pays the money for feeding school children directly to food vendors through their bank accounts. However, other officials involved in the coordination and implementation of the program at state and local levels are unpaid. This is particularly true for Imo State.

■ **Exclusion of line ministries involved in educational development:** One dominant question that arose during the engagement with Imo policy stakeholders is why the feeding programme is domiciled in the Ministry of Happiness instead of the Ministry of Education. Other line ministries such as the ministries of agriculture, health, education, women affairs, including the National Union of Teachers and Parents Teachers' Association are excluded from the day-to-day implementation of the programme in both states.



Affairs, Agriculture, Health, Planning, Chieftaincy Affairs and Abia State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBE B). The committee is responsible for piloting and monitoring the implementation of the feeding programme in the entire state. The monitoring team at the local government level includes desk officers, the education secretaries, nutrition officers, environmental officers, health officers,

supplied to schools. Vendors receive payments directly from FGN, but report to desk officers at the local government and to state officials. Hence, head teachers exercise minimal control and supervision of vendor activities. Also, head teachers are not aware of the amount of funding the food vendors receive, including the criteria and the schedule of payment. As such, they do not feel sufficiently carried along, and lack