Whose Decision Counts?

Introduction
The 2005 UN Summit recognised Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) Program as one of the best strategies to reduce poverty in developing countries. The summit regarded the program as a ‘quick impact initiative’ to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially in areas facing the twofold challenge of chronic malnutrition and low agricultural productivity. The Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP) began as a pilot program with 10 schools, drawn from each region of the country. The program expanded rapidly and by March 2007, it had grown to cover 975 schools and benefited about 408,989 pupils daily with the expectation to benefit over 1 million pupils by 2010. The program is coordinated at the national level by the School Feeding Program Secretariat under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment (MLGRDE). At the local level, the District Assembly acts as the focal point for implementing the program with the task of establishing District Implementation Committees (DIC) and School Implementation Committees (SIC) at the district and school levels respectively.

SEND Ghana in its contribution to ensure the success of the program facilitated an independent civil society-led participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) of the implementation of the program.

Key Findings
In general, primary school enrolment has increased under the program. At the same time, the study unearthed some gaps in the program in relation to good governance, accountability and equity. These include:

- **Gender Mainstreaming and Equity:** The management structures of the GSFP are not fully consistent with the government’s gender-mainstreaming policy. The composition of the District implementation Committee (DIC) lacks explicit directions to ensure the participation of women. Also, at both the DIC and SIC levels, there was no specific directive to incorporate persons with disability and the youth in the planning and implementation of the program.

- **Effectiveness of Implementing Structures:** Some stakeholders were not aware of their responsibilities. About 14% of DICs and nearly 47% of SICs were not aware of their terms of reference outlining their expected roles and duties. Some of the committees

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have either met once or never met since their formation. This observation raises some concerns as to how decisions about the selection of new beneficiary schools, purchase of foodstuff, planning and execution of actual feeding are taken.

- **Public Procurement**: Procurement procedures as stipulated in the Public Procurement Act 2003 (Act 663) were not adequately followed. In sourcing for materials, research shows that more than 50% of the districts did not follow laid-down tender procedures in the award of contracts in respect of the GSFP. In general, procurement for all the necessary inputs was done mostly at the DIC level through the services of external suppliers who supplied items from outside the beneficiary communities.

- **Local Farmers**: The program has not adequately provided support to local farmers as planned. The program’s plan of increasing incomes of local farmers by providing them a ready market was not complied with. In a number of cases, purchasing of the foodstuff was not necessarily from local farmers but from the market. Also, only 7% of districts covered by the study facilitated access to bank credits for local farmers.

- **Transparency and Accountability**: The management of program funds is not utterly transparent. About 39% of districts covered by the study failed to disclose information on the flow of funds. Other districts, due to poor record keeping, could not give accurate information regarding total monies they have received for 2007.

- **Unity of Disbursement**: There are multiple disbursement channels for the allocation of funds to the various districts for the program. District Assemblies received funds from different sources; from the School Feeding Secretariat, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, and from the Controller and Accountant General’s Department. Also, about 41% of districts covered by the study indicated that the release of funds was irregular.

- **Capacity Building**: The increase in enrolment has not been accompanied by additional resources to sustain the program. This adversely affected the capacity of the program to cope with the higher demands exerted by the increase in enrolment.

In the light of the foregoing, SEND Ghana makes the following Policy Recommendations:

**Policy Recommendations**

**Good Governance**
- There is the need to enhance the monitoring and supervisory capacity of the programme. This could be achieved through such measures as improvement in decentralised data management of programme inputs and outputs, strengthening of human resource capacity, and increasing logistics.
- It is necessary to build the capacity of all stakeholders at the various levels of the programme (i.e. DIC, SIC and Community levels) in relation to their responsibilities, and the duties of others. This would encourage stakeholders to peer review each other’s performance to promote effective work. One way to achieve this is through policy education for stakeholders in the various districts.
- Decision making at all levels should be consistent with the guidelines of the GSFP. Broad-based participation by all stakeholders, bottom-up approach and community ownership must be emphasised.

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3 ibid
4 ibid
The need for holistic planning and proper coordination of the stakeholders are critical not only for the effectiveness of the implementation process but for sustainability of achievements. The involvement of the district directorates of health, education and agriculture during all stages of the programme cycle should be strengthened.

**Accountability**

- To ensure transparency, all relevant stakeholders must take keen interest in the management of programme funds. To this end, the Public Procurement Authority should take active interest in the programme and work with the GSFP Secretariat to institute measures to ensure that procurement procedures are adhered to. It will be useful for it to collaborate with the Secretariat to plan and implement a training programme on the Public Procurement Act for all the key stakeholders.
- Moreover, effort should be made by the Auditor-General’s Department to cooperate with the GSFP Secretariat to come out with a financial reporting format to ensure proper financial record keeping at the DIC and SIC levels.
- In addition to the timely release of funds to the districts for the programme, there is the need to enhance information dissemination among stakeholders about funds received at the district level. Again, restrictions to access to public information should be discouraged.
- For the effective tracking of funds allocated for the programme, it is important to avoid the use of multiple disbursement channels for the allocation of funds to the districts.

**Equity**

- Effective measures should be put in place to ensure that increased enrolment come with commensurate improvement in the allocation of funds and other resources necessary to sustain the gains in enrolment made by the programme.
- Due to the increased enrolment recorded under the programme, the tendency to include other non-beneficiary schools is high. However, the study recommends that efforts should be made to correct the shortcomings in the current implementation phase before the addition of new schools to the list.
- To ensure that all DICs are gender-balanced, the guidelines of GSFP in relation to membership of the DIC should be reviewed to be consistent with the gender equity and mainstreaming policy. Efforts should be made by all DICs to ensure that at least one woman is a member, especially in districts where the Districts Girl-Child Education Officer is a man.
- The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) should be encouraged to play its role as stated in the programme document of the GSFP. This will promote the organisation of farmers' cooperatives and markets where the programme could directly purchase foodstuffs from local farmers. Under such arrangements, it will be easy to identify the programme’s client farmers for financial assistance and other material incentives to expand production.

**Conclusion**

The GSFP can indeed live to its description as a ‘quick impact initiative’ to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. However, this will require holistic planning, effective monitoring and evaluation, capacity building, and transparent management of program resources. All these are within the reach of the government and other stakeholders.
This policy brief is the first by SEND Ghana. It is based on report of the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP). The intended target of this policy brief includes policy makers, senior civil servants, development partners and media as a quick reference material. The financial support of Cordaid Netherlands for this project is gratefully acknowledged.

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