
HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on the socio-economic development in Benue State. The incrementalism theoretical model provided a framework of analysis for the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The major instruments employed to generate data for the study were questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistical measures were used to analyze the data for the study. Findings have revealed that the implementation of the HGSFP has not resulted in an increase in school enrolment in the State. Instead, the enrolment rate has decreased by 61.5%. Despite this decrease, the attendance rate increased by 11.12% during the implementation of HGSFP in the State. The program enhanced the income of cooks but this was not sustainable due to the rising prices of food items without a corresponding increase in the funds paid to the cooks. It was found that the food supplied to schools was not produced in the host communities of the schools. As a result, the HGSFP as an ongoing programme is yet to achieve its objective of boosting agricultural production of the local farmers. The study concluded that the HGSFP has the potential to increase enrolment rates but several challenges have affected the implementation of the program in the State. These challenges include inconsistency in the disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the program; lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of the program; wrong bank verification numbers; hijacking of the program by the political class; inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ensure the quality and quantity of food and the environment where food was served. The study recommended that there is a need for the Federal Government to be consistent in disbursing funds to cooks as this will increase the enrolment rates of pupils in schools. Also, there is a need for proper monitoring of the program to ensure that cooks buy foodstuffs directly from local farmers in the host communities of the schools. This will boost agricultural production and income of the local farmers in the State.

Keywords: Home-grown; School feeding Program; socio-economic; Development

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

In every society, there exist some problems. These problems could be in the areas of politics, commerce, education, agriculture, communication, housing, transportation, and health care among others. In order to solve these problems, the government formulates policies in response to them and in relation to the objectives of national development and the well-being of the citizens. These are public policies as opposed to private policies. Public policies are necessary because they attempt to address problems as they arise so that they do not degenerate into uncontrollable states where society's socio-economic development is endangered.

Home Grown School Feeding Programmes (HGSFP) constitute critical interventions that have been introduced in many developed and developing countries of the world to address the issue of poverty, stimulate school enrolment, and enhance pupils' performance. Federal Government of Nigeria, after the pilot study in 12 states in 2016 launched the Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) in public primary schools in all the states and FCT with the aim of ensuring one solid quality meal a day for children in classes 1-3 in order to increase enrolment, reduce dropout rate and ensure quality learning outcomes. The main objective of the program is to help improve the enrolment of primary school pupils, ensure retention, reduce dropout rate and ensure total completion in the school. Other objectives of the program include:

- i. To improve nutrition and health of primary school children. The idea is to provide one meal per day to all primary school pupils within the classes of 1-3 in Nigeria with the objectives of improving their health status.
- ii. To stimulate local agricultural production and boost income for the local farmers through using food that is locally grown by small holder farmers.
- iii. Creating jobs and improving family and state economy: The programme aims to create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development (HGSFP, 2016).

The first funds were disbursed in January 2017 to five states: Anambra, Ebonyi, Ogun, Osun and Oyo. By August 2017, a total of 14 states had begun the national HGSF programme.

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme commenced on 3rd March, 2017 in Benue State, at the LGEA Primary School, Wurukum, Makurdi. The programme has recruited 3,865 cooks across the 23 local government areas to feed 447,215 pupils (Benue State Office of Social Investment, 2019). The first tranche disbursed to Benue State was ₦168, 157,000 and the same amount was disbursed in the second tranche amounting to ₦337, 157,800 to feed 240, 827 pupils. The third tranche of ₦626, 100,000 was disbursed for payment of Benue cooks and food suppliers to feed 447,215 pupils (Benue State Office of Social Investment, 2019). Benue State remains the first and only state to implement the feeding programme across all its twenty three (23) local government areas as at 2019 (HGSFP, 2019).

The thrust of this study is to examine the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on socio-economic development in Benue State. Benue State being an agrarian state, the HGSF programme presents an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and local communities, and to strengthen the nexus between nutrition, agriculture and social protection. This could be achieved by restricting the purchase of local products for schools from smallholders. Linking schools to local production can complement other national efforts to strengthen food production and diversification, and can be an important element in the transition to sustainable national programmes that are widely

supported by stakeholders in different sectors and at different levels. There is growing focus on delivering healthy meals to children, while at the same time stimulating local agriculture and economies through the procurement of local food from small-scale producers in Benue State. Countries increasingly recognize that social protection measures, including feeding, are needed to reduce and or prevent poverty and hunger, and that connecting programmes to agriculture through institutional procurement programmes can further increase benefits, particularly for family members who are the backbone of agriculture in Benue State. After five (5) years of the implementation in Benue State, this study therefore seeks to ascertain if the programme has achieved its overall objective of promoting socio-economic development in terms of school enrolment and retention, income of vendors/cooks, employment and profit of small farm holders in Benue State.

Benue State has myriads of socio-economic challenges. Some of these challenges are poverty, hunger, malnutrition, diseases and low school enrolment. For instance, the state has the highest number of out-of school children in North-Central Nigeria (NBS, 2019). The report by NBS further indicates that the state accounts for 260, 000 out of school children, placing it on the list of states with low enrolment rates. The state is also among the poorest states in the federation. In fact, in 2019 the state ranked the 21st poorest state in the federation judging from the high level of unemployment and decline in agricultural production (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

The resultant effect of the poor state of the economy is the inability of parents and guardians to pay the fees of their wards resulting in pupils dropping out of schools. Many children of school age are found on the streets hawking petty wares instead of being in school. This situation is worsened by the incessant attack on the poor farmers by herders. Herders attacks on farming communities has resulted to destruction of houses and crops, displacement of farmers, and dwindling income of farmers. Thus, accessing food items by the cooks for the programme from places other than from the host communities has aggravated the problem and has not resulted in empowering local farmers after all.

This study interrogates the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) of the Federal Government of Nigeria as adopted and implemented in Benue State. The motivation for this study arose out of the fact that most public policies of government such as this have never yielded the desired result in the past, nor benefitted the masses and improved their standard of living. This has been a major challenge over the years. This, therefore calls to question the success and sustainability of the present Home Grown Feeding Programme (HGSFP). Will it go like the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy of 1976 or the UBEC policy of 2004? These policies brought free primary education and resulted in the building of public primary schools across the State, but this was not sustainable as most of these schools are no more. Where they still exist, the condition under which the school pupils receive teaching is horrible. In view of the failure of previous policies, it behooves this study to interrogate the strategies for successful implementation set out in the present program and the extent to which it has achieved its objectives so far. Whether the feeding of pupils, which is restricted to primary 1-3 can have positive effects on the enrolment, retention, and completion of Basic Six (Primary 6). The assessment of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSP) and its impact on socio-economic development in Benue State defines the problem of this study.

2.0 Materials and Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Survey research seeks to describe, explain, or interpret existing conditions, circumstances, or practices, existing relationships, attitudes, and beliefs, so as to make generalizations. The survey research design is suitable for this study because it identifies the specific population to be studied and develops strategies for sampling the population effectively through the use of questionnaires and interviews as instruments of data collection.

2.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises the various groups involved in the Home Grown School Feeding Programme. They include cooks, parents of pupils, staff of the Office of Social Investment in Benue State, Head Teachers, and Farmers' Associations. The following are the number of cooks, staff of the office of Social Investment in Benue State, Head Teachers, Farmers Association, and parents of pupils: Cooks, 7,207; Head Teachers, 2766; Members of Farmers Associations, 4670; Parents of Pupils, 463,979; and Staff of Benue State Social Investment, 27. Therefore, the total population for the study is 478,622 (Office of Social Investment, Benue State, 2017).

2.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Multi-stage Sampling was used to select respondents for this Study. A multi-stage sampling is a situation where a population is distributed into a number of first-stage sampling units and a sample of the unit is taken. In this study, Benue State was divided into three zones according to the senatorial districts: Benue North-East senatorial district; Benue North-West senatorial district; and Benue South senatorial district. This procedure was adopted in order to ensure thoroughness in the sample selection.

The second stage was the purposive selection of two Local Government Areas in each of the three senatorial districts in the State. These Local Government Areas are: Kwande and Logo Local Government Areas in Benue North East Senatorial Districts; Gboko and Guma Local Government Areas in Benue North-West Senatorial District; and Otukpo and Oju Local Government Areas in Benue South Senatorial District. The criterion for the selection was purposive. The selected Local Government Areas have the highest number of schools that are benefiting from the HGSP across the three senatorial districts of the state (Office of Social Investment, Benue State, 2017). The following are the number of cooks, Head Teachers, Farmers Association, parents of pupils, and staff of the Office of Social Investment in the six selected Local Government Areas of Benue State:

i. Cooks	3865
ii. Head Teachers	862
iii. Members of Farmers	4670
iv. Parents of pupils	2981
v. Staff of Social Investment	27
Total	12,405

Sources: Extracted from Benue State Office of Social Investment (2019), Benue State Ministry of Education (2021) & All Farmers Association Benue State (2022)

The sample size of this study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) scientific formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N = Finite population

n = Sample size

e = expected error

l = constant

$$n = \frac{12405}{1 + 12405 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{12405}{1 + 12405 (0.05 \times 0.05)}$$

$$n = \frac{12405}{1 + 12405 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{12405}{1 + 31.0125}$$

$$n = \frac{12405}{32.0125}$$

$$n = 387.50$$

$$n = 388$$

The sample size is 388

To assign the sample size of 388 to the various categories of respondents selected in Table 1 below, the researcher employed Bowley's proportional allocation formula as indicated below:

$$nb = \frac{n(n)}{N}$$

Where:

nb = Bowley formula

n = Element within the sample frame, number allocated to respondent groups

(n) = Sample or proportion of the universe used for the study (total sample size)

N = Population of the study.

The determination of each of the sample groups is shown in the Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Sampling Distribution using Bowley's Proportional Allocation Technique

S/N	Categories of respondents	Population	Sample size
1	Staff of Benue State Social Investment	27	2
2	Head Teachers	862	27
3	Members of farmers associations	4670	145
4	Parents of pupils	2981	93
5	Cooks	3865	121
	Total	12405	388

Source: Computed by the Researcher

2.4 Sources of Data

The study employed the use of both primary and secondary sources of data to generate data needed for the study. Under primary source, the study used the questionnaire and interview as instruments of data collection. The secondary sources of data for the study was generated through books, journals, thesis, online/internet materials, seminars/ workshops proceedings, commissioned studies among others.

2.5 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, questionnaire and Key Informant Interviews were used.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire which contained both open and closed ended questions was administered to head teachers, cooks, and parents of pupils and members of Farmers' Associations across the selected six local government areas and Benue State Social Investment Office in the state. Therefore, a total of 388 copies of questionnaire were administered to these categories of respondents with the help of research assistants.

Key Informant Interviews: Key informants are defined as those individuals with special expertise knowledge on the issue under investigation and community life. For this study, key informants were identified based on role of the staff of Benue State Social Investment (implementing agency) and heads of primary schools where the HGSFP is being implemented. Key informants provided important contextual information helpful for establishing sample parameters for later interviews. Interviews were therefore conducted with staff of the Social Investment Office, Chairmen of Parent Teachers Association in the selected Local Governments in the State. These interviews centred on the area of management, pupils enrolment and the challenges associated with the implementation of Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Benue State.

2.6 Method of Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive statistical measures to present, analyse and summarize the results. The justification for this method of analysis was informed by the need to study individuals and be able to describe closely, analyse, interpret and make inferences and generalisations. The use of this method was imperative for the study as it helped in the classification and summarization of large and complicated sets of data gathered from the field. To sum up the mass of data generated from field survey, the study presented the data in frequency tables and percentages, as well as graphs and bar charts where applicable. Data collected were therefore analysed and inferences were drawn in line with the objectives of the study.

3.0 Results and Discussions

3.1 Bio-data of Respondents

The demographic attributes of respondents which include, sex, age, educational attainment, local government and position held were collected and are presented below:

Table 3.1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	239	66
Female	125	34
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in Figure 4.1: shows that 239 (66%) of the sampled respondents are male while 125 (34%) are female. The result implies that the majority of the respondents are men. This demonstrates that men have taken over available opportunities in Nigeria's public space.

Table 3.2: Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentages
21-30	81	22
31-40	121	33
41-50	87	24
51 and above	75	21
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The age distribution of respondents shows that 81(22%) of the respondents are between the ages of 21-30 years, 121(33%) are within the age range of 31 to 40. The age distribution also shows that 87(24%) of the sampled respondents are age 41 to 50, while 75(21%) are 51 years and above. The result implies that the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 31-40 years. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents are mature adults which implied that they have good knowledge of the importance of feeding young children on a balanced diet.

Table 3.3: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentages
Single	131	36
Married	210	58
Divorced	23	6
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3.3 above presents information on the marital status of respondents, it shows that 131 (36%) are single, 210 (58%) are married, while divorced 23 (6%). The result implies that the majority of the respondents have families.

Table 3.4: Educational Level of Respondents

Educational Status	Frequency	Percentages
Primary	-	-
Secondary	78	21
Tertiary	286	79
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3.3: above shows that, out of the 364 respondents, 78 (21%) of respondents completed secondary school while a huge majority 286 (79%) attained tertiary education. Thus, the study inferred that opinions expressed came from enlightened or well informed minds. It was further observed that respondents who were trained were aware of the importance of school feeding programmes and its impact on children's enrolment, class attendance and retention. It also enhances the validity of the research outcomes regarding the impact on program on the generality of the Benue population.

Table 3.5: Occupational Distribution of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Cooks	105	29
Head teachers	52	14
Members Farmers Association	32	9
Parent of pupils	173	47.5
Staff of Benue State Social Investment	2	0.5
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result on table 3.5: above indicates that 105(29%) of the sampled respondents are cooks, 52 (14%) are head teachers while 32(9%) of the respondents are members of farmers association. The result further reveals that 173(47.5%) of the respondents are parents of pupils and 2(0.5%) of the respondents are staff of Benue State Social Investment. The result demonstrates that majority of the respondents are parent of pupils who are beneficiaries of the program.

3.2 HGSFP and School Enrolment in Benue State

As stated in the introductory section of this study, the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme was flagged off on the 3rd July, 2017 in Benue State. Since the flag off of the programme, 3,865 cooks have been recruited across the 23 local government areas. However, the number of the pupils that have been fed has continued to fluctuate. For instance, the records obtained from the Office of Social Investment in Makurdi (2021) indicate that the first tranche of disbursement to Benue State was on 26th June, 2017 for the feeding of 240,827 pupils. The number of pupils increased to 447,215 for the 3rd and 4th tranches and further rose significantly to 754,774 during the 9th and 10th tranches of disbursement. It

however dropped to 576,560 in the 11th and 12th tranches. The latest disbursement being 21st tranche was on the 14th July, 2021 was meant to feed 463,979 pupils. This implies that since the inception of the programme, there has been inconsistency in the disbursement of funds to cooks. It also shows the fluctuation in the number of pupils fed (see Table 3.6). Below is the detail of dates of disbursement and number of pupils fed in Benue State.

Table 3.6: Amount Paid to Benue State since the Inception of the School Feeding Programme

TRANCHE	DATE OF PAYMENT	DAYS OF FEEDING	NUMBER OF PUPILS FED	AMOUNT PER MEAL	AMOUNT DISBURSED ₦
1 ST	26/6/2017	10	240,827	₦ 70	168,578,900
2 ND	20/07/2017	10	240,827	₦70	168,578,900
3 RD	13/10/2017	20	447,215	₦70	626,101,000
4 TH	10/11/2017	20	447,215	₦70	626,101,000
Total			2017		₦1,589,359,800
6 TH	24/01/2018	20	447,215	₦70	626,101,000
7 TH	9/3/2018	10	447,215	₦70	313,050,500
8 TH	16/04/2018	10	447,215	₦70	313,050,500
9 TH	2/5/2018	20	754,774	₦70	1,056,683,600
10 TH	26/06/2018	20	754,774	₦70	1,056,683,600
11 TH	9/10/2018	20	576,560	₦70	807,184,000
12 TH	27/11/2018	20	576,560	₦70	807,184,000
Total			2018		4,979,937,200
13 TH	18/01/2019	20	562,991	₦70	788,187,400
14 TH	12/3/2019	20	562,991	₦70	788,187,400
15 TH	8/4/2019	20	562,991	₦70	788,187,400
16 TH	11/7/2019	10	205,361	₦70	143,752,700
17 TH	19/09/2019	20	562,991	₦70	788,187,400
Total			2019		3,296,502,300
18 TH	2/1/2020	20	318,769	₦70	446,276,600
19 TH	25/02/2020	20	318,769	₦70	446,276,600
Total			2020		892,553,200
20 TH	6/5/2021	20	463,979	₦70	649,570,600
21 ST	14/07/2021	20	463,979	₦70	649,570,600
Total			2021		1,299,141,200
TOTAL			₦ 12,057,493,700		

Source: Benue State Office of Social Investment, 2021

The result in Table 4.6 indicates that a total of ₦ 12,057,493,700 was disbursed to Benue State for the feeding of public primary school pupils from primary 1-3 from June, 2017 to July, 2021. One issue in the Table that is important to highlight is the phenomenal increase in the number of pupils for the programme during 2018. From 2nd May, 2018 to 26th June, 2018, the number of pupils fed was 754,774. The information available to the researcher from the

Protocol Officer of Benue State Social Investment Office was that the increase was due to the inclusion of primary 4-6 pupils in the feeding programme (Interview with Iorhemba Jonathan, 20/09/2021). This was a gross violation of the programme guidelines which is meant for only pupils in primary 1-3. The development informed the coming of staff of the National Bureau of Statistics for a verification exercise. The verification exercise resulted in reduction of the number of pupils being fed from 754,774 to 576,560 in subsequent tranches (Interview with Iorhemba Jonathan, 20/09/2021). During the period of verification exercise, no disbursement was made to Benue State for the months of July, August and September, 2018. Some food vendors also suffered this because during the period of the verification exercise, payment for feeding was suspended and many others lost out of the program after the exercise.

Table 3.7: Primary School Enrolment from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016 in Benue State

Years	Primary 1		Primary 2		Primary 3		Total		Grand Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2012/2013	62831	56214	57008	50859	52963	46992	172802	154065	326,867
2013/2014	174823	162985	140111	135084	130965	122553	445899	420622	866,521
2014/2015	174865	162971	140097	135083	135083	130951	445913	420589	866,502
2015/2016	52232	46775	40218	36356	33993	30483	126443	113614	240,057
Total	464,751	428,945	377,434	324,682	353,004	330,979	790,057	1,108,890	2,299,947

Enrolment During The Implementation of HGSFP in Benue State, 2016/2017 to 2019/2020

Years	Primary 1		Primary 2		Primary 3		Total		Grand Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2016/2017	55666	50863	44492	41456	39815	36154	139973	128473	268446
2017/2018	53732	48794	44313	40629	39695	35748	137740	125171	262911
2018/2019	55565	50851	2868	2868	2868	2868	61301	56587	117888
2019/2020	47083	44066	38919	36466	35766	33566	121768	114098	235866
Total	212037	194574	130592	121419	11814	108,336	339,014	424,329	885,111

Source: Benue State Ministry of Education, 2021

The result in Table 3.7 indicates that male enrolment in 2012/2013 was 62,831 while that of females was 56,214. In the 2013/2014 sessions, male enrolment rose from 62,831 to 174,823 and female pupil experienced an increase from 56,214 to 162,985. During the 2014/2015 session, the male enrolment experienced a slight increase of 42 pupils from the previous session to 174,865 while female enrolment was 162,971, a drop of 14 female pupils from the previous session. Lastly, 2015/2016 session the male enrolment dropped drastically from 174,865 to 52,232 in 2014/2015 while those of female also dropped to 46,775 in primary one. This drop for the session was also witnessed in primary two and three respectively.

On the other hand, in the same Primary 1 during the implementation of HGSFP indicates that in 2016/2017 session which coincides with the implementation of the HGSFP male enrolment stood at 55,666 while female was 50,863. In the 2017/2018, the male enrolment dropped to 53,732 while the female also dropped to 48,794. During the 2018/2019 session, there was a slight increase to 55,565; the same slight increment was also experienced among female pupils to 50,851. In the 2019/2020, the enrolment rate among male decreased to 47,083 and the same decrease was noticed among female pupils. It is noticeable that the number for pupils fed during the 2018/2019 was more than the enrolment at the same period of time. This is because, during the 2018/2019 session, the implementers of the programme in Benue State went against the policy directive and included pupils from primary 4 to 6 as earlier explained in the analysis of Table 4.6 (Protocol Officer, HGSFP, Makurdi, interview, 20/08/2021).

The result on Table 4.7 indicates that the total enrolment for Primary 1 from 2012/2013 to 2015/2016 before the implementation NHGSP for instance was 893,696 (both male and female) while during the implementation of the programme the enrolment rate was 406,611 Primary 1. Thus, with this result, it could be inferred that there was 54.5% decrease in pupils' enrolment in Primary 1 since school feeding programme started in Benue State.

3.3 Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) and Job Creation in Benue State

One of the objectives of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is job creation and improving family and state economy. The programme is intended to create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development. Below are the responses elicited to ascertain the impact of HGSFP on job creation in Benue State:

Table 3.8: The Implementation of HGSFP and Employment Creation in Benue State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	144	40
Agree	102	28
Undecided	36	10
Disagree	69	19
Strongly Disagree	13	3
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result in Table 3.8 above indicates that 144(40%) of the sampled respondents strongly agreed that the implementation of HGSFP has created employment opportunities in Benue State, 102(28%) agreed while 36(10%) were undecided. The result also designates that 69(19%) disagreed and 13(3%) strongly disagreed respectively that the implementation of HGSP has created employment opportunities in Benue State. The implication of the result is that HGSFP has created employment opportunities for some category of unemployed in the state. Since the inception of the programme, 7,207 cooks have been engaged.

Table 3.9: The Implementation of HGSFP and Improved Standard of Living

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	111	30
Agree	139	39
Undecided	34	9
Disagree	59	16
Strongly disagree	21	6
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result on Table 3.9 indicates 111(30%) of the sampled respondents strongly agreed that the implementation of HGSP has improved their standard of living, 139 (39%) agreed while 34(%) were undecided. The result further demonstrates that 59(16%) disagreed and 21(6%) strongly disagreed respectively that the implementation of HGSFP has improved their standard of living. However, the result show that implementation of HGSFP has improved the income of those employed in the programme, and thus, standard of living of beneficiaries in Benue State.

However, many of the cooks interviewed expressed concerns about the inconsistency in the disbursement of the funds and the rising cost of food items which has affected their earnings. One of the cooks stated that “whenever, we received our payment, it helps us to serve our daily needs, but due to the increase in prices of food items, the gains are fast eroding” (Joy Tyoakaa, a cook in LGEA, Akpaghaer, Mbativ Gboko LGA, Interview, 2023). Some of these cooks stated they receive about ₦150,000 to ₦162,000 at the inception of the programme but the amount has continued to reduce to ₦122,000 to ₦98,000 to feed about 34-28 pupils for a month. In view of the high level of inflation in the country it is becoming “extremely difficult for us to cope” (Joy Tyoakaa, a cook in LGEA, Akpaghaer, Mbativ Gboko LGA, interview, 2023).

3.4 Home Grown School Feeding Programme(HGSFP) and Local Agriculture production in Benue

Home Grown School Feeding Programme also aims at stimulating agricultural production among local farmers because the farmers wouldn’t have difficulties selling their farm produce (NHGSFP, 2016). In order to test this aspect of the programme, the researcher asked the local people some questions regarding their agricultural activities. HGSF programmes target small-scale farmers who are mostly poor because of inadequate access to assets such as land, water and human capital. Their production practices are characterized by limited use of productivity-enhancing technologies and practices such as hybrid seeds and fertilizers. They are also poor because even when they do adopt improved production methods, they are often unable to easily sell their produce in markets, which, for smallholders, are thin, volatile and costly.

Table 3.10: Distribution of Respondents according to Source of Food Supplied to Schools

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	53	15
Agree	63	17
Undecided	29	8
Disagree	107	29
Strongly disagree	112	30
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result above indicates that 53(15%) of the respondents strongly agreed that food supplied to schools are produced locally, 63(17%) agreed with the above position while 29(8%) were undecided. The result further avails that 107(29%) of the respondents disagreed that food supplied to schools are produced locally and 112(30%) strongly disagreed with the above proposition. The result implies that food supplied to schools is not produced in host communities.

Table 3.11: Opportunity for Sell of Food to the Benefiting Schools in the Programme

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	49	13
Agree	26	8
Undecided	9	2
Disagree	146	40
Strongly disagree	134	37
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result above indicates that 49(13%) of the sampled respondents strongly agreed that HGSFP has made it easy for farmers to sell their farm produces to benefiting schools, 26(8%) agree while 9(2%) were undecided. Besides, majority of the respondents 146(40%) disagreed that HGSFP has made it easy for farmers to sell their farm produce to food vendors in schools benefiting in their community, while 134(37%) strongly disagreed with the above assertion. The result implies that the HGSFP has not made it easy for farmers to sell their farm produces to benefiting schools.

Table 3.12: HGSFP and increase Agricultural production in the State

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	66	18
Agree	49	13
Undecided	13	4
Disagree	124	34
Strongly disagree	112	31
Total	364	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The result on Table 3.12 indicates that only 66(18%) strongly agreed that HGSFP has boosted agricultural production in the state, 49(13%) agreed while 13(4%) were undecided on whether HGSFP has boosted agricultural production in Benue State. Also, 124(34%) disagreed that HGSFP has boosted agricultural production in Benue State while 112(31%) strongly disagreed with the above assertion. The result implies that HGSFP has not boosted Agricultural production in the State.

HGSFP has not stimulated the local economy, nor financially empowered the community. It has not even encouraged local procurement. The HGSFP in Benue State largely benefits the bigger business people who do not reside among the locals but operate their businesses in the urban centers. The funds released by the government towards the programme which were meant to circulate among the locals and improve their economic status do not reach the intended people; but instead end in lining up the pockets of already rich people. The farmers in the area have not been stimulated by HGSFP to grow more maize and beans to sell to the schools. The farmers are still using their usual ways in agricultural activities. There is no adaptation of innovative ways of improving farm productivity. The main reason is that the schools have not shared this opportunity within the communities. The communities were not aware that they can do business with the schools. Because of this only little diversification by farmers in the production of cereals such as beans has been noticed after the introduction of HGSFP. Food security has also not improved among the community members. The locals still depend on rain fed agriculture and poor farming techniques leading to low harvests. The locals hardly harvest enough to last them the whole year.

3.5 Challenges of Implementing of HGSFP in Benue State

The implementation of HGSFP is confronted with some challenges; the objective here is to unravel some of these challenges identified by the respondents.

Table 3.13: Challenges Affecting the Implementation of HGSFP in Benue State

S/N	Challenges	Respondents No: 364	Percentages	Ranking
1.	Inadequate funding	356	98%	1 st
2.	Inconsistency in the disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the program	350	96%	2 nd
3.	Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of the program	345	95%	3 rd
4.	Wrong bank verification number	330	90%	4 th
5.	Inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ascertain the quality of food and the environment	319	88%	5 th
6.	Quantity of food served is small	319	88%	5 th
7.	Hijacking of the programme by the political class	298	82%	6 th

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3.13 present results on the challenges affecting the implementation of HGSFP in Benue State. According to the result, respondents were of the view that inadequate funding was the major challenge affecting the implementation of HGSFP in Benue State, represented by 356 (98%) (1st position). Relatedly, 350 (96%) of the respondents identified inconsistency in disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the programme as the second most prevalent challenge affecting the implementation of HGSFP in Benue State. The third challenge of HGSFP in Benue State is the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of the program, 345(95%) of the respondents attested to this. The wrong bank verification number is the 4th challenge with 330(90%). The fifth problem on the ladder of challenges affecting the HGSFP in Benue State is taken quantity of food served. The inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ascertain the quality of food and the quantity of food served which is usually small, represented by 88% of the respondents. Hijacking of the program by the political class was the least of the challenges affecting HGSFP in Benue State with the respondent's scores of 298 (82%). The result clearly demonstrates that the implementation of HGSP in Benue state has been confronted with several challenges.

The Programme Officer in Benue State, specifically reiterated that funding was a major challenge and he noted that the program was expensive. He disclosed that the state government was making efforts to explore opportunities for donor agencies support from UNICEF, Partnership for Child Development (PCD), Vitol Foundation, Sahara Group, Bill and Milinda Gates Foundation as well as the Global Child Nutrition Foundation. He submitted that the impact of the aforementioned had been felt more in capacity building and cited the round table meeting of stakeholders of the school feeding program held in May 2019 in Abuja, which was jointly organized by Partnership for Child Development and Vitol Foundation, in collaboration with the Federal Government and Benue State Government.

One of the major challenges of the HGSFP implementation in the State is the inability of the Benue State government to meet its financial obligation under the program (Iorhamba Jonathan, State Operations Officer, interviewed, August 2021). According to the MOU signed by the Federal and the State governments, the state governments are supposed to provide funds for logistics while the federal government provides funds for the feeding of the pupils. However, the Benue State government has reneged on providing logistics apart from the offices provided for the Programme (Dominic Torvande, State Feeding Officer, interviewed, August 2021). According to one of the staff of the Programme, the lack of financial commitment by the Benue State government has seriously affected the implementation of the Programme as staff cannot go out to do their routine supervision and the ground assessment of the Programme.

Another challenge identified by the cooks especially was the discrepancies in the Bank Verification Number (BVN). Most of the cooks especially those operating with Sterling Bank experienced difficulties in accessing their funds due to account reconciliation issues during the 6th and 7th disbursements. This affected the program in the State in several ways. For instance, in November 2020, about 312 cooks were dropped from the program as a result of the wrong BVN, and consequently, 23,627 pupils were affected (Protocol Officer, NHSFP, interviewed, 2021). As of the time of this study, these 23,627 pupils were completely excluded from the program. Equally appalling is the unrealistic budget allocated to feed a child per day which is ₦70 per meal at the time of conducting this study. Consequently, the ₦70 is highly inadequate for a meal given the current high market prices.

Another challenge identified by cooks is the delays in payments to food vendors by the Federal Government in the State, which has drastically reduced the frequency of food given to the pupils in terms of quality and quantity (Dominic Torvande, SFO, Interview, 2021). Despite the claims by the Federal Government of a huge number of chickens, eggs, cattle, and metric tonnes of fish being fed to the pupils, many of them, including the teachers, as well as parents, have reservations about the size of meals served to their children. This is because, meat, fish, egg or chicken given to the pupils failed to meet up with expectations of the required standard (Dominic Torvande, State Feeding Officer, interviewed, August, 2021). Also, in terms of quality, some nutrition experts across the State and Nigeria have expressed their dissatisfaction about the procurement of substandard food commodities used in preparing the food (Dominic Torvande, State Feeding Officer, interviewed, August 2021). This could not be unconnected with a series of allegations of bribery and corruption among vendors, political leaders in the communities, and the State officials in charge of the program which has significantly affected the outputs of the program (James Aboh, member of the Association of Farmers in Gboko, interviewed, 2021).

It was also observed that the preparation of the meals was contracted out to food vendors who cooked the food in their respective homes and then transported them to the various schools. One of the head teachers disclosed during the interview that it was practically not easy to assess the sanitary condition of the place where the food was prepared. However, further investigation revealed that a monitoring committee had been established by the program secretariat to supervise the food preparation. In addition to this arrangement, each school had a health teacher whose duty was to supervise the meals brought by the food vendors to ensure that they were of hygienically good quality before pupils were served. The arrangement of food preparation outside the school premises was identified at the round table meeting of the stakeholders of the program held in May 2019 in Abuja as one of the gaps in the program implementation which needs to be revisited.

Some of the interviewees, however, noted that there exists some form of monitoring system at the state and school levels. At the state level, the state monitoring committee and state steering committee are responsible for program oversight, the State Ministry of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board are responsible for collecting data on school enrolment and attendance on a regular basis; the Ministry of Health is responsible for collecting state-wide data on general child health and nutritional status; Local Government Education Authority Secretaries and Planning Officers are responsible for collecting weekly feeding forms that consist of the number of pupils that have been fed and for collating the data for the program and the zonal inspectors of education are responsible for monitoring the feeding process, environmental health and enrolment data.

At the school level, the School-Based Monitoring Committees are responsible for the program oversight; the quality of the food is monitored by the head teacher or health teacher while the Parents-Teachers' Associations' representative and the school prefects randomly inspect the food. Surprise checks according to Iorhamba, interviewed (2021) are also conducted regularly by programme monitors. These monitoring systems are challenged by a lack of funds, vehicles, and growth monitoring gadgets required for effective program planning, review, and improvement (Iorhamba Jonathan, State Operation Officer, interviewed, 2021).

The researcher took time to observe the children in the morning in LGEA in Akpaghaer Gboko LGA before lunch and after lunch. The findings indicated that in the morning the children looked happy to be in the school, although they looked pale. This could have been due to a lack of breakfast at home in the morning and poor diet in their evening meals. Some hours before meal the children looked jovial and were in a hurry to leave the classrooms. They were observed to fight and made irregular queues to be served first. The best moments were in the afternoon after the meals when the children looked happy and satisfied and concentrated in class. Children require adequate, varied, and balanced food but most importantly, it should also be consistently available (Apond, 2014).

Furthermore, the implementation of the program in the State is affected by the rising cases of insecurity occasioned by farmers and herders conflict and intra and inter-community conflicts in the State. For instance, a total of 67 schools in six local government areas of Guma, Agatu, Kwande, Logo, Gwer-West, and Makurdi which are epicenters of these conflicts have been affected and this has consequently affected 56,000 pupils in these schools (Protocol Officer of HGSFP, Makurdi, interviewed, 20/08/2021). The outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 also truncated the implementation of the program for 13 months.

3.6 Discussion of Findings

This study set out to achieve three objectives. These are: to examine the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on school enrolment in Benue State; to assess the role of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on job creation and improving income of beneficiaries in Benue State and assess the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on stimulating local agricultural production to boost income of local farmers in Benue State.

In light of the first objective, the study found that the implementation of the HGSFP has not resulted in an increase in enrolment. Instead, the enrolment rate has decreased by 61.5%. This finding disagrees with earlier findings of WFP (2009) that after school feeding started there was a surge in school enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa up to about 46%. Although an increase in the school enrolment may not be solely due to the school feeding program, other

factors could jointly explain an increase in the enrolment. For example, a change of mind or a rethink to send children to public primary schools, like the Pakistan program that gave conditional Take Home Ration of oil to the pupils. Ahmed and Arend (2003) found that the program changed the way parents think and act before the program started and they started sending their children to school.

This study shows that there was a marginal increase of 11.12% in the attendance of pupils in Benue State primary schools since the school feeding intervention started. A critical assessment of the attendance statistics showed that the pupil's attendance has continued to grow marginally and stabilized in the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 sessions since the program started in the 2016/2017 academic session. This finding agrees with the earlier findings of Moore (1994), Bergeron and DelRosso (2001), Ahmed & Carlo de (2020), Gelli (2017), and Kristjansson (2019) that, in Niger Republic, when school canteens were closed, high absenteeism followed and children were withdrawn from school. The program might have contributed to health improvement that resulted in an increase in school attendance, though there are other factors, such as improved socio-economic status of the parents and others.

The result shows that the cooks benefited from the HGSF in the area of financial empowerment. This implies that there has been an improvement in their income and, as such, they can make contributions to the state economy. This is in line with the view of Osokoya (2008) that discussion about a society's development usually centers on the transformation of the economic and socio-cultural structure of a people leading to improvement in their living conditions.

The study also revealed that the foods supplied to schools are not produced in the host communities. As a result, the HGSFP has not achieved its objective of boosting agricultural production in the host communities and the State as can be seen in Tables 4.13 and 4.14. The HGSFP has not stimulated the local economy nor financially empowered the community. It has not even encouraged local procurement either. The HGSFP in Benue State largely benefits the bigger business people who do not reside among the locals but operate their businesses in urban centers and townships like Makurdi, Gboko, Otukpo, and Kastina-Ala. The implementation of the program has encountered several challenges. Some of the challenges identified in the study are inadequate funding, inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ascertain the quality of food and the environmental insecurity, lack of effective monitoring and evaluation, lack of logistics, and inconsistency in the disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the program. All these have affected the implementation of the program in Benue State.

4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary

In Nigeria, an estimated 40% of all school children go to school hungry and more than 10 million children do not attend school at all (UNESCO, 2020). Rates of school attendance in Nigeria continue to be lower than the average for West and Central Africa despite Nigeria's higher GDP. Nigeria is a country with the highest number of out-of-school children, being home to more than half of the estimated 20 million out-of-school children worldwide (NBS, 2021). After an initial attempt to run a national school feeding programme in 2005, a redesigned programme was launched in 2016. The new national HGSF programme is one of five Social Investment Programmes (SIPs) which have been launched by the Buhari administration.

The major aim of the programme was to address a range of poverty-related problems simultaneously, which include youth unemployment, low agricultural productivity, child nutrition, primary school attendance, and gender inequality. The HGSF programme's strategic plan stipulates that it will provide one meal per school day to all primary school pupils in primary 1 to 3 in Nigeria. By doing so, it aims to: improve the enrolment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout rates from primary school which is estimated at 30%; improve the nutrition and health status of many children and thereby also improve learning outcomes; stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of farmers by creating a viable and ready market via the school feeding programme and create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development.

The HGSF programme is a multi-sector coordination across various government ministries which include the Federal Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Health, Justice, and Budget and National Planning. However, the objectives of the school feeding programme focus on three major sectors: agriculture, health and education and the programme intends to generate a positive, integrated impact across all three. It aims to do this by employing local women to work as food vendors in schools, working with farmers so they can provide the necessary produce to local food vendors, involving health workers to monitor the health of school pupils and ensure they receive a nutritious meal prepared in a hygienic way each day. The programme is managed and funded by the Federal Government but is mainly to be implemented by local school communities in every state.

This study examined the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme on socio-economic development in Benue state. The specific objectives of this study were to: examine the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on school enrolment, attendance and retention in Benue State; assess the role of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on job creation and income of beneficiaries in Benue State; assess the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on stimulating local agricultural production to boost income of local farmers in the state and identify the challenges confronting the implementation of HGSFP in Benue state. In the light of the above objectives, the following are the summary of major findings:

- i. The study found out that the implementation of the HGSFP has not resulted in the increase in enrolment. Instead, the enrolment rate has decreased by 61.5%. This study shows that there was a marginal increase of 11.12% in the attendance of pupils in Benue State primary schools in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 sessions since the school feeding intervention started. The reasons for the decrease in the enrolment rates are due to inconsistency in disbursement of funds by the Federal Government and rising insecurity in Benue State.
- ii. The cooks benefited from the school feeding programme in the area of financial empowerment. The programme has created jobs and improved income of cooks. The knowledge and skills gained by the cooks in training has also improved their purchasing power and that they now cook in hygienic manner. However, this was not sustainable due to the rising prices of food items and inconsistency in the disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the programme.
- iii. The finding from the study also indicates that the foods supplied to schools are not produced in the host communities. As a result, the HGSFP has not achieved its objective of boosting agricultural production in the host communities and the State. It has also not stimulated the local economy, nor financially empowered the community. It has not even encouraged local procurement. The HGSFP in Benue State largely

benefits the bigger business people who do not reside among the locals but operate their businesses in the urban centers and townships like Makurdi, Gboko, Otukpo, Kastina-Ala.

- iv. There were identified challenges in the implementation of the programme in the State, which included: inadequate funding; inconsistency in disbursement of funds by the Federal Government for the programme; lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme; wrong bank verification numbers; hijacking of the programme by the political class; inability to effectively monitor the food preparation to ensure the quality of food and the environment. There was also the challenge of insecurity in five (5) Local Government Areas affecting 67 primary schools where the programme could not commence.

4.2 Conclusion

Efforts in this study were geared towards assessing the impact of National Home Grown School Feeding Programme on socio-economic development in Benue State. The study has shown that the programme is yet to achieve its mandate of increasing enrolment of pupils in public primary schools in Benue State. Instead, it was found that from 2016/2017 when the programme was implemented in Benue State to 2019/2020 academic sessions, the enrolment rate among pupils in public primary 1-3 has decreased by 61.5%. However, the attendance rate of pupils in primary 1-3 in public primary schools in the state has increased marginally to 11.12% since the inception of the implementation of the programme from 2016/2017 to 2019-2020 academic sessions.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that HGSFP has benefited the cooks in the area of financial empowerment. The knowledge and skills gained by the cooks improved their purchasing abilities. However, the prospects of the empowerment being sustainable is put to question due to the inconsistency in the disbursement of funds for the programme by the Federal Government and the rising cost of food items in the market on a daily basis. Apart from that since the inception of the programme the price per ration of meal has remained at N70 per meal (within the period of this study) which is the basis on which food vendors are paid.

Furthermore, the Home Grown School Feeding Programme has failed to achieve its objective of boosting agriculture at the community level through direct purchase of food from the host communities in Benue State. This is due to the fact that foods supplied to schools are not always produced in the host communities. Hence, the HGSFP objective of stimulating the local economy and financial empowerment of the host community is defeated in Benue State. The implementation of the programme has encountered several challenges that has affected its effectiveness in Benue State within the period of this study.

4.3 Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. The study found out that there was decrease in enrolment rate as result of inconsistency in disbursement of funds by the Federal Government and rising insecurity in Benue State, hence, the study recommends that there is need for the Federal Government to be consistent in disbursing funds to cooks. Also there is need for the Federal and Benue State Governments to collaborate to address the security challenges affecting the programme in the State.
- ii. Based on the finding that foods supplied to schools are not always produced in the host communities, the study recommend that the motoring team for the programme should be strengthened to create awareness to the local farmers on food production

- and to ensure that cooks buy directly from farmers in the host communities where they operate. As a way of ensuring compliance, cooks who default the directive should be delisted from the programme to serve as deterrent to others.
- iii. The Federal Government should increase budgetary allocation to the HGSFP in Benue State and other States implementing the programme. The current budget allocation of N70 per meal is no longer feasible due to the increase in prices of food stuffs.
 - iv. Benue State Government should provide funds for logistics in line with its part of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with the Federal Government on school feeding programme. This will enable staff to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of the programme across the State.
 - v. To allow more success on the programme and hygienically prepared foods, Benue State Government should re-consider building of kitchens within the school premises. Most parents want to know and see the source of the food given to their children.

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