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Food Vendors' Views on Home Grown School Feeding Programme for Public Primary School Children in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on food vendors' views on Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) for public primary school children in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Specifically, it determined types of food provided for school children; meal preparation and, hygiene practices observed by food vendors of the HGSFP, and factors militating against HGSFP. It used survey research design. Population was made up of 1435 food vendors. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Findings show nine types of food provided for the children, top among them were rice 333(100%), and beans porridge 314(94.4) while the least provided food were eggs 197(59.3%), fruits 123(37.0%), and meat. Majority of the food vendors (77.8%) used healthy cooking methods such as steaming, broiling, grilling, and roasting and washed all fruits and vegetables before serving 290(87.0%). Majority 259(77.8%) do not wash hands, and cooking surfaces often using hot soapy water, before handling the cooking utensils and food, there were no proper screening and handling of food before meal preparation as revealed by most of them 290(87.0%**)** and no medical report was requested for before recruitment 321(96.3%). Challenges encountered include insufficient government monitoring of activities 173(51.9%), insufficient funding 79(79.6%), among others. Five recommendations for improving HGSFP were made.

Keywords: Food, Vendors, Home-Grown, School, Feeding, Programme,

Introduction

United Nations World Food Programme revealed that 66 million primary school-age children go hungry every day, with 23 million hungry children in Africa alone. Furthermore, 80% of these 66 million children are concentrated within just 20 countries including Nigeria (World Food Programme, 2015). School feeding is not just about providing food for the school children, it is also beneficial in the following areas: health and nutrition; education and gender equality; social protection, and local economies and agriculture (WFP, 2019).

In 2004, the implementation of the Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programme was piloted by the Nigeria Federal Government with 12 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Not long after commencement, this programme was stopped by 10 States and the FCT leaving only Osun and Kano States with SFP. Some of the major challenges that resulted in the discontinuation of the pilot HGSFP were insufficient monitoring and evaluation, failure of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to disburse funds to pilot States, lack of supporting infrastructures such as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, low community involvement and participation due to inadequate sensitization and advocacy of relevant stakeholders, inadequate policy and legal framework at the State and Federal level, and institutional structure at Federal level not made fully operational. However, for implementing the HGSF programme across Nigeria the Government convened a high-level National Advocacy Meeting with support from donor agencies like the World Bank Group in May 2014, and recommendations to address key challenges were made including the development of National Policy and Guidelines to institutionalize HGSF at State level. (NHGSFP, 2020).

To achieve the objectives of HGSFP, the Federal Government aims to improve the health and educational outcomes of public primary school pupils by providing one meal a day at the cost of ₦70 through the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP). It uses farm produce locally grown by smallholder farmers hence boosts local agriculture, creates stable markets, business opportunities for about 70% of women, and provides children with nutritional mid-day meals daily (Drake, Woolnough, Burbano, and Bundy, 2016). SFP can lessen poverty by increasing income for families and communities (Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Gelli, Jukes, and Drake, 2009), link local farmers to the education sector by enabling their access to the school feeding market. For instance, in Jordan, the World Food Programme Healthy Kitchen project exemplifies livelihood creation through school feeding, employing local women who cook healthy school food for over 85,000 pupils (WFP, 2019).

To ensure sustainable implementation of SFP objectives stakeholders including multi-sectorial

ministries, school-based management committees/Parent Teachers Association (SBMCs)/PTAs), Local Government Education Authorities, Non-Governmental organizations, Community Based organizations, Food vendors(Cooks), Pupils Farmers, etc., need to work together constructively.

Food vendors as one of the stakeholders of HGSFP play a critical role in providing safe and healthy meals at Nigerian schools and their responsibilities include preparation of meals for their assigned pupils in a hygienic and clean environment, procurement of the required ingredients for cooking based on the menu approved by the state, signing of the feeding attendance sheet of pupils served on a daily, washing of food dishes after meals and store appropriately amongst others (McCain, 2009).

In Nigeria, over 95,000 women are employed as part of the national school feeding program food vendors (NHGSFP., 2017; Government of Nigeria, 2018). So far, more than 19,000 schools and approximately, 3, 000, 000 school children in the pilot states of the federation have been covered under the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme, and in Ebonyi State, the HGSFP has covered 1,050 schools and 163,137 schoolchildren have been fed (Agency Report, and Kaduna, 2017).

In January, 2017, Ebonyi was one of the five states that received N400 million for the continuation of its HGSFP. Under free HGSFP, an estimated 5.5 million pupils in the five states including Ebonyi would be fed for 200 school days and N93.1billion was appropriated for the feeding scheme in the 2016 budget. However, the monitor of the program in Ebonyi State viewed it as being derailed and on the verge of collapse. The food vendors faced an initial challenge of being unable to access their money but the state government intervened which eased the problem of the food vendors. However, given the rising costs of food items in the market, the N70.00 allotted for the meal of each pupil was not enough to provide a pupil a balanced meal because an egg cost N40.00. The programme monitors criticized how the programme is being run in the state. They stated that quality food was not being given to the pupils for the five school days as specified by the FG's guidelines and the pupils were served food on their palms and in a most unhygienic manner thereby emphasizing the need for the programme operators to follow the Federal Government guidelines as stipulated. They also reported that primary school pupils were fed with less than N30 for a meal as against N70 approved by FG, and vendors complained of underfunding by their handlers, making it impossible to serve the pupils with decent meals. The food vendors threatened to quit the programme except the FG mediated and addressed the obvious gaps (The Nations Education News Update, 2017).

The perception of Food Vendors on HGSFP is imperative as it is expected the more they understand the

relevance of programme policies, the more they feel involved in the decisions that affect their everyday tasks, and so doing embrace change, and successfully implement it. However, some studies have examined the view of food vendors towards the foods they serve, the conditions under which they serve them, and the challenges encountered.

Murimi, Chrisman, Diaz-Rios, McCollum, and Mcdonald, (2015) stated that poor funding affects the implementation of the programme. Food vendors specifically perceived the SFP as presenting better nutrition in terms of nutrients and variety of foods offered to students than they receive at home. Though they identified disadvantages and barriers of the SFP to be an inadequate amount of time allowed for the meal period, low-quality food, and lack of support and discouragement by various stakeholders in offering the SFP. Poor funding barriers were also reported in the studies of Lambert, Raidl, Carr, Safaii, and Tidwell, (2007), Mensah, (2016). Also, the studies of Falade, Otemuyiwa, Oluwasola, Oladipo, and Adewusi, (2012), Karissa and Orodho (2014), Taylor, and Ogbuogu (2016) among others noted that school feeding programme has greatly improved the nutritional status of school children though poor framework to support the programme were major challenges. Even though few studies have been conducted among food vendors on their view on the programme implementation in the area of meal planning and challenges encountered in Nigeria, none have been done in Ebonyi State. This study tends to fill this gap.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the views of food vendors on the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) practiced in public primary schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study determined:

1. types of food (dishes) provided for primary school children by HGSFP.
2. meal preparation practices observed by food vendors HGSFP.
3. hygiene practices observed by food vendors of HGSFP.
4. factors militating against the HGSFP.

Research questions

1. What are types of food (dishes) provided children by the HGSFP?
2. What are the meal preparation practices observed by food vendors of the HGSFP?
3. What are the hygiene practices observed by food vendors of the HGSFP.?
4. What are the factors militating against the HGSFP?

Methodology

Design of the study: The study used cross-sectional research design. This design was also used by Akanbi, and Alayande (2011); and Taylor and Ogbuogu, (2016) in their study in the public primary schools in Osun State.

Area of the study: The area of study was Ebonyi State. Southeast, Nigeria. It has a landmass, of 5,533 km2 (2,136 sq

mi), a total population of 2,176,947, of (2006 Census), located between latitude N 6° 10' 40.7028" of the equator and longitude E 7° 57' 33.4296") and situated on an altitude of 113m above sea level. Ebonyi state has three senatorial zones namely: Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central, and Ebonyi South senatorial zone, and a total of 13 local government areas (LGAs). Ebonyi is primarily an Agricultural region and is the leading producer of yam, rice, maize, potatoes, cassava, and beans, and have a notable basket market in Nigeria. This attribute contributes greatly to the implementation of HGSFP in the state as it partakes to local farmers. According to the Ebonyi State Universal Basic Education Board, (2018) There are a total of 1941 approved primary schools (1076 public, 713 private),but only 1066 public primary schools are currently practicing HGSFP (Igboji, Umoke, Umoke, Nwazunku, Nwalieji, Umoke, Onwe, Nwafor, and Nwalieji, 2020).

Population for the study: Ebonyi state has a total population food vendors' population of 1,453 according to Ebonyi State Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB, 2018). These are women caterers that are picked from within the communities in the state, employed to cook food for school children under the scheme, and were provided with utensils to do so.

***Sample for the study*:** The sample size was 333 food vendors in Public Primary Schools. A multistage sampling technique was used to select the respondents: firstly, dividing the state into three zones; secondly purposively selecting seven Local Government Areas, two from Ebonyi North (Abakaliki, and Izzi), two Ebonyi Central(Ikwo, and Ezza South), and three Ebonyi south (Afikpo North, Afikpo South, and Onicha) Senatorial zones currently providing school meals (In-school); and thirdly, random sampling of 333 schools with their 333 food vendors selected for the study. Three LGAs were chosen from Ebonyi South because it has a total of 5 LGAs while North and Central have 4 LGAs each.

Instrument for data collection: An 18-item questionnaire was used to obtain information about HGSFP from food vendors. It was made up of 2 sections. Section 1-contain the 4 items on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, 2- contain 15 items on meal management and services practices of the vendors, and challenges vendors encounter in the provision of meals for the children. The content and face validity was established by two experts in the field. The reliability of the instrument was established from four schools selected within the population but outside the sampled schools. A high-reliability co-efficient of 0.734 was obtained hence, the instrument was considered reliable for use in this study.

Data collection methods: There was a one-day training of Headteachers on how to administer the questionnaire to food vendors in their various schools. A total of 333 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. All the 333 copies were

properly completed and retrieved. It gave a 100 percent retrieval rate.

Data analysis techniques: Data generated were analyzed using frequency, and percentages.

Findings of the study

Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents

Data analysis shows that out of 333 respondents, their ages distribution was: 21-30years 80(24.1%); 31-40 years 192(57.5%); and 41-50 years 61(18.4%). All the vendors are females 333(100.0%), and their level of education were, non-formal 25(7.4%), primary 74(22.2%), secondary 154(46.3%), and tertiary 80(24.1%). The majority were from the rural 216(64.8%), and less from urban 117(35.2%).

Table 1: Percentage Responses of Types and Regularity of Food Provided for the Children

S/N	Types of Foods provided	Yes F (%)	No F (%)
1.	Do you get the food from your community?	216(64.8)	117(35.2)
2.	Do you serve the pupils with these oods such as;		
	Yam	311(96.3)	22(3.7)
	Rice	333(100)	0(0.0)
	Beans porridge	314(94.4)	19(5.6)
	Eggs	197(59.2)	136(40.8)
	Fruits	123(37.0)	210(63.0)
	Meat	99(29.6)	234(70.4)
	Fish	204(61.1)	129(38.9)
	Garri and soup	74(22.2)	259(77.8)
	Okpa	259(77.8)	74(22.2)

Table 2 reveals the types of food and dishes provided for the children while in school. A majority 216(64.8%) got the food from the community. The food served were yam porridge 311(96.3%), rice 333(100%), beans porridge 314(94.4), eggs 197(59.3%), fruits 123(37.0%), meat 99(29.6%), fish 204(61.1%), garri and soup 74(22.2%), and okpa 259(77.8%).

Table 2: Percentage Responses on Meal Preparation Practices Adopted by Food Vendors

S/N	Meal preparation practices	Yes *F* (%)	No *F*(%)
1.	Do you use healthy cooking methods such as steaming, broiling, grilling and roasting**?**	259(77.8)	74(22.2)
2.	Do you use a variety of herbs for additional flavor rather than relying on salt and magi alone?	123(37.0)	210(63.0)
3.	Do you use packaged or processed foods	56(16.7)	277(83.3)
4.	Do you wash all fruits and vegetables before serving?	290(87.0)	43(13.0)
5.	Do you separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods.	327(98.1)	6(1.9)
6.	Do you cook foods to a safe temperature using a food thermometer	12(3.7)	321(96.3)

Table 2 shows that on meal preparation practices, a majority of the food vendors use healthy cooking methods such as steaming, broiling, grilling, and roasting 259(77.8%), but only a few use a variety of herbs for additional flavor123(37.0%). Most of them reported that they don't use packaged or processed foods 277(83.3%). Most of them wash all fruits and vegetables before serving 290(87.0%), do separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods 3277(98.1%). However, a majority do not cook foods to a safe temperature using a food thermometer 321(96.3%).

Table 3: Percentage Responses on Hygiene Practices Observed by Food Vendors of the HGSFP.

S/N	Hygiene Practices	Yes *F* (%)	No *F* (%)
1.	Do you wash hands, and cooking surfaces often using hot soapy water, before you handle the cooking utensils and food?	74(22.2)	259(77.8)
2.	Is there proper screening and handling of food before meal preparation**?**	43(13.0)	290(87.0)
3.	Is there any proper plan for food purchasing**?**	56(16.7)	277(83.3)
4.	Do you Stack food in the warehouse for long periods of time before use?	12(3.7)	321(96.3)
5.	Were you asked for any medical report before recruitment	12(3.7)	321(96.3)

Table 3 reveals that on hygiene practices observed by food vendors of the HGSFP, a majority 259(77.8%) do not wash hands, and cooking surfaces often using hot soapy water, before you handle the cooking utensils and food and there were no proper screening and handling of food before meal preparation as revealed by most of them 290(87.0%). Also, a majority of 277(83.3%) stated that there was no proper plan for food purchasing, and no medical report was requested for before recruitment 321(96.3%). However, most of them 321(96.3%) reported that they don't stack food in the warehouse for long periods before use.

Table 4: Percentage Responses on Factors Militating Against the HGSFP

S/N	Factors Militating Against the HGSFP	Yes *F* (%)	No *F* (%)
1.	Do you think Government monitoring of your activities is sufficient?	160(48.1)	173(51.9)
2.	Do you think the fund given for HGSFP is sufficient?	68(20.4)	265(79.6)
3.	Do you think that; Food poisoning may occur?	197(59.3)	136(40.7)
4.	Do you think there may be withdrawal of government / donor support?	314(94.4)	19(5.6)
5.	Do you think there is absence of a legal frame work and policy to support the HGSFP?	333(100)	0(0.0)

Table 4 shows the factors and challenges encountered during HGSFP implementation. Most of the respondents stated that Government monitoring of your activities is not sufficient 173(51.9%). Also, they reported that funds given for HGSFP were not sufficient 79(79.6%). Other factors revealed by the vendors were: food poisoning 197(59.3%), withdrawal of government/donor support 314(94.4%), and absence of legal framework and policy to support the HGSFP 333(100%).

Discussion

The objectives of the National Home Grown School Feeding Program amongst others is to stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of farmers by creating a viable and ready market via the school feeding programme, and to create jobs along the value chain, and provides a multiplier effect for economic growth and development. These goals will not be achieved if the programme is not properly implemented. The views of Food vendors on meal services and challenges are very crucial because they are one of the stakeholders of the programme whose job is to procure and cook a healthy and nutritious meal for the children in primary schools.

The result of our study revealed that a majority 216(64.8%) of the food vendors got the food from the community, and they served the children local foods such as yam porridge, rice, beans porridge, garri

and soup, and okpa. This was supported by Drake et al., (2016) who revealed that HGSFP uses farm produce locally grown by smallholder farmers hence boost local agriculture. Additionally, since one of the goals of HGSFP is to boost the economy of farmers, this is being achieved because food vendors procure food from their community. Procurement of locally produced crops and service of pupils with local foods was also reported in the studies of Sitao, (2018); and Goldsmith, Andrade, Cornelius, Asigbee, Atim, and Tamimie, (2019).

In addition, only a few food vendors in this study reported that they gave eggs, fruits, meat, and fish, which are nutritious and can, boost school children's health. Likewise, and Taylor and Ogbogu (2016) also reported that most of the catering managers in their study explained that meals were usually prepared daily for the pupils and this is in line with the findings of the study. At variance with the result of the study, Day, et al., (2015); Taylor and Ogbogu (2016); Asada, Ziemann, Zatz, and Chriqui, (2017) reported that pupils were served with assorted fish, vegetable fruit, chicken, meat.

Moreover, there were good meal preparation practices by the food vendors in this study; a majority of the food vendors use healthy cooking methods such as steaming, broiling, grilling, and roasting, and most of them reported that they don't use packaged or processed foods, they do wash all fruits and vegetables before serving and separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods. However, a majority do not cook foods to a safe temperature using a food thermometer as they don't even have a food thermometer. In the same vein, according to the progress report of the programme in 2017 (NHGSFP, 2017), some of the flaws in the program implementation are the engagement of cooks without appropriate utensils, and the cooks were not able to cook effectively. These findings suggested that food vendors are to be enlightened on the importance of cooking food to a safe temperature and they should be provided with appropriate utensils including food thermometers and be trained on how to use them. Healthy cooking helps with healthy eating because it gives when food is properly cooked by various methods, any germ that may cause food poisoning will be eliminated during preparation. Stacking food for a long time in a warehouse may expose the food to spoilage and infestation by pests and rats which can cause illness for the children. However, the reason why foods were not stored long enough in stores is that there are no many purchases done by the vendors.

Furthermore, there were some poor hygiene practices observed by food vendors of the HGSFP, as the majorities do not wash hands, and cooking surfaces often using hot soapy water, before handling the cooking utensils and food; no proper screening and handling of food before meal preparation **no** proper plan for food purchasing, and no medical report

requested for before recruitment. At variance with the result of the studies of Day, *et al.*, (2015) in England; and Asada, *et al.* (2017) in USA they reported that there was a proper screening and purchasing plan, policy formulation and implementation of the school feeding programme in their studies. These differences could be due to different populations and regions studied. England and USA are among the developed nations and policies being put in place are also being implemented unlike developing areas like Nigeria.

Furthermore, on the factors militating the provision of meals for the children, most of the respondents stated that Government monitoring of your activities and fund were not sufficient and other challenges were food poisoning, withdrawal of government/donor support and absence of legal framework and policy to support the HGSFP. In the same vein problems of insufficient funding and lack of effective monitoring and evaluation system were also revealed in the studies of Taylor and Ogbuogu, (2016). Ghodsi, Omidvar, Rashidian, Raghfar, Eini-Zinab, and Ebrahimi, (2017); Azubuike, and Mbah, (2019). Regarding the direct benefits of the homegrown school feeding programme, these challenges are to be ameliorated using an integrated approach in support and success of the Home Grown School Feeding Program in the state.

Conclusion

Conclusively, there were proper meal service practices observed in the study like healthy cooking methods, proper food storage, and procurement of locally grown crops. However, gaps still exist in the provision of healthy nutritious meals (fruits, vegetables, meats, and fish), proper planning for food purchase, and screening of food vendors before handling meals. Some of the challenges as viewed were, problem of food poisoning, insufficient government monitoring of their activities and funding, government/ donor withdrawal support for programme implementation., and absence of a legal framework and policy to support the HGSFP.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

1. The government and stakeholders of HGSFP should be committed to the adequate funding of the HGSFP through appropriate budgetary allocation for the sustenance of the programme in the state.
2. A national policy framework should be put in place to ensure monitoring on food procurement process, storage and distribution
3. There should be existence of SFP committee that will put up appropriate measures for food stocks records and food treatment so that it does not go bad or face pests attack.
4. There should be screening and monitoring of the health status of the food vendors to ensure healthy feeding of the children.

5. Healthy and balanced meals should be promotion based on locally available produce, such as addition of meat, fish, eggs, fruits, and vegetables.

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