



Public plate and socio-economic outcomes: Explaining the impact of the national home-grown school feeding programme on out-of-school children and the local economy in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Extant studies on the implementation of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) in Nigeria have extensively explored the neo-liberal inclination of the programme and its socioeconomic impact. However, the program's performance indicators in stimulating a reduction in the population of out-of-school children (OOSCs) and the multiplier effects on the economy of the local participating communities in Nsukka have largely remained understudied. To address this lacuna, this paper aims to assess the impact of NHGSFP in the area. A mixed method of data collection and a qualitative descriptive method of data analysis were adopted. Using welfare state analysis as an explanatory tool, the paper concludes that the implementation of NHGSFP in Nsukka shows a strong relationship between the implementation of the NHGSFP and the reduction in the number of OOSCs in Nsukka. In addition to the multiplier effects on

the economy of the local communities, the programme has arguably stimulated a viable and ready local market, which has contributed to boosting the income of the indigenous farmers and traders who supply farm produce to the food vendors. Findings also indicate that sustaining the gains of NHGSFP requires holistic funding commitments and the provision of all the necessary logistics and regulatory environments by all the levels of government in Nigeria.

Keywords: Out-of-school children, welfare state, local economy, Nsukka, local participants, NHGSFP

Introduction

Over the years, developing economies have faced the dire problems of access to basic education, hunger, vulnerability of households, and overall impairment in the future human resources requirements for development (Mboza, 2023). Reports indicate that despite the global improvements in agriculture and food production, an estimated 811 million people sleep without food, and about 0.88 billion suffer food insecurity (Global Hunger Index- GHI, 2021 & World Food Program- WFP, 2020). The World Food Council (WFC) reported that over 9 million people die annually from hunger-related causes, with acute food insecurity likely to worsen in 20 countries (Hunger hotspots, 2022). More so, these vulnerable segments of the population are denied the basic infrastructure of survival, such as clean water, and many

resort to "washing with dirty waters" (Nwobodo & Nche, 2022, p. 1) in preparation for school and doing home chores. Given the severe implications of food insecurity on access to basic education, the United Nations (UN) Millennium Declarations of 2000 and 2015 were focused on eradicating extreme poverty, achieving universal primary education, and bridging the gender gap in accessing primary and secondary education (UN, 2015). Immediate actions have been taken by the World Bank (WB) and its development partners (including the WFP) to achieve these goals by launching the Education for All (EFA) and Fast Track Initiative (FTIs) in 2002. The EFA and FTI's primary objective was to support low-income countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the EFA (Brigham & Haug, 2022).

In 2015, the WFP introduced the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), focusing on ending hunger, ensuring food security, and improving accessibility to quality education (WFP, 2017). HGSFP has its plank and modality in serving prepared food to school children and developing a value chain by creating jobs for the cooks and ensuring a sustainable income for smallholder farmers (WFP, 2013). It was initially conceived in 2004 as a pilot programme in twelve African states, including Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia (AUDA-NEPAD School Feeding Handbook, 2019). The African Union (AU) adopted the programme in 2016 in a bid to promote sustainable food and nutrition security, in addition to realizing the AU Agenda 2063 encapsulated in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) (CESA, 2021). Critical to the implementation of HGSFP by AU is to align to the global education agenda in 2030 and to overcome the trajectory of underdevelopment in African states (CESA, 2021), where many African countries such as Nigeria and Sudan have experienced extreme poverty due to states' actors' misplacement of priorities

(Okon et al., 2024). Available statistics show that by 2019, 46 sovereign states in Africa, including Nigeria, had enacted national policies and enabling laws for the implementation of HSFP (African Union, 2021).

NHGSFP was initially implemented in Nigeria in 2004 as a pilot programme in twelve (12) states. Owing to setbacks orchestrated by the inadequate legal framework at the national and sub-national levels, the policy objectives of the programme were re-enacted in 2016 (NHGSFP Strategic Plan, 2016). This was in keeping with Nigeria's poise to stanch extreme poverty, hunger, vulnerability, and unequal access to basic education (National Population Commission, 2018). The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) provided a plank for the implementation of NHGSFP. The target was to provide 5.5 million pupils in public primary 1-3 free food and to create a ripple effect in rural economic development (NHGSFP, 2020). Since 2021, the programme has been instrumental in enrolling 27, 889 388 pupils in public primary schools in Nigeria and 9, 887 000 receiving free food across the federation. It has also led to the creation of direct and indirect jobs, with 120,000 cooks and food preparers and 1000 transporters engaged. This is in

addition to engaging 5000 food processors, 2000 food packages and handlers, 5000 monitoring food service departments, and 550 safety and quality inspectors (Ferrero et al, 2023).

Before the implementation of NHGSFP in Enugu State in 2016 (The Guardian, 2021), the total number of out-of-school children was 416,832, with 156,092 out-of-school boys and 150,168 out-of-school girls (ESSPIN, 2014). Nsukka was ranked the 4th highest in out-of-school-children (OOSC), with 15,706 dropouts and 15,129 never-attended schools and a total of 30,835 OOSC (ESSPIN, 2014).

Despite the challenges, the implementation of NHGSFP in Enugu has seen a significant reduction in OOSC in the state and the Nsukka local government area. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of OOSC in Enugu State reduced from 406,832 to 222,584. In Nsukka, the number of OOSC reduced from 30,835 to 139, and 126 small-holder farmers and food vendors mobilized as food preparers in various public primary schools in the local government area (Enugu State Annual School Census Report, 2019; Nsukka Local Government Council Annual Bulletin, 2021). Thus, the implementation of NHGSFP in Enugu State and Nsukka in particular and the impact on the public

primary school enrollment and completion and the local economy has since aroused scholarly debate.

Studies such as Allen and Guthman (2006), Morgan (2006), Morgan and Sonnino (2008), Sonnino (2010), Sonnino et al. (2014), Coca and Barbosa (2018), Barbosa et al. (2022), Singh and Fernandes (2017), Ahern et al. (2021), Mensah and Karriem (2021), Destaw et al. (2022), Dos Santos et al. (2022), Iddrisu et al. (2022), Igboji et al. (2020, 2022), among others, have commented on the neo-liberal inclination of NHGSFP, as well as its impact on stimulation of local economy and improvement of school enrollment, completion, nutritional values and performance of pupils. However, the studies have hardly provided measurable evidence on how the NHGSFP has impacted on OOSC phenomenon and stimulated the local economy in Nsukka. The paper exploits this gap to interrogate the impact of NHGSFP on OOSC and the local economy in the Nsukka local government area.

Literature review

NHGSFP: conceptualization, structure and impact

NHGSFP is a non-contributory social safety net designed to provide meals for

school children (Gentilini & Omamo, 2009; World Bank, 2018). It is conceptualized as the "provision of cooked or raw foods to school children, requiring either to give school children raw foods at the end or beginning of the week or month and to those who attend school regularly" (Oganga, 2013, p. 11). NHGSFP has two major perspectives, namely: (1) on-site or in-school meals in which children are given food to support their access to education and enhance learning by reducing short-term hunger; and (2) take-home rations in which food is given to school children targeting their family members, and in most cases, on the condition of sending their kids to school (WFP, 2020; AU Commission, 2018). On-site or in-school is the dominant perspective adopted by the FG in partnership with sub-national governments, non-state actors and development partners. Under this perspective, pupils are served meals and snacks during school hours and are occasionally given the remnant as a take-home (NSIO, 2018).

The essence of NHGSFP is to shift the attention of pupils from worrying over an empty stomach to concentrating on classroom activities thereby improving their retentive memory and their overall performance and reduction in the

incidence of OOSC (WFP, 2022).

According to UNICEF (2013), the majority of the OOSC, especially at the primary education level have never attended school in their lifetime. Others are children who were enrolled in school but in the process abandoned the school without completing or transferring to another school to complete the programme (Nandi et al., 2021). There are voluntary and involuntary OOSC or dropouts. While involuntary withdrawal deals with non-eligible ones who are excused by the school authorities due to one reason or another, voluntary withdrawal refers to those at the school-age who are not in school perhaps as a result of early marriage, child labour, or other extenuating circumstances (Sherrel, 1967; Amedu & Ossai, 2023).

The NHGSFP is coordinated by the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) under multi-sectoral collaborations of relevant and supportive stakeholder ministries including education, health, agriculture, justice, budget and planning, trade and commerce, as well as women affairs (Onah & Onah, 2021; National Social Investment Office, 2017). NHGSFP has its major focus on ministries of agriculture, education and health, with local women, farmers and health workers engaged as food vendors, suppliers of

needed farm produce and health and nutritional inspectors in schools (Cummings & Kulutuye, 2017). The federal government provides 100 per cent of the cost of the programme which is limited to primary 1 to 3, while the state governments are expected to take up the funding of primary 3-6 (Onah & Onah, 2021).

The policy imperativeness of NHGSFP has long been variously stressed in the literature (Wineman et al., 2022; Igboji et al., 2022). What differ in the literature are contextual perspectives on the socio-economic impact of the programme. Scholars such as Allen and Guthman (2006), Morgan (2006), Morgan and Sonnino (2008), Sonnino (2010), Sonnino et al. (2014), Coca and Barbosa (2018), Barbosa et al. (2022) etc contend that the NHGSFP was initiated to reproduce and inflate the neoliberal agenda. A neoliberal ideology sees school as an institution of the state (Althusser, 2014; Ibeanu, 1993). Thus, by promoting private sourcing of funds, reduction of state intervention in the economy and devolution of responsibilities to the local capacities (local farmers & food vendors), the neoliberal philosophy believes that the market is the most optimal means of resolving social problems (Coca & Barbosa, 2018). According to Allen and

Guthman (2006), by externalizing capacities in both conceptualizing and financing NHGSFP, its advocates unwittingly displace the role of the sovereign state in the management of its basic duties. Drawing on the experience of the Republic of Brazil, Coca and Barbosa (2018) in corroboration, argued that although the school feeding programme in the country specifically contributed to its removal from the annual Hunger Map of the world, the programme is merely responding to the neoliberal diets because the food items served to the pupils are merchandized. They further argue that commoditization and mercantilisation of food served to school children is an authentic crime.

In spite of its ideological contestations, scholars like Singh and Fernandes (2017), Asante et al. (2020), Ahern et al. (2021), Mensah and Karriem (2021), Destaw et al. (2022), Dos Santos et al. (2022), Rettig and Hijmans (2022), Iddrisu et al. (2022), Igboji et al. (2022), Okolo-Obasi and Uduji (2022), Solomon and Yusuf (2022), and Wineman et al. (2022) have all pointed to the significant contribution of HGSFP to academic enrollment, performance and rural development. For instance, Singh and Fernandes (2017) called attention to its stimulation of local production systems and the

diversification of food nutrients in Ghana. In their various studies, Adekunle and Christiana (2016), Adebisi et al. (2019), Azubike and Mbah (2019), Igboji et al. (2020), Alabede et al. (2020), Olajibutu et al. (2021), Agu et al. (2023), and Onah and Onah (2021) have altogether stressed the impact of NHGSFP on the improvement of school enrollment, nutritional values, and performance of pupils. While these perspectives on NHGSFP are arguably defensible and plausible in providing insight into their various contextual applications, they, however, failed to shed adequate light on how the HGSFP has addressed the OOSC phenomenon and stimulated the local economy in the Nsukka local government area. This lacuna forms the point of departure in this study.

NHGSFP and socio-economic impact in Nsukka: the welfare state theoretical discourse

The theoretical assumptions regarding the welfare state have some analytical utility in the analysis of the socio-economic impact of HGSFP in Nsukka. The earliest development in the discourses of the welfare state is associated with the state welfare programme adopted in 1870 in Germany by Otto von Bismarck. However, it was in 1941 that William Temple coined the

word "welfare state" to make a distinction between war period in Britain and the welfare state of Nazi Germany (Atherton and Reader, 2011:xv). By 1942, William Beveridge recommended state responsibility for individuals from cradle to grave (Beveridge, 1942). Other scholars associated with the theory are Wilensky and Lebaux (1958), Briggs (1961), and Wilensky (1974). At the heights of the ideological struggles in the 1990s, the theory attracted the attention of the left-wing and was reflected in the works of Esping-Anderson (1990,1999), Korpi (1983, 1985, 1990), Korpi and Joakim (2003), Gosta Esping-Anderson (1985, 1989, 1990, 1999), Quadagno (1987), Gough (1978, 1979).

More recently, the welfare state theory has been reflected in the works of Goul-Anderson (2007, 2012), Korpi (2001), and Korpi and Lindbom (2003). A synthesis of these works reveals that the primary purpose of welfare politics is to promote the economic and social well-being of citizens based on the concepts of equality of opportunity and the equitable distribution of resources. It is a form of state intervention in the welfare of the masses in a capitalist market economy (Gough, 1989). The concept of welfare state policy is a complex combination of public policies that create and distribute

social security, retirement benefits, education, healthcare, and other services between the government, the market, and society (Ventre et al., 2015). According to Briggs (1961), the welfare state began as a deliberate state policy to modify the impact of market forces on the masses by making provisions for social amenities. Seen from this perspective, the welfare state ensures the continuation, stability, and efficient working of the economic system, and in doing so, it integrates other vulnerable social groups for the maintenance of the social order (Myles & Quadagno, 2002). Although in contrast with the neoliberal orthodoxy that assigns the market as the most efficient means of resolving social problems, proponents of the welfare state insist on its principles because of the pervasiveness of market failure prevalent in postcolonial states like Nigeria (Stiglitz, 2017; Ake, 1981).

Most contemporary measures of the welfare state are based on the degree to which the state owns the provision of welfare services (Skillen, 1985; Adejumobi, 1991; Mbah, 2016). Esping-Anderson's (1990) critiques of the theory led to the development of three typologies of welfare regimes consisting of liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare regimes. While the

liberal welfare regime is an incarnation of the classical liberal orthodoxy that believes in the superiority of the market ethos, the conservatives believe in marginal state intervention. The social democratic welfare regime places a high priority on the provision of social interventionist policies by the parliamentary democracy because "social policy is not only emancipatory but is also a precondition for economic efficiency" (Esping-Anderson, 1990, p.20). Scholars such as Mitchell (1991), Holiday (2000), Gough (2004), and Powel and Kim (2014) believe that Esping-Anderson's welfare typology is deficient because it is too narrow, involving only 18 advanced countries of Europe and cannot describe the nature of welfare programs in the developing countries. They, therefore, believe that the welfare state refers to "the entire set of institutional arrangements, policies and practices affecting the outcomes and the stratification effects in diverse social and cultural contexts" (Gough, 2004, p.27).

The above viewpoints are considered germane because they address the question of compromise between strict private and public ownership of the social welfare services in Nigeria, both in conceptualization, design, and implementation. As the world witnessed

the reconfiguration of politics from a welfarist state to a neoliberal market state, the state is expected to be retrenched and rolled back from the provision of basic social amenities to society on the assumption of the efficiency of the market. The foisting of this market ethos on the Nigerian state through colonialism and subsequent neoliberal economic and political reforms has resulted in moving Nigeria state from a relative welfare state or ad hoc welfarist state to a full-blown market economy state, yet with little compromise, resulting in reforms made through existing public institutions to improve people's welfare and broaden their democratic rights (Ekanade, 2014; Mbah, 2016; Adesina, 2009). It is these historical contexts that informed the implementation of NHGSFP in Nigeria by the administration of Muhammadu Buhari in 2016.

Methodology

The study employed mixed methods of data collection. Through the documentary approach, the researchers collected much of the secondary data related to the study utilizing desk review and analysis of relevant materials comprising scholarly publications in reputable and impact factor journals and official publications, including statistical data and annual

reports of FG, Enugu State government and Nsukka Local Government Council on the implementation of NHGSFP, institutional reports and policy briefs, magazines and newspaper editorials and commentaries. These were triangulated with primary data gathered by the researchers through key informant interviews (KIIs)/focus group discussions (FGDs) following a long field trip and study, conducted from June to September 2023 on 46 public primary schools cited across the twenty (20) electoral wards in the three (3) development centres in Nsukka, namely Nsukka Central, Nsukka West, and Nsukka East.

The researchers employed a mapping approach to compile a list of targeted key stakeholders/informants who possessed the most pertinent data on the topic due to their direct engagement as government education board personnel, food vendors and small-holder farmers. Based on the mapping method, the researchers organized and conducted twenty (20) in-depth interviews involving the School Board Management Committee (SBMC), head teachers, teachers, parents, local government and state supervisors of NHGSFP. Added to this were seven (7) focused-group discussions (FDGs) comprising a maximum of 5-10 participants each,

totalling 42 persons (all 18 years and above) conducted in the selected study area to elicit first-hand information. The participants were selected from the following primary schools and communities: Agu-Echara Primary School I; Community Primary School, Owere-Obukpa; Township Primary II; Community Primary School, Ihe/Owerre; Joint Primary School, Edem-Ani; Central Primary School, Alor-Uno; Central Primary School, Okutu; Edem-Umabor Primary School; Central School Lejja; Community Primary School, Oye-Agu. In the sampled schools, a total of 21 KII were conducted in addition to 7 KII conducted with the local government personnel in each development centre as well a total of 7 FGD conducted in all three development centres. Non-participant observation was adopted in some cases, using telephone calls. A qualitative descriptive method was applied in describing and analysing all the information and data generated in the study.

In-school feeding and the incidence of out-of-school children in Nsukka

Although the Enugu State government's free education policy and national-level interventions through the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) have had a significant impact on the enrollment and school dropout rates in public primary schools in Enugu State (Okenyi, 2023), the reduction in OOSC in Nsukka is largely attributed to the implementation of the NHSFP. Nigeria has a population of approximately 124 million children with no formal education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015). Many of these children were employed in different households, with some of them working as child labourers and house helps (Amedu & Ossai, 2023; ESSPIN, 2014). The share of Enugu State in the number of OOSC in Nigeria is reflected in the survey outcome undertaken by ESSPIN in Enugu State from 2013 to 2014. The survey is depicted in the accompanying Table 1:

Table 1: Trends in out-of-school children (3– 18 years) in Enugu state, 2013–2014

Status	Males	Females	Total	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Dropped-Out	156,092	150, 168	306, 260	51.0	49.0	100
Never-Attended	54,513	56,059	110, 572	49.3	50.7	100
Overall OOSC	210, 605	206, 227	416, 832	50.5	49.5	100

Note: ESSPIN Report (2014)

The survey report shows that in 2014, Enugu State had a total number of 306, 260 school drop-outs, while 110, 572 others had never attended school, making it a total of 416, 832 OOSC. Table 1 also shows a marginal difference in OOSC between males and females. Males had 210,605 OOSC while their female counterparts had 206, 277 OOSC. Out of these numbers, Nsukka was ranked fourth in terms of the number of dropouts, with 15,706 leaving school and 15,129 never-attended school, resulting in a total of 30,835 OOSC in the local government area (ESSPIN, 2014). The Enugu State government's official bulletin put the entire public primary school drop-out at 6, 519 out of which Nsukka local government area had a share of 281,

excluding those who have not accessed school owing to many extenuating circumstances (Enugu State Annual School Census Report, 2014). Out of the 799 public primary schools that participated when NHGSFP was implemented in Enugu State in 2016 (The Guardian, 2021), only 46 schools were selected from Nsukka due to a lack of sufficient funds from the FG (The Guardian,, 2022). Based on the FG menu template, pupils were served local delicacies such as yam and beans, rice, chicken, egg and meats, as well as fruits such as banana, garden egg and paw-paw. A group of food vendors who were interviewed acknowledged that a conscious effort was made to strictly follow the template but due to

insufficiency of funds from the government, both the contents and regularity of making the food available became an issue.¹ Nevertheless, the

available food served made an appreciable impact on the reduction of OOSC as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Trends in the number of school dropouts in Nsukka LGA, 2014–2022

Years	Primary 1		Primary 2		Primary 3		Primary 4		Primary 5		Primary 6		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
2014/2015	38	42	28	22	31	26	20	16	26	12	12	8	281
2015/2016	3	4	6	7	9	11	5	7	1	1	1	1	56
2016/2017	4	5	2	3	3	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	27
2017/2018	11	7	9	15	6	11	7	5	14	17	6	6	114
2018/2019	11	10	12	14	11	10	14	15	13	12	7	10	139
2019/2020	7	6	10	10	9	11	6	7	4	3	2	2	77
2020/2021	3	5	7	7	4	3	8	4	1	1	1	1	45
2021/2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Extracted and modified by the author from the EASC report, 2015-2022

Table 2 shows that before the introduction of NHGSFP in 2016, 281 primary school pupils dropped out in the 2014/2015 academic session. The figure dropped to 56 in 2016 and 27 in 2017. The dropout rate increased to 114 in 2018 and 139 in 2019 but decreased again to 77 in 2020 and 45 in 2021. The table indicates that there were no school

dropouts in the 2022 academic session. FGDs with the teachers and the former OOSC, as well as their parents, revealed the impact of NHSFP on mobilizing the school dropouts back to school in Nsukka². Teachers interviewed at Agu-Echara Primary School I, Community Primary School, Owere-Obukpa, Township Primary II and Community Primary

School, Ihe/Owerre remarked that the programme brought back some drop-out children to the school³. A teacher in Township Primary School II specifically asserted that the programme was instrumental in mobilizing and incentivizing some drop-out pupils (whose parents could hardly fend for their food and school fees) back to school⁴. A similar narrative on the incapacity to provide food for the children as the factor that has stopped them from attending schools resonates in FGDs with a group of women and OOSC in Edem-Ani, Alor-Uno, Edem-Umabor, Oye-Agu and Lejja communities⁵. A woman and mother of four children in the Edem-Umabor community admitted that the NHSFP is responsible for her two children going back to school⁶.

Studies on the difficulties associated with the implementation of NHSFP in regions prone to terrorist activities have generally identified constraints in food deliveries and other logistical problems (Agu et al., 2023; Udentia, 2023; Asiegbo et al., 2022; Alabede, 2022; Onah & Onah, 2021; Azubuike & Mbah, 2019). In contrast, there is unanimity in the views of government officials, the School Board Management Committee (SBMC) members, and head teachers interviewed

that the constraints in food delivery have little or no impact on the reduction in the number of OOSC in Nsukka⁷. A teacher in Central School Lejja attributed the constraints in food delivery to the programme implementation arrangement by the levels of governments⁸. A member of the Nsukka Local Government Education Board who pleaded anonymity averred that the reduction in the number of OOSC in zone gauging from the available data cannot be divorced from the impact of NHGSFP⁹. In corroboration, a staff member of Nsukka Local Government Council in an anonymous interview asserted thus, "I cannot give firsthand information on the number of dropouts that have returned, but teachers reported to me that some of the drop-out pupils have returned"¹⁰. It is apparent from the foregoing data generated from the fieldwork that the NHGSFP has contributed to the shrinking of the number of primary school dropouts in the Nsukka local government area.

NHGSFP and local economy in Nsukka

One of the key objectives of the NHGSFP is to eradicate poverty by stimulating the local economy through the provision of empowerment opportunities for rural women, increasing local agricultural production, creating a viable and ready

market and boosting the income of farmers and women along the value chain (Action Health Incorporated, 2023; Onah & Onah, 2021). For this purpose, women food vendors (cooks) were recruited from within the communities where schools are located to enhance acceptance and easy access to the schools (Action Health Incorporated, 2023). Cumulatively, 107,670 cooks have been empowered while over 200,000

smallholder farmers have been linked to the programme by providing locally sourced produce and ingredients (Oladele et al., 2020). In Nsukka, about 201 cooks and food vendors have been recruited (Nsukka Local Government Bulletin, 2016). Table 3 depicts the number of cooks and food vendors recruited and primary schools covered in various development centres in Nsukka.

Table 3: Number of food vendors recruited and primary schools covered in various development centres in Nsukka

Development Centres	Overall number of Food Vendors	Number of Schools they covered
Nsukka East	41 Food Vendors	41 schools
Nsukka West	74 Food Vendors	74 schools
Nsukka Central	86 Food Vendors	86 schools
Total	201	201

Source: Nsukka Local Government Bulletin, 2016

Participants were trained in the areas of meal planning, the nutritional targets of each meal, and how to measure whether the nutrients are reflected in the food, as well as provided with kitchen utensils like pots, spoons, plates, gas cylinders, refrigerators, and funding facilities¹¹. Funds for the programme are a part of the N500 billion annual budget of NSIP, which stood at N1.7 trillion between

2016 and 2019, with N70.00 budgeted for a plate of food (Igbokwe, 2020). The First City Monument Bank (FCM) remits funds directly to the individual bank accounts of the food vendors (Onah & Onah, 2021). The amount to be remitted is calculated based on the number of pupils assigned to each food vendor¹².

In line with the key objectives of NHGSFP in providing at least one balanced diet that contains the micronutrients children require for healthy growth, cooks and food vendors are meant to adhere strictly to the guidelines of a standard menu prepared by a team drawn from the ministries of education and health (NHGSFP Strategic Plan, 2016). The menu provides for a balanced meal comprising protein, carbohydrates, vegetables and fruits. Food items on the menu include beans, rice, yams, beef, eggs, assorted fruits and vegetables, all aimed at ensuring a balanced meal (NHGSFP Strategic Plan, 2016). A group of food vendors interviewed across the sampled development centres and primary schools acknowledged being in possession of the menu¹³, stressing the multiplier effect of the programme on their income and overall family wellbeing¹⁴. Interviews conducted with a group of agrarian communities and agro-based merchants in Umabor, Eha-Alumona, Agbamere, Eha-Ndiagu, Ede-Oballa, Opi Uno and Opi-Agu show that NHGSFP has as well, along the value chain, stimulated a viable and ready market, contributing in boosting the income of the indigenous farmers and traders who supply farm produce such as rice, yam, cocoa yam, vegetables etc to the food vendors¹⁵. One

of the local farmers conceded to the significant increase the programme has made in his agro-based business and daily income, but stressed the need for the government to fund agriculture¹⁶. Food vendors also commented on the government's limited funding, high cost of transportation, and constraints associated with operating from their respective homes and locations owing to limited facilities to accommodate their cooking activities in the schools¹⁷. One of the food vendors interviewed in Eha-Alumona asserts that "the labour and transportation of the food vendors are hardly captured in the funding system, which, according to her, takes much of their proceeds and savings¹⁸. To avoid the likely impediment on the quality of food served to pupils and the agricultural produce supply chain owing to funding challenges, the vendors formed mini cartels and agreed on a standard of meals and other forms of collaboration to reduce cost¹⁹. Also, through ingenuity and commitment to the programme, the food vendors introduced meals that are cheaper and more nutritious, such as *Okpa* (powder of Bambara nuts), maize-based food popularly known as *Igbangwu* or *moi-moi oka* fortified with vegetables, etc (Onah & Onah, 2021).

Conclusion

The study investigated the implementation of NHGSFP in Nsukka. As in other local governments in Nigeria, available statistics before 2016 showed that Nsukka was bedevilled with dire problems ranging from poor access to basic education, rural poverty and vulnerability of OOSC to societal ills such as childhood sexuality, teenage pregnancy, child labour, alcohol and drug abuse etc, with overall implication on the significant drop and low ranking in public primary education enrolment. The performance indicators of the NHGSFP in Nsukka have largely highlighted a strong relationship between the implementation of the programme and reductions in the number of OOSC. This is in addition to the multiplier effects on the economy of the local women participants, as well as

stimulating a viable and ready local market along the value chain, which has contributed to boosting the income of the indigenous smallholder farmers and traders who supply farm produce to the food vendors. Tackling the inherent challenges, such as inadequate funding, logistics, and constraints in food delivery, and sustaining the NHGSFP and accrued gains requires holistic and joint funding commitments and provision of all the necessary logistics and regulatory environment by all levels of government in Nigeria.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author (s)

Funding statement

The author(s) received no financial support for this research

Notes

1. Interview with 5 food vendors aged 40-60 in Edem-Ani, 5 June 2023
2. FDG with 11 teachers aged 30-45, 5 out-of-school children aged 10-15, parents aged 40-60 in Agu-Echara, Owere-Obukpa and Ihe/Owerre communities, 12 June 2023
3. Interview with 20 teachers aged 28-45 in Agu-Echara Primary School I, Community Primary School Owere-Obukpa, Township Primary II and Community Primary School Ihe/Owerre, 20 June 2023
4. Interview with a teacher aged 45 in Township Primary School II, 20 June 2023

5. FDG with 15 parents aged 45-60, 8 out-of-school children aged 10-15 in Edem-Ani, Alor-Uno, Edem-Umabor, Oye-Agu and Lejja communities, 25 June 2023
6. Interview with a woman and a parent aged 50 in Edem-Umabor community, 28 June 2023
7. Interview with 2 government officials aged 45-60, 2 School Board Management Committee (SBMC) members aged 45-60 and head teachers in Township primary II, 30 June 2023
8. Interview with a teacher aged 35 in Central School Lejja, 5 July 2023
9. Interview with a member of Nsukka Local Government Education Board aged 55 in Nsukka Local Government Council, 10 July 2023
10. Interview with a staff of Nsukka Local Government Council aged 40 in the local government council, 10 July 2023
11. Interview with a food aged 50 in Agu-Echara community, 15 July 2023
12. Interview with a food aged 50 in Agu-Echara community, 15 July 2023
13. Interview with 15 food vendors aged 40-55 in Edem-Ani, Alor-Uno, Edem-Umabor, Oye-Agu and Lejja, 20 July 2023
14. Interview with 15 food vendors aged 40-55 in Edem-Ani, Alor-Uno, Edem-Umabor, Oye-Agu and Lejja, 20 July 2023
15. Interviews with agro-merchants aged 45-60 in Umabor, Eha-Alumona, Agbamere, Eha-Ndiagu, Ede-Oballa, Opi Uno and Opi-Agu, 6 August 2023
16. Interview with a local farmer aged 55 in Eha-Ndiagu, 15 August 2023
17. Interview with a local farmer aged 60 in Opi-Agu, 25 August 2023
18. Interview with a food vendor aged 40 in Eha-Alumona, 10 September 2023
19. Interview with a food vendor aged 40 in Eha-Alumona, 10 September 2023

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