

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme and Socio-economic Development in Benue State

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Abstract

The National Home Grown School Feeding Programme is a component of the National Social Investment Programme initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016. The objective of the programme is to promote primary education while reducing the scourge of poverty among the beneficiary communities and improve socio-economic development through the promotion of local agricultural production, creating employment and stimulating economic activities in the beneficiary communities. Communities, especially the local farmers, local traders, and local caterers, are through this programme, expected to derive some benefits. However, evidence of the impact of school meal programmes has been mixed. This prompted this study to assess the impact of Nigeria's National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on socio-economic development in Benue State. The study is anchored on the incrementalism model as its framework of analysis. Mixed methods research was adopted for the purpose of data collection and analysis. Primary data were collected using interviews. Findings have revealed that the implementation of the HGSFP has not resulted into an increase in school enrolment in the State. Instead, the enrolment rate has decreased by 61.5%. Despite this decrease, attendance rate increased by 11.12% during the implementation of HGSFP in the State. The programme 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 programme in the State. It was revealed that in spite of this however, more needs to be done to improve school enrollment and attendance as well as Job creation in Benue state in order to reduce poverty and achieve socio-economic development. The study recommended 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. 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.

Keywords: Home Grown, School Feeding Programme, Socio-economic, Development, Benue State

Introduction

Every society has its own peculiar problems. These problems could be in the areas of politics, commerce, education, agriculture, communication, housing, transportation, health care among others. In order to solve these problems, government formulates policies and programmes in response to them and in relation to the objectives of national development and wellbeing of the citizens. Programmes are given solution to each of the causal problems that explains a central problem in policy and which were deemed crucial by a strategy designed to address those challenges and to overcome it (Ikelegbe, 2006).

Since Nigeria's political independence in 1960, several policies have been formulated and implemented by successive governments to address the development challenges experienced in the country. Some of these policies include Universal Primary Education (UPE), 1976, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), 1976, Federal Urban Mass Transit Programme (FUMTP) 1988, National Policy on Housing (NPH) 1986, People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), 1989, the Community Bank Scheme, 1990, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), 1999, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the State and Local chapters of State Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) (Akhakpe, 2014).

Home Grown School Feeding Programme (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. The Federal Government of Nigeria, after the pilot study in 12 states in 2016 launched the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in public primary schools in all the states and FCT. The task of the programme was to ensure that one solid quality meal was given to children in classes 1-3 per day. This was aimed at increasing enrolment, reducing dropout rate and ensuring quality learning outcomes. The main objective of the programme is to help improve the enrolment of primary school pupils, ensure retention, reduce dropout rate and ensure total completion in the school among others (NHGSFP, 2016).

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme commenced on 3rd March, 2017 at the LGEA Primary School, Wurukum, Makurd in Benue State. 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).

Following the aforementioned development and in light of these challenges and current research gaps, the study evaluated the impact of HGSFP on the 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. 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.

Statement of the Problem

Benue State has myriads of socio-economic challenges. Some of these challenges include 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. The NBS (2019) reports 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. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the state ranked the 21st poorest state in the federation judging from the high level of unemployment and decline in agricultural production.

The resultant effect of the poor state of the economy is the inability of parents and guardians to pay the fees of their wards. Thus, 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 which results in reduced participation in agriculture, destruction of farmlands, crops, homes and displacements leading to dwindling income of farmers. Again, accessing local food items by the cooks of the programme has been made difficult, thus aggravating the socio-economic condition, resulting in further disempowerment of local farmers.

Some studies have been conducted to assess the implementation of HGSFP such as: Awojobi and Tinubu (2020), Adekunle and Ogbogu (2016) who assessed the school feeding programme of public elementary school pupils in Osun State, Nigeria; Moore and Kunze (2017) evaluated school feeding programme in Burkina Faso and found that school canteens were associated with increased school enrolment and regular attendance, especially among girls; Iyiola (2020) assessed the educational objectives of Osun Elementary School Feeding and Health Programme (O-MEALS) in rural primary schools in Osun state. However, most of the earlier studies have not concentrated on the impact of school feeding programme on other stakeholders like the cooks/vendors, supervisors, small farm holders' financial empowerment. In other words, although there is a large and well substantiated evidence base for the nutritional, educational and household food security impacts on 'primary beneficiaries' school-aged children of conventional school feeding programmes, much less is known about the impacts of HGSFP on the 'secondary' beneficiary groups, such as local farmers, suppliers and caterers. This study attempts to fill this gap by bringing into limelight the secondary beneficiaries like local farmers, suppliers and caterers that are critical in measuring socio-economic development in Benue State.

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 as to the viability and sustainability of the present Home Grown Feeding Programme (HGSFP). Against this backdrop, the question to ask is: Will it go like the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy of 1976 or the UBEC policy of 2004? These policies brought in free primary education, which 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 on this study to interrogate the strategies for successful implementation set out in the present programme and the extent to which it has achieved its objectives so far. On the school enrolment and attendance in Benue State, the role of the HGSFP on job creation and improving income of beneficiaries in Benue State and its impact on stimulating local agricultural production to boost income of local farmers in the state as the problematic of this study

Objectives of the Study

These objectives include:

- i. To assess the impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on school enrolment and attendance in Benue State.
- ii. To examine the role of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on job creation and improving income of beneficiaries in Benue State.
- iii. To assess the impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on stimulating local agricultural production to boost income of local farmers in the state.

Conceptual Clarification

The Concept of Public Policy

The term 'policy' is central to the operation and activities of both private organisations and

public institutions (Ozor, 2004). A policy option made by an individual or private institution is known as private policy while the one made by government or its institutions is called public policy. However, the term 'policy' as it is used in this work refers to only those policies made by government and which are, regarded as public policies. Generally, scholars have viewed the term policy differently and from various perspectives. Some emphasize policy as an action. Others see it as a choice. Yet, some see it in terms of scope of action (Ikelegbe, 2006). In other words, the way a given scholar conceptualises a policy depends on the perspective from which the scholar is viewing it and this accounts for the varied definitions of the concept. For instance, Egonmwan (1991), is of the opinion that, public policy is a governmental programme of action, while to Abdulsalemi (1990), it refers to hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring government action for their solution. To Ezeani (2006), it is the proposed course of action which government intends to implement in respect of a given problem or situation confronting it. Ikelegbe (2006, p.3), in a more elaborate form, defines policy:

as the integrated course and programmes of action that government has set and the framework or guide it has designed to direct action and practices in certain problem areas. In essence, a policy is a course setting action that provides the direction, the guide and the way to the achievement of certain goals or objectives desired by government.

The Concept and Origin of Home Grown School Feeding Programme

School feeding is simply the provision of food to children in schools. According to Oyefade (2010), different countries have one or a combination of two feeding modalities in place for various objectives. However, they can be grouped into two broad categories: in-school meals and take-home rations where families are given food if their children attend school. Uduku (2011) contended that there are indications of a significant swing in thinking about school feeding and many elements of this new thinking are being promoted keenly under the rubric of "home grown school feeding". What is obtainable in Nigeria is in-school meals. However, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the country attempted to feed children in their various homes.

School feeding, according to Espejo, Burbano and Galliano (2009) has been an effective safety net that can prevent those affected by economic shocks (increased food prices or during protracted crises) from adopting negative coping strategies. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP) and the Millennium Hunger Task Force launched the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme initiative (Kiamba, 2013). The concept is based on harnessing structured demand from school food provision (a win-win for farmers and school children). Neeser (2012) argued that school feeding is currently being used in this way in many countries, including Haiti, Liberia, Pakistan and Senegal. In many low-income countries, school feeding programmes have also been a critical part of the response to the global economic crisis. Espejo, Burbano and Galliano (2009) stated that the objectives of school feeding vary depending on the context. General objectives are to: meet the immediate food needs of children; alleviate short-term hunger and improve learning capacity; increase access to education (i.e. enrolment, attendance, retention and completion); reduce gender and social inequalities; improve health and nutrition status; increase development opportunities. These objectives have great potential for addressing the development challenges in Nigeria, and Benue state in particular.

However, citing The World Bank, Tomlinson (2007) argues that there is little evidence to show that school feeding programmes have a positive impact on nutrition for participating children, nor on the root causes of malnutrition and hunger. Tomlinson (2007) advocates the use of School Feeding Programme (SFP) not for educational benefits per se, but as a developmental tool saying it would focus on improving the livelihoods of particular groups that are vulnerable to food insecurity, and not simply (for example), improving school enrolment. He further argued that, if increased enrolment is the aim, then using government funds to reduce or waive school fees would be a more cost-effective way of ensuring this than School Feeding Programme (SFP).

The SFP should be seen as income transfer within the community and not solely on school feeding. To Otsuki (2011), the HGSFP initiative is an institutional experiment in promoting a green economy by linking public sector food procurement to sustainable agriculture. It offers opportunities for food produced and purchased within a country by producing and purchasing food from local small-scale farmers, (Espejo et al, 2009). Songa (2011) says that the need to transit from SFP to HGSFP was to achieve reduced costs, a more sustainable feeding programme, provision of predictable market for local farmers, boosting local development and enhancing local ownership of school meals programme.

The Concept of Socio-Economic Development

Adoyi, Aliegba& Abu-Tom (2019) traced the concept of socio-economic development to the evolution of capitalism and the demise of feudalism. According to these authors, socio-economic development is related to increase in output coupled with improvement in the social and political welfare of the people within a country. This definition connotes that socio-economic development encompasses both growth and corresponding welfare values. The authors went further to identify indices of this concept to include: gross domestic product, income distribution, literacy and education, access to health care, social security and pension and modern transportation.

To Todora (2011), socio-economic development, implies the improvement of the way endowments such as goods and services are used within (or by) the system to generate new goods and services in order to provide additional consumption and/or investment possibilities to the members of the system.

Socio-economic development has traditionally been seen as the first form of development. It has often been strictly associated with the concept of economic growth, in turn, defined as an increase in the per capita- income of the economic system. Indeed growth defined in this way can be seen more as the result of an economic development process i.e. the transformation of the structures of an economic system, rather than as a development process per se. This view limits development to the production of goods and services in a given society. However, it ignores completely the distribution of the goods and services being produced. The basic question that emanates from this view is that what happens if these goods and services are unequally distributed to the extent that only few persons in the society benefit? In other words, the definition undermines the principle of equality that is cardinal to development.

In an elaborate and embracing perspective, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2010) introduced the concept of human development in development discourse. According to UNDP (2010), human development is people-centered development, where the focus is put on the improvement on the various dimensions affecting the wellbeing of individuals and their relationship within the society (health, education, entitlements, capabilities, and empowerment) among others. This study agrees with this view. The definition captures all the indices that this study seeks to measure. The indices are also in line with the objectives the HGSFP has set out to achieve. The above mentioned emphasis on the links between human capital and growth constitute a step towards a multi-dimensional concept of development, where knowledge is not only fundamental to economic growth but an end per se, as it generates empowerment, self-reliance and a general improvement in community and social relationships. Nowadays, the concept of development encompasses a set of elements comprised in more than one of the above mentioned qualifications. UNDP (2010), for instance, provides an aggregate concept of human development on the basis of three criteria; (i) long and healthy life: (ii) knowledge, and (iii) a decent standard of living; which is respectively measured by life expectancy at birth, mean years and expected years of schooling and gross national income per capita as well as purchasing power parity. The process of development is not complete unless the progress made is sustained. Development process must put in place strategies for sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Incrementalism Model as its framework of analysis. Charles Lindblom is associated with this model. It rejects the rational comprehensive model of decision making that

calls for careful articulation of all alternatives. Charles Lindblom's essay, "The Science of Muddling Through" (1959), inaugurated a new approach to understanding public policy. To Lindblom, decision makers frequently approach development situations with ideal goals in mind, but only apply marginal changes to the existing problems. Thus, traditionally, policy reviews cover a limited number of the many problems raised at a time. This implies that planners and policy makers in conservative political systems are inclined more to Lindblom's incrementalism because it offers a realistic, feasible and in most cases, a simpler measure to handle immediate political and developmental concerns.

The salient tenets of the incremental model enunciated by Lindblom (1959) are summarized as follows:

- i. The decision maker focuses only on those policies which differ incrementally from existing policies.
- ii. Only relatively small number of policy alternatives is considered.
- iii. For each policy alternative, only a restricted number of important consequences are evaluated.
- iv. The problem confronting the decision-maker is continually redefined, and
- v. There is no one decision or "right" solution to a problem but a "never-ending series of attacks" on the issues at hand through serial analysis and evaluation.

Incremental decision making has been described as remedial, geared more to the alleviation of present concrete social imperfections than to the promotion of future goals. It does not seem to have the know-how of forecasting an impending problem.

Lindblom's model of incrementalism has encountered several challenges. First, it is alleged to be insufficiently goal oriented and ambitious, inviting "complacent acceptance of our imperfections" (Arrow, 1964, p.588), and justifying "a policy of no effort" (Dror, 1964, p. 155). Incremental steps are said to mean proceeding "without knowing where we are going" (Forester 1984, p. 23).

A second criticism holds that incrementalism is an overly conservative approach, which "would tend to neglect basic societal innovations" (Etzioni 1967 p.387), and would limit social scientists' ability to serve as a source of social innovation. Third criticism holds that incrementalism is appropriate in only a narrow range of decision situations: where the environment is stable, no crisis is impending, the organization's survival is not at stake, available resources are not desperately short, and where current policy problems resemble previous ones for which the organization has experience (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988).

In spite of these criticisms, incrementalism is politically expedient because it is easier to reach agreement when the matters in dispute among various groups have only limited modifications of existing programmes rather than policy issues of great magnitude or of an all-or-nothing character.

It is thus, true to character that public decision makers find this model cheap, fast and, above all, expedient. Overall, incrementalism is suitable for describing the attitude of major decision makers in Nigeria's response to the challenges of socio-economic development in the country. For instance, since the inception of democracy in 1999, successive political leaders have initiated policies or programmes such as NAPEP, SURE-P and Social Investment programmes among others to address the development challenges especially poverty in the country.

Drawing conclusion from the above, the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is therefore an increment on the other past government policies like Universal Primary Education (UPE) 1976, and Universal Basic Education programme in 2004. The intellectual limitations of incrementalism are by no means material to its realistic suitability in understanding the decision behaviour of policy makers cum political leaders.

The experience in Benue State is the same in terms of policy attitude. Most of the public policies designed to address the challenges of development are domesticated from the central/federal government. This implies that there are mere improvements and modifications of existing

policies. The HGSFP is one of those policies that is implemented in the state through the Federal Government and the policy attitude has been incremental without radical changes in previous government policies and programmes.

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative approach where interview was the major instruments of data collection as well as content analysis which were sourced from government publications, among others.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section deals with data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings in line with the objectives of the study:

The impact of HGSFP on School Enrolment and Attendance in Benue State

Interviews conducted with heads of schools to ascertain the reasons for the decrease in enrolment despite the implementation Home Grown School Feeding Programme all point to two major reasons. These reasons include the inconsistency in disbursement of funds for the programme and the rising spate of insecurity in the state. For instance, a Head Teacher, LGEA Primary School in Gboko LGA stated that: “the programme has the potential of boosting enrolment rate, however, the inconsistency in the disbursement of funds which results in the inconsistency in provision of meals has hindered the programme from achieving its objectives in Benue State” (Interviewed, 09/7/2021).

Besides, a Head Teacher, LGEA Primary School in Oju LGA also opined that: “apart from funding, insecurity occasioned by farmers and herders conflicts and inter-ethnic conflict between Oju and ShangevTiev in Konshisha Local Government Area had driven many pupils away from schools. The little benefits recorded in terms of enrolment have been neutralised by the conflicts” (Interviewed, 16/07/2021).

From these responses, it would be safe to conclude that even though the HGSFP has the potential of increasing enrolment rates, lack of consistency in the disbursement of funds resulting in no meals to pupils and insecurity has affected the prospects of the programme in Benue State.

In order to ascertain if the implementation of HGSFP has resulted to the increase in attendance, records were obtained from Benue State Basic Education Board four (4) years before and after the implementation and the result is presented on Tables below.

Table 1: Attendance rate in Benue State primary schools before HGSFP

Sessions	Primary 1 (%)	Primary 2 (%)	Primary 3 (%)	Average %
2012/2013	73.3	67.6	79.4	73.4
2013/2014	72.8	83.6	70.9	75.8
2014/2015	70.0	80.0	67.8	72.6
2015/2016	72.8	71.6	72.1	72.3
Average	72.2	75.7	72.6	73.52
attendance before				

Source: Benue State Universal Basic Education Board, 2021

Table 1 above shows the trend of attendance rated in Benue State primary schools before the implementation of HGSFP. It could be seen from the statistics of attendance presented in percentages in Table 1, that between 2012/2013 and 2015/2016, the mean attendance rate was 73.52% for primary 1-3.

Table 2: A attendance rate in Benue State primary schools during HGSFP

Sessions	Primary 1 %	Primary 2 %	Primary 3 %	Average %
2016/2017	79.3	84.1	76.3	79.9
2017/2018	79.4	87.3	79.2	81.97
2018/2019	88.6	88.1	88.9	88.53
2019/2020	89.1	87.2	88.2	88.17
Average attendance during HGSFP	84.1	86.7	83.1	84.64

Source: Benue State Universal Basic Education Board, 2021

The result in Table 2 shows the attendance rate in Benue State during the implementation of HGSFP (2016/2017 and 2019/2020). The result indicates that the mean attendance rate was 84.64%. Thus, the attendance rate in the intervention period was much higher than the periods before intervention. In primary 1-3 the mean attendance rate increased by 11.12% between 2016 and 2020 during the implementation of HGSFP in Benue State.

Interviews with teachers in some schools where the HGSP is implemented revealed that school attendance improved since the inception of the programme. The teachers interviewed explained that pupils in Primary 1-3 hardly missed school since the beginning of the programme. Another teacher further clarified that, the level of attendance is greatly determined by consistency in the provisions of meals by the vendor. This means that when there is consistency in the supply of meal, there is also a corresponding increase in school attendance by pupils. Attendance remains moderate in some schools that provided SFP due to inconsistency in provision of meals as a result of poor funding. When children miss school, it implies that they may not progress to other levels of learning. The finding agrees with the study conducted by Moore (1994), Bergeron and DelRosso (2001), Ahmed & Carlo de (2020), Gelli (2017) and Kristjansson (2019) that, in Niger Republic, when school canteen were closed, high absenteeism followed and children were withdrawn from school. The programme might have contributed to health improvement that resulted into increase in the school attendance, though there are other factors, such as improved socio-economic status of the parents and others.

Role of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) on job creation and improving income of beneficiaries 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:

Interview conducted with the beneficiary caterers/vendors in some part of Benue state supports the assertions that HGSFP has created job to especially the vendors and has indeed help in improving their income. Caterers from the selected communities attested to the fact that catering jobs in homegrown school feeding programmes generated income for them. The caterers in Gboko, Makurdi, Katsina-Ala, Otukpo, Ushongo, Ado and Buruku communities confirmed that their involvement in the programme has "helped us earn money that enables us solved some of our financial problems." One of the vendor, Tracia Tyowua from Gwer West said, she has expanded her business due to income from the Homegrown school feeding programme. This implies that homegrown school feeding programmes has created job which caterers generate income through the catering jobs they were involved in by the government 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 thus:

whenever, we received our payment, it helps us to solve our daily needs, but due to the increase in prices of food items, the gains are fast eroding". We use to 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, Akpagher, Mbatia Gboko LGA, interview, 2021).

Field data revealed that the aim of the programme on job creation in Benue state as a whole according to a focus group conducted reveals that government needs to do more in the area of job creation because without a commensurate release of funds the impact is not as expected in Benue. This finding corroborates Adepoju and Babalola's (2011) claim that individuals who receive empowerment are better able to earn a livelihood that provides purchasing power to sustain their family.

The impact of the HGSFP on stimulating local agricultural production to boost income of local farmers in the state.

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. 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 adopt improved production methods, they are often unable to easily sell their produce in markets, which, for smallholders, are thin, volatile and costly.

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 centres. 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. Instead the funds end up the pockets of 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 old methods of agricultural practice.

An interview result revealed thus:

Local farmers across the selected communities do not expand their farmlands due to homegrown school feeding programmes. A “programme which is not patronizing our resources cannot affect the size of our farm. They are not buying our rice, beans or even yam. They don't buy from us” the local farmer said in answering this question via the interview. This means that homegrown school feeding is no more ‘homegrown’ because the idea of making it a homegrown programme was to derive anything to be eaten by the pupils from the core beneficiary community. By importing food items into the beneficiary community under any other arrangement is akin to deviation from the real idea for establishing homegrown school feeding programmes(Interview, 2021).

Therefore, there is no adaptation to 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 local farmers still depend on rain fed agriculture and poor farming techniques leading to low harvests. The local farmers hardly harvest enough to last them the whole year, not to talk of selling the food commodities. This negative trend in the policy implementation has affected the socio-economic well-being of the target groups of the NSIP objectives.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the impact of Home Grown School Feeding Programme on socio-economic

development in Benue state. The study found that the implementation of the HGSFP has not resulted in the significant increase in enrolment. Instead, the enrolment rate has decreased even though there is increase in the attendance and retention 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 the disbursement of funds by the Federal Government and rising insecurity in Benue State. The findings also reveals that despite the poor implementation of the policy 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 have also improved their purchasing power and that they now cook observing hygienic practices. The finding from the study also indicates that the food supplied to schools is not produced within the host communities. As a result, the HGSFP has not achieved its objective of boosting agricultural production by the local farmers in the host communities. 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 local people but operate their businesses in the urban centres like Makurdi, Gboko, Otukpo, Kastina-Ala. Rather than source food products from local farmers and enhance their social condition, food produced majorly comes from outside the community, thereby defeating the objective of improved income and socio-economic wellbeing of farmers through the HGSFP.

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

- i. 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. The study recommends that the monitoring 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 ₦70 per meal is no longer feasible due to the increase in prices of food stuffs.

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