

CHALLENGES OF INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION: An Assessment of the State of Complementary Services in Ghana School Feeding Programme

Introduction

In 2005, the Government of Ghana with support from the Dutch Government began the implementation of the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP). The programme which aimed at reducing poverty and improving food security represented a quick-impact approach to achieving the Millennium Development Goals especially with regards to poverty and hunger, universal primary education and under-five mortality. Since its inception the programme has chalked some successes in school enrolment and retention of children in beneficiary schools. Currently, the GSFP feeds about 595,000 children in public primary schools with a target of 1.04 million children by 2010. The programme has so far spent a total of 65.7 million Ghana Cedis since its inception.

As per its design, the GSFP anticipated the active collaboration of some key government institutions to complement the programme budget and support related activities for the achievement of its immediate objectives i.e. increasing school enrolment and retention; reducing hunger and malnutrition; and boosting domestic food production. Among the key collaborating government institutions in the programme are the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), Ministry of Health (MoH) with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural

Development (MLGRD) hosting the National Secretariat of the programme. The programme, consistent with the Local Government Law (Act 462) which seeks to foster local participation in and ownership of development programmes, has the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies as the core implementing body at the district level. Altogether, the GSFP was designed with the expectation of the active involvement of the key collaborating government institutions.

The institutional collaboration in the GSFP is yet to be as effective as expected almost three years into programme implementation. As a result, the delivery of key complementary services in the GSFP schools and communities has been affected.

In line with SEND-Ghana's role of facilitating an independent civil society-led participatory monitoring and evaluation of the GSFP, a study was commissioned to assess the state of complementary services in various schools and communities covered by the GSFP in 2008. In all, 23 schools in 21 districts were purposively selected from the Upper West, Upper East, Northern and Greater Accra regions based on the active presence of SEND-Ghana in those districts. Respondents involved in the study were selected from the broad stakeholder categories of the GSFP at the local level including MMDAs, District Implementation Committees (DIC), decentralised directorates (specifically health, agriculture and education), School Implementation Committees (SIC) and the community.

This report is derived from SEND-Ghana's second participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) report on the Ghana School Feeding Programme. The findings and recommendations include;

Key Findings

Using the SEND Ghana School Feeding Complementary Service Assessment (SF CSA) index, the study found: the state of education services to be midway of expectation; the state of basic infrastructural and health services to be low relative to expectation; and the state of agricultural services to be very low relative to expectation. Moreover, the study observed that the current state of complementary services in the various beneficiary schools and communities adversely affected the quality of education with negative implications on the health of pupils and the sustainability of the programme. Overall the study identified weakness in institutional collaboration between the GSFP and the collaborative decentralised Ministries as the main determinant of the current state of complementary services.

Basic Infrastructural Services

1. About 61% of beneficiary schools did not have good kitchen structures. This adversely affected the maintenance of hygienic environment for food preparation.
2. About 78% of beneficiary schools did not have adequate stock of kitchenware especially plates and cups. As a result, pupils were required to eat in turn such that one cluster was served after the other has finished using plates and cups. This coping strategy unduly prolonged lunch breaks in the affected beneficiary schools, thus reducing contact/instructional hours with negative effects on the quality of education.
3. Among the 83% of schools provided with water tanks, about 37% of the water tanks supplied were not in use due to operational challenges. In some cases, the water tanks supplied have not been used for the past two years due to the inability to connect the tanks to a water source. In other cases, the disuse of water tanks has resulted from the poor access of some schools to a water source. Such cases are indicative of the cost associated with the formulation of national plans without the inclusion of the views of the various SICs to reflect local realities.
4. About 43% of beneficiary schools did not have access to safe water. As a result, pupils were compelled to take time off school to trek for water to support the feeding programme. The cost on contact hours and the quality of education is obvious.
5. Nearly 26% of beneficiary schools have no access to toilet facilities with about 35% lacking urinal facilities. This has implications for school attendance of adolescent girls especially during menstruation.
6. Almost 87% of beneficiary schools lacked hand-washing facilities. This is serious given the health implications of the intake of faecal matter associated with poor sanitation and eating with unclean hands.



Picture 1: Pupils sitting on the ground to write while studying under a tree with no chalkboard in Pina in the Sissala East District.

7. About 70% of beneficiary schools did not have enough classrooms to shelter all classes (KG to P6). In addition classroom overcrowding was found to be an issue, in some cases two or more classes shared one classroom.
8. Inadequate furniture was a problem in about 61% of beneficiary schools; resulting in some pupils in the affected schools sitting on the floor to write, negatively affecting teaching and learning.

Health Services

9. Cooks operating in about 22% of beneficiary schools have not undergone any training in nutrition and hygiene. Consequently, basic health standards were not observed in the preparation and serving of food to pupils in the affected schools.



Picture 2: Serving food in Zori Yapala Primary School in the Gushegu District.

10. Remarkably, pupils in all the beneficiary schools were given health education. In most schools, some teachers were specially trained to provide health education to pupils.

11. However, nearly 70% of beneficiary schools have not received any training in the maintenance of water and sanitation facilities. Where such trainings have been given, services were provided by community health nurses and NGOs.
12. There was no check of Body Mass Index (BMI) in around 87% of the beneficiary schools. Where BMI measures were taken, findings were not reported to SIC as stated in the GSFP Annual Operating Plan. This was because the checks of BMI were taken for purposes other than the GSFP.
13. Pupils from about 43% of beneficiary schools have not been de-wormed since the 2007 national de-worming exercise. In most instances where de-worming was done by the Ghana Health Service, the District Directors of Health (DDH) did not consider it as contributing to the objectives of the GSFP but as part of general routine. Most of the DDH have no knowledge of the GSFP annual plans, objectives and strategy.
14. Supervisory inspections in about 96% of beneficiary schools did not focus on any health related service or adherence to health standards in the feeding programme but mainly on getting pupils fed. Monitoring of the programme was predominantly done by the GSFP desk officers without the active involvement of the Ghana Health Service (GHS).

Agricultural Services

15. Contrary to expectations, the bulk of foodstuffs used for the feeding programme were procured from the open markets within and outside of the various districts. In all, stakeholders from about 91% of beneficiary schools and communities indicated that foodstuffs were not obtained directly from farmers in the beneficiary districts. Although in some cases, certain ingredients for the feeding programme were not locally available or produced in sufficient quantities, the programme failed to buy from farmers in cases where foodstuffs were available.
16. There was no assistance for any farmer or Farmer Based Organisation (FBO) in the beneficiary communities to access credit to expand production because of the GSFP.
17. Stakeholders from nearly 87% of beneficiary communities indicated that farmers did not benefit from any form of extension services. Similar to the health service experience, District Directors of Agriculture were not active in the programme implementation. Almost none of them were aware of the plans, objectives, and strategies of the GSFP.
18. According to the with farm inputs to expand production because of the GSFP.
19. There was no FBO involving farmers linked to the programme in about 87% of the beneficiary communities. Interestingly, MoFA directors indicated the existence of some FBOs in the communities but not related to the GSFP. Moreover, MoFA directors at the various districts did not consider their services as contributions to the GSFP because of their lack of information regarding the plans and strategies of the GSFP.

Education Services

20. Community leaders in about 48% of beneficiary communities were never approached at any point in time to publicise the programme as planned. In effect, community participation in, and ownership of the programme succumbed to apathy which is rife in the affected communities.
21. Remarkably, almost all stakeholders interviewed indicated that parents/guardians of pupils in the beneficiary schools were regularly sensitised to supervise their children's education.
22. Contrary to expectations, the supply of high value education services was generally lacking. In about 85% of beneficiary schools, the average teacher: pupil ratio was 1 teacher to more than the GES standard of 35 pupils. In some cases, the ratio was 1 teacher to 83 pupils.
23. The supply of Basic English and Mathematics textbooks was found inadequate. In about 87% of the beneficiary schools, there were not enough textbooks to satisfy the condition of 1 pupil to 1 textbook. Textbooks for stakeholders interviewed, no farmer or FBO in the beneficiary communities was supplied other subjects such as Religious & Moral Education and ICT were generally lacking.
24. About 30% of beneficiary schools did not have equipment for co-curricula activities as planned.

Policy Recommendations

- ✚ Stakeholder education on the GSFP for all stakeholders especially community members, officials of collaborative decentralised directorates and the MMDAs should be expedited. Civil society organisations could also be encouraged to assist in the sensitisation of communities regarding the programme. Avenues such as community radios, FM stations, TV etc could be used to increase stakeholder awareness of the plans, objectives, strategies and requirements of the programme. Also, all decentralised directorates and beneficiary schools should be given copies of the GSFP documents, manuals and annual operating plans.
- ✚ There is the need to find innovative ways to strengthen the collaboration between the GSFP, MMDAs, collaborative decentralised ministries and other non-state stakeholders. Moreover, in addition to the GSFP desk officer or liaison officer at the MMDAs, the collaborative decentralised directorates should create school feeding desks with responsibility for all aspects of the programme which directly fall under the purview of the decentralised directorate. Also, information on selected beneficiary schools should not be limited to the MMDAs and the GSFP Secretariat alone but copied to the decentralised directorates as well. The multi stakeholder forum on the GSFP held in Tamale should be encouraged and seen as an innovative model for promoting collaboration in the GSFP.

- ✿ Effective involvement of local actors in the formulation of the annual plans of the GSFP to reflect local realities should be encouraged. Where practical and cost effective, the formulation of the annual plans should start at the DIC levels with the active participation of all SICs. The various DIC plans should then be consolidated at the national level. With such an arrangement, the members of the DICs including the directors of the decentralised directorates and members of SICs including community leaders will not only become aware of the plan but also offer their inputs in its formulation. Besides, this will also enhance the collaboration between the actors in the GSFP. However, guided by the experience of the formulation of the district development plans which in most cases are done without the involvement of the relevant stakeholders, the GSFP secretariat must ensure that all the DIC and SIC stakeholders are involved.
- ✿ Given the importance of local food production in the achievement of the programme goal and its sustainability, the technical and facilitative roles of MoFA is crucial. To this end, it is necessary to redefine the role of MoFA in the GSFP especially as related to the sourcing of locally produced foodstuffs for the feeding programme. MoFA should be tasked with the responsibility of making food available for the programme. With such an arrangement, it will be easier for MoFA to target farmers in the various districts for extension services, inputs and other support necessary to expand food production for the benefit of the GSFP and for national consumption. By this, farmers involved in the programme can easily be identified and improvement in their welfare tracked to assess the programme impact on the income level of farmers.
- ✿ In order to ensure that beneficiary schools are provided with the full complement of services in the context of scarce resources, it will be necessary for the MMDAs, and all the decentralised directorates to prioritise the beneficiary schools as model schools in the various districts. However, in order not to create undue problems of inequity, it is important for the selection of beneficiary schools to be based on need. With this, the prioritisation of the beneficiary schools as model schools for improvement in basic infrastructural, health, agriculture and education services could be justified based on equity. In addition, CSO efforts at independent monitoring and facilitation of appropriate linkages to address practical needs of the beneficiary schools and communities should be encouraged by the GSFP secretariat.
- ✿ Finally, effective monitoring and evaluation focusing on all aspects of the programme is imperative. To this end, a monitoring team comprising representation from each of the decentralised directorates and the MMDA should be formed to regularly monitor the implementation of the programme and make appropriate recommendations for improvements. The different stakeholders in the team will ensure that all areas of the programme including health and agriculture are covered in the monitoring of the implementation of the GSFP in the various schools and communities. This will require additional funding from the GSFP for the DICs to fund monitoring.

Conclusions

The collaboration envisaged in the GSFP was meant to enhance service provision to enable it achieve its goals of poverty reduction and food security. However the provision of these complementary services is beset with challenges necessitated by weakness in the collaboration

between the GSFP and MoFA, GHS and GES especially at the district level. Accordingly, quality education, improved health among children in beneficiary schools as well as boosting domestic food production is far from being attained.

Given the implications of the current state of complementary services on quality education, improved health among children and the sustainability of the programme, it is important for stakeholders to take immediate steps to drastically improve upon the situation. Without improvement in the current state of complementary services, the GSFP is likely to become unsustainable with time and contribute close to nothing to its overall goal of poverty reduction and food security.