

**HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING SYSTEM AS A SAFETY NET FOR  
SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: HISTORICAL  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*Deprivations in education, health, employment, housing and extreme poverty among Nigerian households have constrained the progression of attaining Universal Basic Education programme objectives as a probable social safety net. As a result of this, dropout is frequent and low school completion rates indicate that education quality remains a major challenge especially in poor and rural communities. Thus, this paper examined Home-Grown School Feeding System as a safety net for sustainable educational development in Nigeria; Historical Perspective. The study concluded that Home-Grown School Feeding System sustained school enrolment, attendance rates, retention rates, pupils academic performance and reduced dropout rates in public primary schools. It was recommended among others that Federal government should expand the coverage of school feeding programme to all states of the federation predominantly where dropout rate is prevalent. To enhance all round school feeding and health programme, the school management and other education stakeholders such as the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) should initiate school feeding integrated intervention programmes that incorporate school-based*

*deworming, WASH, and micronutrient supplementation for primary school pupils.*

**Keywords:** Home-Grown School Feeding System, Sustainability, Educational Development, Public, Primary Schools

### **Introduction**

Education is a means to address the ever changing situation of the world as well as medium to make ready children bring something new for the world. In order to help people to better understand the world they live in, and to stimulate them to act appropriately, it is necessary to involve them in educational practices that aligned with sustainable development perspectives.

Sustainable development, according to the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD, 2019), meets the needs for the present, without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. Sustainability can be viewed as a long-term, effective result of a project, a venture, an action or an investment without additional future resources being consumed (Selvana, 2013). It is the propensity of programme to continue and to grow in time. Universal measure of sustainability includes economic, financial, social, environmental and educational sustainability.

The United Nations Educational , Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014 ) defines education sustainability as sustainable development that enables every human being to acquire the necessary knowledge , skills , attitudes and values to shape a sustainable future. It involves the inclusion into teaching and learning of key sustainable development issues; Climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty alleviation and sustainable consumption, for example. It also requires participatory methods of teaching and learning to motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour, and to take action for sustainable development.

Consequently, curriculum for sustainable development encourages competencies such as strategic thinking, the vision of future possibilities and collective decision-making. Sustainable educational development can therefore be seen as one that requires a shift toward all children's active participation and engagement in learning. There are socioeconomic issues in Nigeria, like other African

nations, such as deprivation with the associated problems of hunger and malnutrition, low enrollment and school completion. Therefore, the Federal Government introduced the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Program (HGSFHP) in 2004 through the Universal Basic Education Act (UBE) in order to meet some of these challenges in particular reducing hunger and improving the nutritional and health status of school children. Twelve states, including Osun State, started the programme, currently, 35 states have benefited from the programme since its commencement with Kwara State as the 35<sup>th</sup> State to implement. Since then the initiative has metamorphosed into the Elementary School Food and Health System (ESF & HP), created solely by the states and its local governments. The School Feeding Programme, which was supposed to be sponsored by the three-tiers of government (federal, state and local) started entirely with the State of Osun on May 6, 2006, and was revitalized on April 30, 2012 (Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme, 2019).

In April 2012, at 1,378 public primary schools, there were 155,318 pupils in grades 1-3 at the start of the re-launch of the Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme. Two months later (June 2012), the state registered 194,253 primary school pupils in grade 1-3 – a 25 per cent rise of over 38,000 pupils. The extension of the programme to cover pupils in grade 4 further brought the total number of pupils to 252,793 (OESF&HP, 2019). This brief description of the available data slightly affirms the increasing pattern and enrolment profile of pupils in public primary schools as a result of the School Feeding Programme initiation in Nigeria. This implies that School Feeding System could result to reduction in the percentage of primary-age children out of school in Nigeria.

Yunusa, Gumel, Adegbusi and Adegbusi (2012) indicated that students in school feeding programmes have the ability to boost their performance as it has allowed them to regularly attend school and study more effectively. Akuamoah-Boateng and Sam-Tagoe (2018) also supported that the school feeding programme improves primary school children's enrolment, participation and retention. As observed by Oyefade (2014), the decision to enrol a child in school and, thereafter, for the child to attend regularly is influenced by many factors. These include the perceived value of education, the availability of job

opportunities, schooling's direct and indirect costs, and the availability and quality of school facilities.

Food benefits given to pupils such as school meals make up for additional childcare expenses for parents. He further observed that implementation of SFP is associated with an increase in enrolment, particularly for School feeding is increasingly recognized as a major investment in both human capital and in local economies which has accelerated country-led demand. It is seen as playing an important role not only in emergency contexts but also in social stability, peace-building and national development (World Food Programme, 2019). School feeding goes far beyond the plate of food, producing high returns in the following critical areas: education and gender equality, health and nutrition; social protection and local economies and agriculture.

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### **School Feeding Programme**

School feeding programmes encompass a diverse array of designs, implementation arrangements and management structures. These programmes can either be nationally owned or administered by international organisations. Occasionally, they can be run through a partnership between a national government and international or non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, school feeding programmes operate in a range of contexts and under various constraints, which further add to the programmatic diversity (African Union, 2018). However, despite the diversity, there are common trends and features in all school feeding programmes. For instance, the African Union (2018) observed the following commonalities in school feeding programmes across AU member states:

- Almost all school feeding programmes target primary school students;
- Most school feeding programmes further target geographically, often based on vulnerability assessments;
- School feeding programmes primarily serve in-school meals;
- Complementary health and nutrition interventions are present in nearly all school feeding programmes, with deworming, micro-nutrient fortification and training being the most common;
- National school feeding policies exist or are in the process of being elaborated/adopted in the clear majority of AU countries;
- Ministries of education and/or the World Food Programme are generally the main implementers for school feeding;
- Communities are involved in the implementation for nearly all school feeding programmes, primarily in meal preparation and serving, giving in-kind or monetary contributions and procurement;
- Rate of enrolment, rate of attendance and other education and learning outcomes are the most common objectives/indicators for school feeding programmes, though a host of school feeding programmes also feature health and nutrition outcomes as objectives; and
- The expansion of Home Grown School Feeding elements, increased cross-sectoral cooperation and transitioning to national ownership are indicated to be the focus areas for future policy making on the continent.

### **The Origin of School Feeding System**

School feeding is simply the provision of food to children through schools. According to Oyefade (2014), different countries have one or a combination of the two feeding modalities in place for various objectives. However, they can be grouped into two broad categories: in-school meals and take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. Historically, in-school meals have been the most popular modality of school feeding interventions. The school feeding can be in turn grouped into two common categories: programme that provides meals and programmes that provides high energy biscuits or snacks to generate greater impacts on school

enrolment, retention rates, and reduce gender or social gaps (Akanbi, 2013). Uduku (2011) contended that there are indications of a significant swing in thinking about school feeding and many elements of this new thinking are being promoted keenly under the rubric of “home grown school feeding.”

In order to improve the nutritional status of school children, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in September, 2005 under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Education. The programme aimed to provide pupils with adequate meal during the school day (FME, 2007). The scheme, officially known as Home Grown School Feeding Programme insisted on buying the foodstuffs from the local farmers. It therefore reduced the rate of malnutrition while it also provided the local farmers the opportunity to sell their produce to participating schools. According to the Federal Government’s directive, Federal, State and Local Governments were to fund the programme with the State and Local Governments providing the bulk.

### **History of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Nigeria**

Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programme in Nigeria has passed through various phases in recent years. To understand the how and why the current programme has emerged in its existing structure, this section provides a brief overview of the programmes political history. The national HGSF programme was first launched in 2005 it was housed under the School Health Unit of the Ministry of Education. At this time, it was called the ‘Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme’. It was managed by the Ministry of Education and was grounded in new federal government legislation and policy which aimed to improve education.

In 2004, the Nigerian federal government passed the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act which states that all basic education is compulsory and free of charge to children of school age in Nigeria. This Act provided the legislative backing for introducing a public programme on school feeding. Around this time, there was support from international development organisations to trial home-grown school feeding initiatives. For example, in 2003, African Governments included locally sourced school feeding programmes in the Comprehensive

Africa Agriculture Development Programme. That same year, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, together with the United Nations World Food Programme and the Millennium Hunger Task Force, launched a pilot Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme in twelve countries, one of which was Nigeria (State of Osun, 2012). The new national HGSF Strategic Plan 2016-2020 identifies the following additional factors as reasons for why the pilot was not successful:

- "Failure of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to disburse funds to pilot States as well as non-remittance of counterpart funds from participating States."
- "Inadequate monitoring and evaluation."
- "Inadequate sensitization and advocacy of relevant stakeholders, resulting in low community involvement and participation."
- "Lack of supporting infrastructure such as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities."
- "Institutional structure at Federal level was not made fully operational."
- "Inadequate policy and legal framework at the State and Federal level."

#### **Home-Grown School Feeding System**

##### **Concept of Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme**

The basic concept of the programme is to provide children in public elementary schools with one hot, nutritious meal, prepared from locally grown food stuffs every school day. Deworming is done twice in a year because worm infestation can cause malnutrition and anaemia in children and contributes to retarded growth. Various committees are put in place to ensure effective implementation of the programme (OESF&HP, 2019).

##### **Concept of Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and

- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Thus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries - developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned. Interpretations will vary, but must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it.

Development involves a progressive transformation of economy and society. A development path that is sustainable in a physical sense could theoretically be pursued even in a rigid social and political setting. But physical sustainability cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to such considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits. Even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation.

#### **Home-Grown School Feeding System for Sustainable School Enrolment and Retention**

As observed by Oyefade (2014), the decision to enroll a child in school and, thereafter, for the child to attend regularly is influenced by many factors. These include the perceived value of education, the availability of employment opportunities, the direct and indirect cost of schooling and the availability and quality of school facilities. Food incentives offered to students such as school meals compensate parents for direct educational costs. He observed further that implementation of SFP is associated with increase in enrolment, particularly for girls.

Also, several studies have found a strong relationship between education and poverty, particularly inequality. The poor are heavily deprived and so are their children. As observed by Oyefade (2014), several factors with significant impact on many dimensions of poverty on school attendance and education quality, particularly early childhood malnutrition, deprivation based on gender and income inequality tend to be responsible. In many countries, such as Brazil, Philippines, Cambodia, Mali, El Salvador, Indonesia, Ghana, Bangladesh,



Ecuador etc where school feeding programmes are implemented, data reveals that the programme has increased enrolment and attendance rates over the years (Akanbi, 2013).

### **Home-Grown School Feeding System for Sustainable Pupil's Academic Performance**

Many studies on nutrition have shown that under nutrition in children stunts their growth and mental development, hence, the relationship between nutrition and academic performance (Alabi, 2003). Although, food has classically been perceived as a means of providing energy and building materials to the body, research over the years has provided exciting evidence for the influence of dietary factors on mental function. Not only are children motivated to get into school but also there is a significant impact on their nutritional status and development, cognitive capabilities and academic performance. Literature has shown that the development and learning potential of the beneficiaries depend on the quality and nutrient components of food (Jukes, Drake and Bundy, 2008).

Nutritional and health status are powerful influences on a child's learning and how a child performs in school. Children who lack certain nutrients in their diet do not have the same potential for learning as healthy and well-nourished children. Children with cognitive and sensory impairments naturally perform less and are more likely to repeat grades. The irregular school attendance of malnourished and unhealthy children is one of the key factors for poor performance (Uduku, 2011).

Yunusa et al (2012) noted that students in School Feeding Programmes have the potential for improving their performance because it enabled them attend school regularly and studied more effectively. He found that in a study carried out in Jamaica, children in Grade 2 scored higher in Arithmetic when they started being fed at school. However, the impact of School Feeding Programme on the academic performance of pupils has been embraced with mixed feelings. It was observed that although SFPs motivate parents to enroll their children in school, its impact on academic performance is mixed and depends on various factors within the context in which the programme is set. Drawing from this, Uduku (2011) opined that SFPs

would best improve the performance of pupils when coupled with adequate learning materials, physical facilities and teacher motivation.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded from the findings of this study that Home-Grown School Feeding System served as a safety net for sustainable educational development in Nigeria. Since sustainable education guarantees active participation and engagement of all children to formal education, this study revealed that school feeding system is instrumental for achieving this sustainable goal. The study found that poor access to quality education can be improved by implementing Home-Grown School Feeding Programme which directly has positive impact on pupils' enrolment, attendance, retention, and cognitive abilities. The study also concluded that Home-Grown School Feeding System is necessary to deter dropout from school and enhance school completion rates.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made in the study.

1. As a result of the positive impact of Home-Grown School Feeding System on pupils' attendance, retention and performance, policies that will guide the need to make school feeding system mandatory in basic schools should be enacted by policy makers in education.
2. To enhance all round school feeding and health programme, the school's management and other education stakeholders such as the School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) should initiate school feeding integrated intervention programmes that incorporate school-based deworming, WASH, and micronutrient supplementation for school primary school pupils.
3. The Federal Ministry of Education, State Ministry of Education and Local Government Education Authority should sensitize local communities on the aims and objectives of Home Grown School Feeding Programme.

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