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School Selection and Local Food Production in Ghana's School Feeding Programme

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School selection and local food production in Ghana's School Feeding Programme[1]

School feeding programmes have been touted to improve school enrolment and physical development of children in poorer communities, but discussions on school selection criteria and linkages to local food production have been very minimal. This article discusses school selection and local food production under Ghana's feeding programme. Findings show that school selection has been very problematic, motivated largely by political patronage and financial gain, and not by the stated criteria of poverty and low enrolment. Local farmers have been registered in some districts to supply food to caterers, thereby helping to improve local food production. The article argues that feeding programmes ought to be designed to ensure that it reaches those who actually need it and to involve local actors in ways that promote mutual benefits.

Keywords: manipulated selection, local actors, food production, food security, transfer enrolments, environmental threat

Seleção de escolas e produção local de alimentos no Programa de Alimentação Escolar do Gana

Os programas de alimentação escolar têm sido elogiados por melhorarem a matrícula escolar e o desenvolvimento físico das crianças nas comunidades mais pobres, mas a discussão sobre os critérios de seleção das escolas e as ligações com a produção local de alimentos tem sido mínima. Este artigo analisa a seleção de escolas e a produção local de alimentos no âmbito do programa de alimentação do Gana. Os resultados mostram que a seleção de escolas tem sido muito problemática, motivada em grande parte pelo favoritismo político e o ganho financeiro, e não pelos critérios estabelecidos de pobreza e reduzido número de matrículas. Os agricultores locais foram registados em alguns distritos para abastecer de alimentos aos fornecedores, ajudando assim a melhorar a produção local de alimentos. O artigo defende que os programas de alimentação devem ser desenhados para garantir que alcançam aqueles que realmente precisam e para envolver os atores locais de forma a promover benefícios mútuos.

Palavras-chave: seleção manipulada, atores locais, produção de alimentos, segurança alimentar, matrículas de transferência, ameaça ambiental

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School feeding programmes have been implemented by several countries in the world as it has been shown to have beneficiary effects on school attendance, enrolment and the physical development of children, and in some cases, improvements in educational attainment (Ghelli et al., 2014; World Food Programme, 2013). Children who suffer from poor nutrition are also associated with poor health, repetition of grades, high drop-out rates and fewer years of schooling (Jukes et al., 2007, in Ghelli et al., 2014). Studies have also shown that hunger impairs attention in class, motivation or interest to learn, and leads children to abandon school altogether (Kristjansson et al., 2016). For many developing countries, school feeding programmes have been introduced as a social intervention strategy to ensure food security, at least, for children (FAO, 1996, 2015).

In Africa, many countries have introduced school feeding programmes due to expected benefits such as nutritional value to children, improved school attendance and reduction of poverty, but the programmes display a mosaic of successes and challenges. For example, in Nigeria, it has been shown to have positive effects on attendance (Ajani, 2009). In Kenya, about 70 percent of the cost of school meals is borne by the community in some counties, thereby affecting the effectiveness of the feeding programme (Kiilu & Mugambi, 2019); in Ethiopia, monthly take-home rations are provided in addition to school meals which are prepared with food items imported from the United States (World Food Programme, 2018); and in Rwanda, efforts have been made to provide adequate infrastructure such as school kitchens and to increase parent and community contributions to the programme (World Food Programme, 2020).

Ghana's school feeding programme was introduced in 2005 to provide children in primary schools and kindergartens in the poorest areas with one, hot nutritious meal per day, using locally-grown foodstuffs, with a broader development objective to contribute to poverty reduction and food security in Ghana in the long term (Abebrese, 2011; ECASARD/SNV Ghana, 2009; Government of Ghana, 2006). Three immediate objectives stated for the feeding programme were: 1) to reduce hunger and malnutrition, 2) to increase school enrolment, attendance and retention and 3) to boost domestic food production, with expected outputs such as increased income for farmers, use of environmentally sustainable farming methods, and start-up of farms by schools participating in the programme (Government of Ghana, 2006, p. 4). This article addresses two main questions based on the stated objectives of Ghana's school feeding programme: first, does the feeding programme reach pupils schooling in poor communities? Second, has the feeding programme led to increased local food production? A number of studies have been undertaken on feeding programmes in general and

that of Ghana in particular. Bundy et al. (2009) have discussed the benefits of school feeding programmes including their potential to provide food transfers to poorer households and their ability to cater for more than 10 percent of domestic expenditures. Gokah (2008) and Serebour (2017) have also argued that feeding programmes help to keep children in school, but it is doubtful whether they have any impact on child malnutrition and hunger in the midst of implementation challenges such as delays in release of funds and lack of appropriate supporting infrastructure. With reference to food security, that is, availability of food, access to food, utilisation and stability of food (World Food Summit, 1996) and food sovereignty, that is, the right of people to sustainably produce, distribute and consume healthy food on their territory, and to have access to markets to sell agricultural produce (Altieri, 2002, 2009; Quaye, 2007; Quaye et al., 2009; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005), a few studies have been undertaken in relation to the feeding programme in Ghana. For instance, a study of participating schools in four districts showed improvements in household access to food, better availability of food and ready local farm market produce created by the feeding programme (Quaye et al., 2010), but this did not say much about any deliberate efforts of farmers to expand farms or take advantage of the existence of the programme to increase food production. Ros-Tonen et al. (2015) have examined value-chain collaborations in the attainment of food sovereignty with the view to formulate a framework that fosters greater farmer autonomy and sustainable food production, but again, very little was revealed about explicit value-chain linkages in relation to school feeding programmes. Salifu, Boateng and Kunduzore (2018) have also discussed the contribution of Ghana's feeding programme towards the achievement of free compulsory basic education in Ghana, and found that it has had a positive influence on school enrolment and retention; however, it is silent on what pertains in non-participating schools in the same community or towns. Iddrisu et al. (2019) have also questioned the link between the selection of participating schools and the objective of the programme to reduce poverty, and have pointed to problems associated with selection of schools.

Regarding food procurement, caterers of the feeding programme have been advised to procure, at least, 80 percent of their food items from local farmers within the community, district, region or national level, with a preference for the nearest food markets (Carvalho et al., 2011); and it is only when the required food items were not available that this advice could be ignored. However, it is doubtful whether this procurement advice is followed. Indeed, a study by Sulemana, Ngah and Majid (2013) in northern Ghana revealed that caterers were not purchasing any food items from local farmers. This raises questions about the link

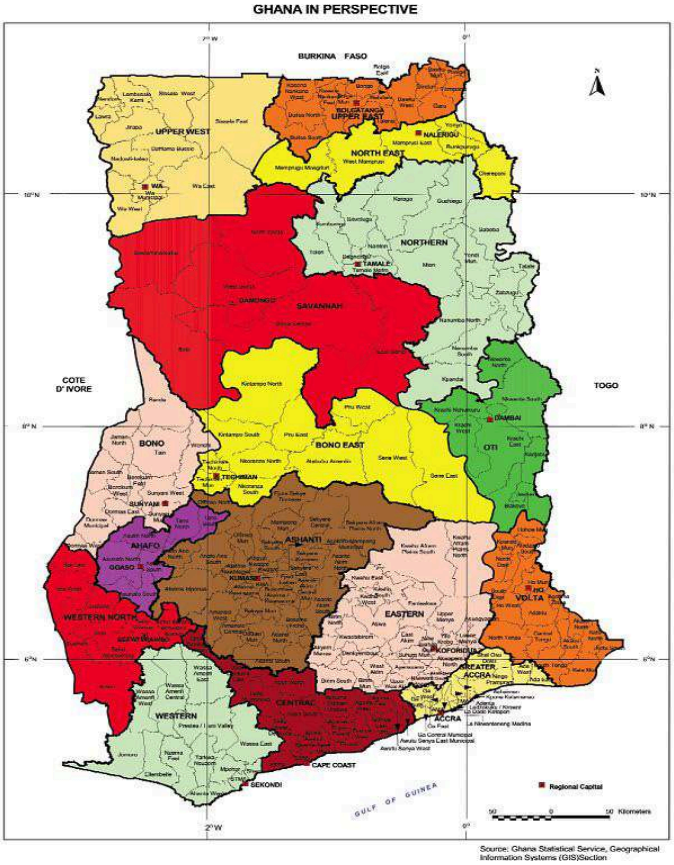
between the feeding programme and promotion of local food production. Has the situation with procurement and local food production changed or remains the same? Have school selection processes improved to allow the feeding programme to reach pupils in poorer communities, or remain the same?

The data for this article was collected in two phases: the first phase occurred from October to December 2015 and the second phase from December 2018 to January 2019, with some updates in November 2020. The first phase involved qualitative interviews with a purposive sample drawn from three regions of Ghana. The ten regions[2] of the country were grouped into clusters based on poverty rankings from the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 and Ghana Poverty Profile reports 2005-2013. This produced the richest cluster regions, namely Greater Accra, Ashanti and Eastern; the poorest cluster regions, namely Upper East, Upper West and Northern; and the mid-income cluster regions, namely Central, Western, Brong Ahafo and Volta (See Figure 1: Map of Ghana; GSS, 2014). The second stage of the selection process involved randomly picking any one region from each cluster, and this resulted in the selection of Greater Accra from the richest cluster, Upper West from the poorest cluster and Central region from the mid-income cluster. From this stage, purposive sampling criteria were used to select districts with public schools that were benefiting or were excluded from the Ghana School Feeding Programme. A total of six districts were selected through this process. In each district, two beneficiary schools and two non-beneficiary schools were selected to participate in the study. In each study location, the study participants included headteachers, teachers, elected local representatives of the community such as the Assembly member, key community leaders, local government officials, GSFP coordinators, officials of the Ghana Education Service (GES) at the district level, and representatives of key partners such as the World Food Programme and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. The criteria for selection of participants included closeness to the key issues of the study such as management, implementation and coordination of the programme. The main primary data was collected through 36 semi-structured interviews between October and December 2015. Questions asked in interviews included objectives of the GSFP, relationships between the programme and poverty reduction, education, agriculture, nutrition and health of pupils; factors considered in the selection of participating schools; assessment of the success of the programme, problems and suggestions for improvement. The study also used secondary data such as published research, reports, poverty profiles, demo-

[2] This study was based on the 10 administrative regions which existed before the 2018 referendum which created six new regions.

graphic data, living standard surveys, welfare indicators reports, census reports, and other relevant materials for analysis.

Figure 1: Map of Ghana showing regions and study areas (arrowed)



Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2020

The second phase of data collection focused on local food production and environment from December 2018 to January 2019, with a purposive sample drawn from Upper West, Upper East and Central regions in Ghana. This involved 61 participants including school headteachers, teachers, caterers, cooks, and GSFP officials. The questions posed in the study covered food that is regularly prepared for children in the schools, food items locally purchased from local producers, reasons for purchasing from local producers, challenges involved in dealing with local producers; sources of energy for the preparation of meals for children in schools, and the reasons for using or not using a particular type of cooking fuel. These were then analysed in terms of their implications for local food production and their impact on the environment.

The article proceeds with an overview of feeding programmes as social policy interventions, Ghana's feeding programme, selection of participating schools and enrolment, nutrition and local food production, GSFP and poverty reduction, source of cooking fuel, discussion of the findings, followed by the conclusion.

Feeding programmes as social policy interventions: an overview

Governments in the Global South face the existential challenge of addressing human needs of citizens with social policies that meet basic developmental principles including meaningful participation by local actors, protection of the environment and social justice. This is no mean task in the face of budgetary pressures, giving rise to intense debates regarding appropriate policy choices (Adésínà, 2007; Mkandawire, 2012). Whereas Adésínà and Mkandawire argue for transformative social policy that incorporates production, protection, reproduction, redistribution, social cohesion and nation-building (Adésínà, 2011, p. 12), others advocate for social protection which focuses on addressing poverty and vulnerability (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2007). School feeding programmes tend to be categorised under social assistance which seeks to address poverty and deprivation, and have been generally introduced under social protection programmes in developing countries (Barrientos & Pellissery, 2012; López-Calva & Lustig, 2010). Key studies undertaken to advance discourses on social protection in Africa under the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) and Legislating and Implementing Welfare Policy Reforms (LIWPR) projects include social transfer payments in sub-Saharan Africa (Gronbach, 2020), politics of social protection reform in Malawi (Siachiwena, 2020), child welfare regimes in Botswana (Chinyeka, 2019), old age pensions in Zanzibar (Seekings, 2016) and expansion of social protection in response to Covid-19 in South Africa (Seekings, 2020).

However, social policy interventions broadly seek to address inequality and ensure decent standards of living, and to maintain social stability and progress, and this involves the pursuit of values that societies consider fundamental for human existence and well-being, including global values enshrined as fundamental human rights and in conventions to which governments have acceded (Capeheart & Milanovic, 2007, p. 2). Such interventions often involve a redistribution of income in ways that ensure that the needs of a population can be reasonably met (Harvey, 1973); it also concerns the provision of education and developing the capabilities of people (Sen, 1985, 1999). Social policy and welfare

provisions are founded on principles of social justice in society. In this regard, Miller (1999, p. 11) has also observed that social justice, at the fundamental level, concerns how the advantages and disadvantages in a society are distributed or how the benefits and burdens are shared by members of the society. Young (1990, p. 16) has also argued that any evaluation of social justice in a society must question whether or not people have equal opportunities, and to examine the structures that enable or constrain social mobility. For Pattison (2008, p. 107) and Smith et al. (2008, p. 108), social justice is also about fairness, attainment of basic needs and capabilities, and maximisation of human potential. Thus, social interventions must aim at addressing human needs that are necessary for survival, promote social participation and well-being, by ensuring access to adequate food, housing, education and gainful employment (Jimenez, 2010, pp. 22-24).

The case of Ghana School Feeding Programme

According to estimates from the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GSS, 2014), Ghana has some 7,744,000 children in basic education, with 72 percent of them in public schools. This comprises 3,651,000 in kindergarten, 2,459,000 in primary school, and 1,060,000 in junior high school. School attendance rates across the regions in Ghana remain very uneven. The regions with the lowest attendance rates include the Northern region (50.4%), Upper East (63.4%) and Upper West (63.6%), which also happen to be the poorest regions in the country. Those with the highest rates of attendance include Greater Accra (92%), Ashanti (87.9%), Eastern (86.6%) and Central (83.6%), with the rest falling between these (GSS, 2014).

Ghana's School Feeding Programme forms part of NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme. It was also geared towards helping to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals of reducing hunger and poverty, and to increase enrolment in primary education. The GSFP was piloted in 2005 with 10 schools drawn from all 10 regions of Ghana, and was formally started in 2007 with sponsorship from the Government of Ghana, the Dutch Government, the World Food Programme and other supporting organisations. By the end of 2008, about 596,510 pupils from 138 districts in Ghana had been fed under the programme. This represented about 20% of all primary school enrolments (De Hauwere, 2008). By 2010, the programme had reached 697,416 pupils across all regions in Ghana, representing about 22% of primary school pupils, as indicated in Table 1 below. The programme targeted about 1,000,000 pupils but this was not met due to a number of constraints including funding (GSFP, 2011),

and by the fourth quarter of 2014, estimates from the National Secretariat of the GSFP showed that 1,728,681 pupils were being fed across the country, with the view to reach 2,500,000 pupils by end of 2015.[3] Reports in May 2019 indicated that 2.8 million children were fed in 9,495 schools across Ghana (MyJoyOnline, 2019). It was estimated that Ghana has a basic school enrolment population of some 7,236, 623 (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Table 1
GSFP coverage of schools and pupils 2005-2020

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Number of Districts
2005	10 (pilot phase)	Not available	10 (one from each of the 10 regions of Ghana as at 2005)
2006	200	69,000	138
2007	975	408,989	138
2008	1,510 (approx. 20% of primary schools)	596, 510	138
2009	1,698 (approx. 22% of primary schools)	656,624	170
2010	1,741	697,416	170
2014	Not available	1,728,681	216
2019	9,495	2,800,000	216
2020	9,000	2,600, 000	216

Source: Adapted from GSFP website, 2020; GSFP Report, 2011; Carvalho et al., 2011

Targeting of beneficiary schools under the GSFP has been problematic and this has been acknowledged by the programme managers themselves (GSFP, 2011, p. 14), stating that a retargeting may be required periodically to ensure that the food actually gets to poor pupils. The targeting criteria since inception of the GSFP have included road access, availability of electricity, access to potable water and other poorly-defined indicators which can be found in nearly every district in Ghana such as poverty, vulnerability and low enrolment; and the criteria are therefore unable to discriminate between deserving and undeserving areas and schools. The criteria seem to pay little attention to available poverty profiles and food security maps, and ignore systematic use of relevant geographic information and other indicators, but seem to rely more on political links to

[3] GSFP website: http://www.schoolfeeding.gov.gh/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=77&Itemid=117

the party in power for financial gains through the provision of catering services. In the process, only about 21.3% of the poor were reached under the programme in a study conducted in 2012, apparently because many of the schools included in the feeding programme were not from poor or deprived areas; however, a sister social assistance programme, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), that relies on similar data but uses a more rigorous targeting approach was able to reach 57.5% of its target beneficiaries (World Bank, 2012, p. 3).

Successes and shortfalls of GSFP implementation

School selection and enrolment under GSFP

The official criteria for selection as a beneficiary school include low enrolment of pupils in a school, poverty and vulnerability conditions of the community in which the school is located, among others. In addition, the school has to be publicly funded. Enrolment data on schools is supplied by the District Educational Directorate to the District Assembly, and data on vulnerability and poverty levels are provided by the Planning and Social Welfare offices at the district level, which use similar data sets to manage the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in the districts. However, the final determination of which schools to benefit from and which ones to be excluded rests with the District Assembly, though other stakeholders may make recommendations.[4]

It is also instructive to note that allocation of beneficiaries under the GSFP is based on a quota system provided by the regional GSFP Coordinator. The Coordinator may inform the District Assembly that they have been allocated a quota of say 1,200 pupils for the year. It is then up to the Assembly to determine how to re-allocate the quota among schools with low enrolment in communities with relatively high poverty and vulnerability.[5]

Community level respondents were asked about the reasons for inclusion or exclusion of schools in their locality from the GSFP, and a wide range of issues were raised. Some indicated that initially the district programme managers gave priority to schools in remote communities but now participation in the school feeding programme is political. This is because schools lobby for it and politicians also use it to score political points, irrespective of enrolment or deprived conditions of the school. For example, if the headteacher and Assembly member have strong linkages with the party in power, they are likely to get more schools

[4] Interviews with GES official, Greater Accra, October 30, 2015; District Assembly official, Central region, December 23, 2015.

[5] Interview with District Assembly official, Central region, December 23, 2015.

in their area included in the GSFP. In addition, if key decision-makers in the local government wish to gain greater political support in the form of votes for their party, then there is a high likelihood that schools in areas where such support is being sought will become beneficiaries of the GSFP, irrespective of the official criteria of low enrolment, poverty and vulnerability.[6]

In the Central region, respondents commented on the criteria for inclusion in the GSFP and the following are excerpts indicating a convergence on the political nature of school selection. One headmistress commented as follows: "political considerations are sometimes prioritised over economic and enrolment drives, and so the selection of schools in the GSFP has turned out to be highly political".[7] Similar views were expressed by an officer of the Ghana Education Service directorate in the same region.[8] Another teacher stated that the political affiliation of a headteacher may influence the decision on the selection of the school, especially if the headteacher has linkages with the party in power.[9] A headteacher also concurred that: "political affiliation of the town, constituency and head of the school are crucial in determining the chances that a school will benefit from the GSFP",[10] and another headmistress supported this view saying: "selection of schools is politically inclined and often based on political grounds".[11] Summing up, one teacher also stated the following: "political influence and the ability to lobby at the District Assembly will determine whether a school in a community will be included or left out in the GSFP".[12] Similar comments in relation to school selection were made in interviews in the Greater Accra region. One Assembly member stated that: "the DCE promised that they will bring school feeding here in 2012, so they did".[13] Another Assembly member concurred with this by indicating that it was a government promise to them, which had been fulfilled.[14] A headteacher in the same region also indicated that schools that were currently benefiting from GSFP are those decided by the Assembly, and not necessarily the poorest or those with lowest enrolment.[15]

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6 Interviews with headteacher, Central region, December 9, 2015; Assembly member, Greater Accra region, November 29, 2015; headteacher, Upper West region, November 4, 2015.

7 Interview with headmistress, Central region, December 10, 2015.

8 Interview with GES official, Central region, December 16, 2015.

9 Interview with teacher, Central region, December 21, 2015.

10 Interview with headteacher, Central region, December 18, 2015.

11 Interview with headmistress, Central region, December 8, 2015.

12 Interview with teacher, Central region, December 15, 2015.

13 Interview with Assembly member, Greater Accra, November 4, 2015.

14 Assembly member, Greater Accra, November 12, 2015.

15 Interview with headteacher, Greater Accra, November 5, 2015.

In the Upper West region, similar views were expressed, but in addition, more schools in urban areas were selected in preference to rural schools which were experiencing greater deprivation and lower enrolments.[16] From the responses, it appeared urban communities with greater political clout and lobbying power were getting more schools to benefit from the GSFP than rural schools in the region. However, poverty levels in the rural areas of this region are far greater than in urban areas (GSS, 2015).

The key link between GSFP and education is in the area of school enrolment. Increased enrolment has occurred in almost every school where the GSFP has been implemented. In the view of most respondents, this high enrolment and improved attendance helps to improve educational participation.[17] However, a closer look reveals some interesting nuances. Some increases in enrolment appear to be a transfer of enrolment from schools that are not participating in the GSFP to schools that are benefiting from the programme in the area or district. For example, there are instances where within a cluster of schools operating on the same compound, some schools are selected to participate in the GSFP and others are excluded. The effect of the situation is that children are removed from non-participating schools and registered in the participating schools by parents.[18] This usually leads to an increase in enrolment of the school participating in the feeding programme, and a loss of enrolment in the schools that are excluded from the programme. This especially occurs at the community level where some schools are selected and others are left out, in a situation that has been confirmed by other respondents.[19]

In other situations, parents move their children from communities where school feeding is not done in the schools to distant towns where the children will be fed in school, even if this means children have to walk over 5 km to school and back every day.[20] Thus, some of the increases in enrolment that accompany the implementation of GSFP in schools may not present an accurate picture of a net increase in school enrolments; much of it may be explained by transfer enrolment from non-beneficiary schools to beneficiary schools. A closer examination of enrolment figures from kindergarten schools in same towns or locations point

[16] Interviews with Assembly member, Upper West region, November 9, 2015; teacher, Upper West region, November 3, 2015.

[17] Interviews with GSFP Deputy Coordinator, Greater Accra region, November 2, 2015; headteacher, Upper West region, October 28, 2015; SNV official, November 3, 2015.

[18] Interview with parent, Central region, December 22, 2015.

[19] Interviews with teacher, Central region, December 12, 2015; Assembly member, Greater Accra region, November 9, 2015.

[20] Interview with District Assembly official, Central region, December 23, 2015.

to this phenomenon as depicted in the Table 2 below. However, further investigation of this may be required to fully determine its extent.

Table 2

Kindergarten enrolment of schools in same towns or locations

Town	School	KG1	KG2	Total
Agona Nkum				
	Nkum AMA 'A' Basic School (GSFP)	56	28	84
	Nkum AMA 'B' Basic School (Non GSFP)	11	8	19
Agona Nyakrom				
	Nyakrom Holy Quran 'A' Basic (GSFP)	30	34	64
	Nyakrom Holy Quran 'B' Basic (GSFP)	25	32	57
	Nyakrom Presby Basic (GSFP)	30	38	68
	Nyakrom AMA 'A' Basic (Non GSFP)	8	10	18
	Nyakrom AMA 'C' Basic (Non GSFP)	16	11	27
	Nyakrom Salvation Army Basic (Non GSFP)	21	17	38
Agona Bobikuma				
	Bobikuma Catholic Basic (GSFP)	70	41	111
	Bobikuma Presby Basic (Non GSFP)	42	30	72
Agona Asafo				
	Asafo AME Zion Basic (GSFP)	82	44	126
	Asafo Catholic Basic (Non GSFP)	47	36	83
Agona Duakwa				
	Duakwa Salvation Army Basic (GSFP)	81	59	140
	Duakwa Methodist Basic (GSFP)	113	53	166
	Duakwa Islamic Basic (Non GSFP)	32	34	66
	Duakwa AEDA Basic (Non GSFP)	15	13	28

Source: Adapted from Ghana Education Service Enrolment Statistics & GSFP Coordination Offices, Agona East and Agona West Districts, Central Region, 2016/2017

In terms of quality of education, respondents indicated that the GSFP has had no direct impact. This is understandable because the programme was not set out to pursue this in the first place. Indeed, in some districts in Greater Accra, schools without the GSFP perform better academically than schools benefiting from the programme, thereby delinking improvement in academic performance from school feeding. However, school enrolments have increased and attendance of pupils have become more regular at the beneficiary public schools.

Nutrition and local food production

The GSFP is expected to help reduce hunger and malnutrition, and is geared towards consuming food that is necessary for growth, improved metabolism and repair of worn-out tissues in the body. The evidence on this has been mixed at best. Some local government officials indicated that the GSFP implementation committee at the local level provides a menu that the caterers are expected to follow in the preparation of food for pupils in the schools; however, while some caterers prepare nutritious food, others provide food that does not meet the required nutritional standards.[21] Sometimes the food is poor to the extent that children refuse to eat, defeating the objective of meeting the nutritional needs of the children.[22] In some schools in the Greater Accra region, most pupils refuse to eat the food because what is in their lunch-packs from home is more nutritious.[23] In other instances, the food is of good quality but the portions are insufficient for the children.[24] This situation was linked to the long delays in the release of funds to caterers, which lead them to reduce the quality and quantity of food prepared for pupils, leading them to occasionally threaten to withdraw catering services altogether.[25] In spite of these challenges, the GSFP was seen by some key respondents as a direct benefit for the pupils whose parents cannot give them nutritional meals at home. In their view, this helps to reduce morbidity and improves the health status of children, thereby reducing the rate of absenteeism from school due to illnesses from malnutrition.[26]

Recent interview with a Desk Officer and Coordinator of the GSFP in the Upper West region (November 23, 2020) revealed significant improvements in the procurement of food items and local food production, regarding the objective to boost domestic food production. GSFP coordinators in the region have been instructed to liaise with the agriculture offices at the local government level in the selection of food suppliers. The agriculture office registers farmers within the locality, who are recommended to caterers for procurement of food items under the feeding programme. These registered farmers are to be given priority in the purchase of food components as registered suppliers. The food items are to be purchased directly from the registered farmers, and where some specific

[21] Interview with headteacher, Upper West region, November 4, 2015.

[22] Ghanaweb: Pupils reject School Feeding Programme, Thursday, May 26, 2016.

[23] Interview with community leader, Greater Accra region, October 28, 2015.

[24] Interview with Assembly member, Greater Accra region, November 29, 2015.

[25] Interview with District Assembly official, Upper West region, October 27, 2015; see also Ghanaweb: School feeding programme under threat as caterers threaten to withdraw services, Thursday, February 9, 2017.

[26] Interview with SNV official, November 3, 2015.

items are not available from the farmers, the caterers are then allowed to purchase them from the local market.

In spite of these arrangements, there is little evidence to show that food production has increased as a result of the existence of the GSFP mainly because the registered farmers are many. Some famers have increased their production but not necessarily as a strategy to supply food to the GSFP because each district has a list of farmers from which the caterers may choose to contact and purchase products. With the limitations on a number of participating schools, budget constraints and the large pool of registered smallholder farmers, the GSFP has not specifically led to expansion farms to boost local food production. As regards increases in the number of people moving into food production as a result of the GSFP, there is little evidence that this has occurred. However, some tomato and pepper cultivators have increased their farm sizes in order to meet supply requirements from caterers in their districts. Overall, local food supply has improved as a result of the GSFP but the downside is that food items become more expensive on the local market anytime basic schools are in session due to buyer-competition from caterers.

Local food production was of prime importance to this study since this was one of the key objectives of the school feeding programme. To this end, the study posed questions to investigate the kinds of food that was regularly prepared for children in school and to determine any linkages with food that was produced in the locality, the district, region or country. The leading meals provided for children in schools, in various combinations, were rice (23.7%), beans (20.8%), *gari*[27] or cassava meal (17.3%), *banku*[28]/maize meal (11.0%) and other variants. These were combined with groundnut soup, okra stew or tomato sauce. The data on food items purchased from local producers also revealed that most of the meals prepared in the schools were sourced from local producers. This included rice, gari, maize, beans, tomatoes, groundnut, cooking oils (such as palm oil, coconut oil, shea-butter oil), onions, pepper and others. This is an improvement on an earlier finding in 2015 which showed a very weak link between local agricultural production and the school-feeding programme. Table 3 presents further details regarding the food items purchased from local food producers for children under the school feeding programme. Though the specific quantities and monetary values could not be easily ascertained, the number of children fed per day in a school and the number of schools involved in the programme provide a sense of

[27] Local meal that is made by milling cassava tubers, drying and dry-frying the dough into fine flour.

[28] This is a form of local maize meal that is made from the maize dough.

the importance of its impact on local food production. The findings also revealed that at least GHC 1.00 is spent on each child per day.

Table 3

Food items regularly purchased from local producers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tomatoes	48	13.2	15.2	15.2
	Onions	42	11.5	13.3	28.6
	Maize	42	11.5	13.3	41.9
	Rice or gari	51	14.0	16.2	58.1
	Beans or groundnut	44	12.1	14.0	72.1
	Meat	3	.8	1.0	73.0
	Local cooking oil	43	11.8	13.7	86.7
	Pepper	42	11.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	315	86.5	100.0	
Missing	System	49	13.5		
Total		364	100.0		

Source: Author, 2019

To further investigate the reasons for buying or not buying food items from local producers, questions were posed to participants regarding these. The reasons given for purchasing food items from local producers included cheaper prices (36.5%), availability in the local market (27%), easier to bargain or negotiate (10.6%) and availability of credit purchases from some producers (10.6%). However, 4.7% mentioned helping local food production and 2.4% mentioned creating employment as their reasons for buying from local producers. Incidentally, these respondents turned out to be the policy level participants, whereas the caterers and cooks gave reasons that focused more on practical or financial issues. Table 4 provides further details about the reasons for buying from local producers. The main reason cited for not buying from local producers were frequent shortages with reference to quantities needed to meet food requirements, demand for instant cash for purchases by farmers, and poor roads that make it difficult to go to villages to purchase food items when necessary. Some farmers have responded to shortages in products such as tomatoes and pepper by expanding their farms, but there has not been a deliberate collective response to take advantage of the situation.

Table 4

Reasons for buying from local producers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Food items usually fresh	7	1.9	8.2	8.2
	Food items available in local market	23	6.3	27.1	35.3
	Prices are cheaper	31	8.5	36.5	71.8
	It is easier to negotiate or bargain	9	2.5	10.6	82.4
	Purchase on credit from some producers	9	2.5	10.6	92.9
	Creates employment	2	.5	2.4	95.3
	Helps local food production	4	1.1	4.7	100.0
	Total	85	23.4	100.0	
Missing	System	279	76.6		
Total		364	100.0		

Source: Author, 2019

GSFP and poverty reduction

There is a stated expectation between the implementation of GSFP and poverty reduction: the programme is expected to improve school enrolment, improve educational attainment and eventually lift families out of poverty. The fundamental logic is that when people are educated, their chances to get out of poverty are enhanced, because they will be in a much better position to create jobs for themselves or would have acquired skills that make them employable. In one sense, the GSFP has helped to reduce poverty by relieving poor parents of some financial commitments that would have gone into feeding their children every day they attend school, and this saved income can be put to some other use.[29] According to the respondents, it is very common in poor communities for children to be absent from school because parents could not provide food for them in order to attend school. Some children indeed come to school on empty stomachs, find it very difficult to participate in academic activities, and eventually abandon school altogether.[30] In some participating communities, parents ask children not to consume all the food given them at school but to bring some home to their brothers and sisters.[31] In some instances, poor children have taken note of the days and times that food is provided in school, and on days where

[29] Interviews with Assembly member, Upper West region, November 2, 2015; and SNV official, November 2, 2015.

[30] Interview with District Assembly official, Central region, December 23, 2015.

[31] Interview with teacher, Central region, December 12, 2015.

feeding is not done, they abandon school and go home.[32] Thus, the GSFP appears to be a critical need for children from extremely poor homes. However, there is also evidence that some parents who could provide food for their children are off-loading that responsibility to the state by failing to feed their children; such parents send their children to school without food, telling them that food will be provided in school.[33] This exemplifies the difficulty to distinguish between the truly needy from those taking advantage of the GSFP, which constitutes one of the classic social policy challenges (Korpi & Palme, 1998). Some respondents also indicated that there has been no direct reduction in poverty in the communities where GSFP is implemented except for the caterers and children who benefit.

Sources of cooking fuel under GSFP

The source of fuel for food preparation under the school feeding programme reveals an environmental threat that needs to be addressed. Respondents were asked about the source of fuel for food preparation and to indicate whether they used gas, electricity, charcoal or firewood or any other source of fuel. Surprisingly, 100% indicated firewood as their source of fuel for cooking in all the regions. They were further asked to indicate their reasons for choosing or not choosing a particular type of fuel for food preparation. The reasons given for choosing firewood (some of which they burn to convert to charcoal) were that it was readily available (48%), it was the cheapest (10%) and it was easy to use (3%) (Tables 5 and 6). In some regions, the children were asked to bring firewood to school and so caterers do not have to pay anything for them. In other instances where this is not feasible, a tricycle load of firewood is purchased every other week, at an average cost of GHC80 (See Figures 2 and 3).

[32] Interview with headteacher, Greater Accra region, November 3, 2015.

[33] Interview with District Assembly official, Central region, December 23, 2015.

Table 5

Reasons for choice of fuel
Region crosstabulation count

		Region			Total
		Central	Upper West	Upper East	
Reasons for choice of fuel	It is readily available (firewood and charcoal)	15	32	1	48
	It is cheap (firewood and charcoal)	3	5	2	10
	Easy to use	1	2	0	3
Total		19	39	3	61

Source: Author, 2019

Table 6

Reasons for not using fuel

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	It is expensive	33	9.1	52.4	52.4
	No equipment to support	9	2.5	14.3	66.7
	Very risky or dangerous to use (gas)	4	1.1	6.3	73.0
	Not available	6	1.6	9.5	82.5
	Do not know how to use it	11	3.0	17.5	100.0
	Total	63	17.3	100.0	
Missing	System	301	82.7		
Total		364	100.0		

Source: Author, 2019

Figure 2: Tricycle load of firewood

Source: Khinanwin Nyande/Gabriel Botchwey, 2019

Figure 3: Firewood for school feeding cooking for two weeks

Source: Henry Bondzie/Gabriel Botchwey, 2019

This represents a major threat to the environment stemming from deforestation problems, especially in the northern part of Ghana. Though there was mention of distribution of gas cylinders by the Government in 2009 to support cooking activities under the GSFP, the cylinders have not been used for various reasons. First, most of the cooking places in the schools were made of temporary sheds or open-air cooking places (See Figures 4 and 5); the gas was considered more expensive and difficult to obtain; and some cooks also indicated that they did not know how to use them, but were more comfortable cooking with firewood.

Figure 4: Temporary kitchen for cooking under school feeding

Source: Henry Bondzie/Gabriel Botchwey, 2019

Figure 5: Open-air kitchen

Source: Henry Bondzie/Gabriel Botchwey, 2019

Some also indicated that it was too dangerous to use the gas cylinders on the school compound due to the presence of children (See Table 6 Reasons for not using fuel). Regarding electricity, the lack of well-fitted kitchens for cooking in the schools precluded its use, and so was not even considered a possibility by

the respondents. Under these circumstances, the use of firewood and charcoal, in spite of the negative environmental consequences continues in all the schools that participated in the study under the GSFP.

To sum up, fuel use under the GSFP poses a threat to the environment and there was little indication that the caterers and cooks were moving away from firewood and charcoal. This therefore needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency to protect the environment. With the feeding programme reportedly covering 9,495 schools, and catering for some 2.8 million children as of May 2019, one can estimate the tricycles of firewood burnt by the weeks, and their impact on the environment (MyJoyOnline, 2019). A simple calculation of two tricycle loads of firewood per month, multiplied by the number of schools using firewood to cook would give an idea of the potential consequences such as deforestation and desertification on the environment.

Conclusion

The GSFP commenced with stated objectives to reduce hunger and malnutrition, to increase school enrolment, attendance and retention and to boost domestic food production, with expected outputs such as increased income for farmers, use of environmentally sustainable farming methods, and start-up of farms by schools participating in the programme (Government of Ghana, 2006, p. 4). Based on these, the underlying questions posed by the study were: first, whether the feeding programme was reaching pupils schooling in poorer communities as stated; and second, whether the feeding programme has led to increased local food production. Furthermore, it investigated whether and how the programme has impacted on food security and sovereignty, improved nutrition and helped to reduce poverty and hunger. The findings of this study have raised serious doubts about the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of schools in the GSFP. Evidence from interviews indicates that it is heavily manipulated by supporters of the political party in power to mobilise votes in some areas or to reward them for their support of the party. Thus, the political alliance of the headteacher or community leaders to the party in power is central to the inclusion or exclusion of a school in the feeding programme and not necessarily the poverty situation of the community. This situation raises troubling questions about whether the programme is reaching the poor or the well connected. It was also revealed that low enrolment is no longer a qualifying criterion for inclusion, but rather, schools with larger enrolments are preferred so that caterers can make more financial gains by cooking for more children, since payment of caterers are based on the

number of children fed in a school. Interestingly, most of the caterers are also affiliates of the political party in power.

Regarding school enrolment, attendance and retention, earlier studies by Gokah (2008), Serebour (2017) and Salifu, Boateng and Kunduzore (2018) indicated that the programme has had positive impacts. This has largely been confirmed in this study, however, it also brought to the fore the phenomenon of parents removing children from schools not participating in the feeding programme to enrol them in schools which participate in the programme, mostly in the same town or community. This is mainly done by parents as a way of reducing food expenses on children attending public schools, and to take advantage of the feeding programme. It also means that the programme is important for such parents, leading them to change schools for their children.

Boosting local food production was one of the stated objectives of the GSFP with the view to ensure that caterers procure food items from local farmers, the locality or nationally (Carvalho et al., 2011; Government of Ghana, 2006). A study by Sulemana, Ngah and Majid (2013) reported that caterers were not buying any food items from local farmers or the locality. However, evidence from this study reveals that the situation is changing. There was no evidence of caterers purchasing food items from local farmers from the first phase of data collection in 2015; but in evidence from late 2018 to early 2019 data showed that caterers have started purchasing food items from local farmers. The latest round of data collection in November 2020 showed that some farmers have been registered as food suppliers in the various districts in the Upper West region, from whom caterers must purchase food items, and may only purchase from others when the items cannot be supplied by the registered farmers. This has somewhat provided a secured market for local food production, but the catch is that there are many registered farmers which have forced them to compete with each other to supply food to the caterers. As a result, the creation of the ready market has not translated into large-scale increases in food production or the expansion of farms. In spite of this situation, a few tomato and pepper farmers have expanded their farms. Earlier studies by Quaye et al. (2010) showed improvements in food security in some communities where GSFP was being implemented, and this has been confirmed by the study. The associated downside is that food items become more expensive on the local market when schools are in session due to buyer-competition from GSFP caterers. This study did not find any significant evidence of threat to food sovereignty in the areas studied.

With reference to development policy goals, the Ghana School Feeding Programme has been roundly hailed by several respondents as a success in help-

ing many children to go to school, and this contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal on Education and Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No poverty), 2 (No hunger), 3 (Good health) and 4 (Quality Education).[34] It has increased enrolment in schools that were previously suffering low enrolment at the basic education level; and it has reduced the burden on parents who struggle to feed their children due to high levels of poverty. In addition, it has helped improve the health status of children in areas where nutritious menus were prepared, adequately funded and followed in the provision of meals; and it has built some measure of linkages with local agricultural production and national food production. Much of the food prepared for children are purchased from local producers, and the programme is serving as a ready farmersmarket. The main sources of fuel for food preparation are firewood and charcoal, which pose threats to the environment.

Concerning implementation, significant challenges emerged from the study. These include lack of transparent and clear criteria for selection of schools which leaves it open to selection manipulation; exclusion of deserving schools; inclusion of non-deserving schools; inadequate, irregular and unpredictable payments for services of caterers; poor quality of food in some schools; and irregular feeding in some schools, which was also confirmed in a study by SEND Ghana.[35]

To conclude, the findings of the study show that school feeding has clearly helped to increase enrolment in schools where the programme has been implemented, though there is a movement of pupils from non-participating to participating schools in some communities. In contrast to earlier research findings, the results of the study also show that the programme is beginning to have some positive impact on local food production because caterers are now purchasing more food items from localities where feeding programmes are undertaken. Food items regularly purchased include vegetables, grains, cooking oils, etc. Additional benefits of buying from local farmers and suppliers include freshness of produce, competitive prices, proximity, and ability to purchase food on credit from some farmers and suppliers, and possibility to bargain or negotiate. Some districts have established a register of farmers to supply food to caterers under the GSFP, which is a significant step to boost local food production and improve food security. In turn, the existence of the feeding programme serves as a ready farm market produce. The article argues that the involvement of local actors in development programmes needs more rigorous assessment and monitoring because some may seize the opportunity to pursue their parochial ends, as

[34] https://www.un.org/en/, accessed December 14, 2020.

[35] See Ghanaweb, February 20, 2018.

evidenced in the selection of participating schools under the GSFP. Nonetheless, the involvement of local actors can also lead to positive mutual outcomes for programme success and local people. Thus, whereas the involvement of local agents can be a positive indicator of relevance, ownership and inclusion, it needs to be carefully managed to generate intended programme benefits.

Evidence from the study indicates that the GSFP is not reaching its intended primary target groups such as children schooling in poorer communities, or schools with low enrolment. This is principally due to political manipulation for votes and financial gain. On a brighter note, the programme is beginning to have some positive impact on local food production, and thereby strengthening food security. However, large-scale farm expansions have not occurred to the large pool of farmers who are registered to supply food to caterers under the programme in some of the districts studied.

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