



Parent-led school feeding: A tested approach to improve learning in schools

Overview

Up to eight million children attend school in Uganda, however the largest proportion go hungry, with only 33% of the children receiving meals at school. This has implications on cognitive development, school performance and achievement (National Planning Authority Report, 2017). According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS-2014), 66% of learners at primary level were not feeding at school.

Urban children (41%) are more likely to receive school meals than their rural counterparts (32%) and most of this feeding is provided through parental contribution. The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) recognizes that feeding is an essential component of a child friendly school as it improves physiological growth, school enrolment, learning and overall cognition. In 2013, government designed the school feeding and nutrition guidelines to improve child health, nutrition and educational performance, however many schools are still unable to implement them.

Additionally, in one of the Cabinet memos, the MoES stated that hunger is one of the main reasons children perform poorly in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools. It noted that hungry children have poor concentration and mental abilities, absenteeism, bad behavior, poor health and end up dropping out of school.

Parent-led feeding is the best option. This policy brief highlights; interventions undertaken to promote parent led school feeding and lessons learnt. It also provides policy recommendations.

Introduction

A daily school meal is a vital incentive to keep children in school and it allows them to concentrate on their studies. School food is in essence vital for achieving education for all (Drake et al., 2015). Not feeding a child at school is a violation of their rights under the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of the Child, and other international protocols and conventions to which Uganda is signatory.

Key Issues

- Only 33% of children receive a meal while at school, and urban children are more likely to receive feeding than their rural counterparts.
- Negative attitude from some parents, changing weather patterns, inadequate storage facilities at school, and laxity of School Management Committees are hindering the effective implementation of parent-led school feeding initiatives.
- There is no linkage between school feeding and agriculture sector production programmes.

At the launch of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1997 in Uganda, roles and responsibilities of key players in providing education were identified and eventually amplified in the Education Act of 2008. Under this law, the government provides inputs through capitation grant allocations to schools, instructional materials, and infrastructural support. On the other hand, provision of food is one of the responsibilities left to parents and school communities.

School feeding modalities include; cash contribution for school food, food item contribution in kind by parents and home packed meals.

Home-packed meals have been the government's recommended and promoted school feeding modality, especially for rural schools that register 80% of the estimated 7.9 million learners in primary education. However, this recommendation has had minimal success because of a number of factors, ranging from lack of food and packing materials at the household



level, to low appreciation of the links between meals and learning outcomes by various responsible parties.

Interventions undertaken to promote parent-led school feeding

i) Development of guidelines on School Feeding and Nutrition intervention Programme

The MoES developed guidelines in 2013 with the aim of assisting the implementation of a parent-led school feeding programme to improve child health, nutrition and educational performance. The guidelines were issued in conformity with the Education Act (Article 13, sub-section 5[2c]) which states that, “*The responsibility of parents and guardians shall include providing food, clothing, shelter, medical care and transport.*” The guidelines have however only been disseminated in the Karamoja, Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

In 2016, the SNV Netherlands Development Organization offered to pilot the guidelines through the dairy project funded by the Dutch Government. The aim of the pilot was to get 5,000 school going children taking parent provided milk while at school in six districts within the cattle corridor in south western Uganda. Within a year, 80,400 children were taking parent provided milk in school on a daily basis.

ii) School Feeding Sensitization Campaigns

The MoES together with various development partners and Civil Society Organizations have sensitized communities at national, district and village levels. In April 2018, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs. Janet Kataha Museveni

launched the National School Feeding mobilization campaign for parents and leaders at all levels to ensure that all children get a meal while at school.

The campaigns take the form of radio talk shows, regional and district based dialogues. In one of the radio talk shows in the West Nile region, on Radio Pacis in Arua Municipality, the First Lady noted that the issue of parents not packing food for their school-going children was a mindset problem that required intensified community sensitization by all leaders at different levels. She added that this attitude arose because of a misconception of the UPE policy by some parents who believed that Government was supposed to do everything.

iii) Investing in home grown school feeding: The World Food Programme (WFP) together with MoES are promoting the home grown school feeding initiative in Karamoja mainly due to the chronic under resourcing of the school meals programme by WFP.

The initiative is aimed at encouraging and supporting parents/communities to be more involved in feeding their children by creating farmer groups under the Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme. The farmer groups grow food which is then sold to the agency and eventually supplied to schools.



Left: Children being served at Awach P7 School in Gulu District; Right: Some parents and school feeding committee members weighing food delivered by parents at Kiteny Owalo P/S in Gulu District

Experience of parent-led school feeding

Parent-led school feeding aids increased enrollment, retention, reduces dropout rates, thereby leading to the achievement of access to inclusive and quality education. This in turn leads to human capital development in the long run. Box 1.0 presents a case where school feeding has contributed to improved enrolments in schools and pass rates in Gulu District.

Box 1.0: Parent-led school feeding in Gulu District

In March 2018, the Gulu District Local council passed a school feeding policy that compels parents to provide lunch to their children during school. According to the policy, parents who fail to ensure that children eat at school can be subjected to punishment as determined by the sub-county ordinances. Also head teachers that do not embrace the policy programme are subject to disciplinary action under the Public Standing Orders. However, the policy spells out that no child shall be punished in anyway or prevented from attending school as a result of their parent's failure to contribute to the programme.

Through sensitizations and meetings, all the schools in the district had embraced the school feeding program. A total of 53 (out of 55) grant aided primary schools, and 12 (out of 16) private schools provided lunch to learners courtesy of the parents, while others had feeding percentage between 35-70%. The parents/guardians contribute 5kgs of beans or peas; 8kgs of grains or 15kg of fresh cassava/sweet potatoes per child. A cash contribution of Ug shs 5,000 towards cook's salary, salt, cooking oil, grinding grains is also made per term. Food items brought are weighed and rationed to determine how much is given out to the kitchen to avoid abuse and wastage of food.

Key achievements: i) Improved pupils' enrolment increased in the district by 5% from 36,000 in 2017 to 37,972 in 2018, ii) Improved daily attendance by the learners and staff in the schools, iii) Better relationships have been created between the schools and the parents who visit more often than previously, and iv) Improved learning achievements were noted in many schools. For example, Awach P7 had 10 pupils in Division one in 2018 PLE compared to none in 2017. Panykworo PS and Oguru PS had pass rates at 100% compared to 95% pass rates in 2017.

Source: BMAU Field Findings January 2019

Implementation Challenges

i) **Negative attitude from some parents** who have a dependency syndrome where they expect government to provide everything to a school going child. In Mpigi District, many parents have refused to

provide a meal for their children and this has impacted on performance as pupils escape to look for something to eat. Similarly, in Rukondwa Primary School in Masindi District, teachers have been in a "cat and mouse affair" with parents over school



feeding for the last two years claiming it is the responsibility of Government.

ii) **Poverty Levels** have hampered the programme since some parents/guardians do not have adequate food at home. The UBOS (2016/17) Household Survey indicates that Ugandans living below the poverty line had increased to 10 million from 6.6 million three years earlier, and only 52% of the households could afford to take two meals in a day on average. The situation has hampered some parents' ability to provide food for school going children.

iii) **Changing weather patterns** have created serious cases of hunger in West Nile, Teso sub-region, Karamoja and Isingiro District thus affecting parents' contribution towards the programme. Parents of Pajimo Army Primary School, Kitgum District were not able to contribute food to the school due to poor harvests in 2018.

iv) **Lack of linkage with the agriculture sector production programmes** which limits production of required foods for school feeding.

iv) **Inadequate storage facilities:** lack of physical facilities to support food storage, food preparation, and related activities compromises food quality and hygiene standards. For instance, Gulu District noted that children in a number of schools were being served under trees because they lacked serving points.

v) **Laxity of School Management Committees** in implementing government programmes especially school feeding. Although guidelines are in place, a number of school management committees have been reluctant to follow up parents who don't provide meals for their children.

Conclusion

Although some parents experience difficulties in contributing towards school feeding amidst increasing poverty levels and unfavorable weather patterns, parent-led school feeding is the most sustainable approach.

There is evidence to show that where parent-led school feeding was adopted, performance of pupils

improved and teacher parent relationships were enhanced. The strategy entails an option of either contributing food in kind or cash for provision of food ration. This therefore calls for concerted effort and commitment from the parents, government and other stakeholders to ensure that children have a meal while at school.

Recommendations

i) The MoES should continuously sensitize the parents on their role of feeding children at school and embark on a national wide dissemination campaign of the guidelines.

ii) The MoES should develop low-cost infrastructure designs for schools to adopt as storage facilities for food items and packed meals.

iii) The MoES should continuously monitor the School Management Committees to ensure that they take up their responsibilities in the school feeding programmes as indicated in the guidelines and in case of failure, punitive measures should be undertaken.

iv) Using the SNV experience, the MoES should explore the possibility of linkage to other sectors such as agriculture to compliment the programme and ensure availability of food.

References

- Ministry of Education and Sports (2013), "Guidelines on School Feeding and Nutrition Intervention Programme.
- Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, "Semi-Annual Budget Monitoring Report FY 2018/19.
- National Development Plan (2017); Towards Zero Hunger: "A strategic Review of Sustainable Development Goal 2 in Uganda
- The World Bank (2013), "Improving Learning Uganda

For more information, contact
Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic
Development
P.O Box 8147, Kampala
www.finance.go.ug