

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and Educational Development in Nigeria: The School Meal Experiment in Enugu State

Sam C. Ugwu¹, Nkechinyere O. Anyadike² & Chekwume Anthony Okolie^{3*}

1,2,3Department of Public Administration & Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

*Corresponding Author Email: anthony.okolie@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Obtaining quality education has actually been the key foundation to creating sustainable development in the modern-day world. Apart from improving quality of life, access to inclusive education is very critical to achieving peace, security and prosperity mantra in line with Sustainable Development Goals four. However, in Nigeria, over 20 million children are out of school and more than 40% of them are of primary school age. These children are of nomadic herdsmen, street urchins called Almagiris and vulnerable homes. Despite global efforts to achieve an umbrella education for all by improving children's enrolment and mass literacy, Nigeria still has a high percentage rate of illiteracy and out-of-school children. The recent inclusion of meals in the educational package, especially at the basic levels in Enugu State, Nigeria is a stimulating strategy to curb the rate of out-of-school children and illiteracy level in the state. Notwithstanding, this has generated a paradigmatic ambivalence whose effects call for investigation, hence, this study. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the administrative challenges posed by the implementation of quality education through school feeding with a view to actualizing the SDGs targets. The researchers applied Structural Functionalism theory as the framework while using Historical and Empirical research as critical sources of information. The paper recommends that the government should be proactively creative and innovative to ensure synergy among the stakeholders in terms of collaboration, coordination, and cooperation to ensure the school feeding programme's success.

Keywords: *Educational Development and Strategy, Administrative Challenges, SDGs, Structural Functionalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Before the United Nations came into being and saw the need to develop programmes that will stand humanity in good stead, civilized countries like US and others had been responding to the demands of human needs. These needs are universal and apply to all cultures (Tay and Diener, 2011). Reports have it that basic human needs are linked to general well-being and self-actualization in life. Based on this, Griffen (1986:42) defines well-being as 'the level to which basic needs are met so long as they retain importance'. However, under social policy, basic human needs are described as both 'universal' and 'knowable' by Doyal and Gough (1991). They add that basic human needs stipulate what persons must achieve if they are to avoid sustained and serious harm.

Following the above, the International Labour Organization (ILO) from their 1976 conference composed a report that brought BHNs into social development policy agenda. According to the report, food, shelter, clothing, housing, water and sanitation are listed as basic needs and emphasized. So, one can see that for the United Nations to recognize school feeding programme as a social safety net to achieving sustainable education and development in the

MDGs, they have seen it as a basic need. Of course, it is a fact that when a child is hungry, it is difficult for that child to achieve anything, let alone discovering or developing himself or herself. Moreover, hunger can have a serious ripple effect on well-being of any child. In view of this, Habyariman et al (2023:338) rightly observed that food insecurity and malnutrition affect the educational attainment, family life, and overall health of children and adolescents attending school. This is probably the more reason UN has deemed it fit to ensure food security for school children to be able to realize the aims of MDGs four, which is sustainable, quality education.

In order to realize quality education for all children of school age globally, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals have taken school feeding as indispensable to the fourth goal in their development programmes. Besides being the fourth goal in both development goals, they believe that all other goals are hinged on education as the driver. That is why to effectively achieve qualitative umbrella education for all children, the United Nations included **Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP)** as one of the means of achieving mass school enrolment and gender equality.

School feeding programmes have been defined by the World Bank as "targeted social safety nets that provide both educational and health benefits to the most vulnerable children, thereby increasing enrollment rates, reducing absenteeism, and improving food security at the household level". (World Bank, 2019). This program, to a large extent, will impact positively on a spectrum of human existence. Moreover, Ozioma Azubuike and Patricia Mbah (2019:104) see the school feeding programme as one aspect of child nutrient with regards to the provision of food to school children. It is the interventions that regularly provide school-going children and adolescents with nutritious food at school (FAO, 2019). Then, Cupertino et al (2022) defines school feeding as an essential initiative addressing food insecurity, improving nutritional education, and ultimately enhancing health outcomes. From these definitions, one can succinctly deduce that school feeding programme is an intervention in the basic needs of school children to improve learning outcomes so as to salvage their future.

While school meals were provided by the governments of most member countries of United Nations who are signatories to the MDGs/SDG implementation programmes, especially developed and developing countries around the globe, those children who benefit from school feeding programs are mostly found in developing countries such as Nigeria, Chile, Afghanistan, Sudan, etc. School feeding in these low-income countries often starts through funding by international organizations such as the Department for International Development (DFID) and or the national governments of the concerned countries (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_meals). In line with this, United Nations World Food Programme is the world's leading provider of school feeding program and financial contributions and program development (UNWFP, 2019). As a result, the WFP currently provides school feeding resources to an average of 22 million children in schools across the globe with about half of whom are girls. The total financial contribution for these programs is USD\$500 million per year ([wikipedia.org/wiki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Food_Programme), 2020). The United Nations through World Food Programme has estimated that US\$3.2 billion is needed annually to feed the 66 million school-age children around the globe, an amount of US\$50 per child (The World Bank and Non-Governmental. 2020).

In Nigeria, Home-Grown School Feeding Programme is a contributory effort of the World Bank, DFID, federal government and of course, the State governments. To this end, some state governments have become pacesetters on school-feeding programs during

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria. These states such as Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Kaduna, etc. have experimented the feeding programme in the past. However, it is observed from a closer look that this programme is faced with implementation challenges. WFP believes that lack of awareness is chief among the problems. They attribute it to absence of Quality Assurance such as poor teaching, poor conditions of schools and equity issues related to opportunities provided to rural children. For quality education to be provided to the children from less-privileged families and for the comprehension of psychomotor, investment is needed in educational sector such as: feeding, teacher training workshops, school building and improvement of water and electricity access to schools.

The involvement of WFP in school feeding programme is highly strategic. In terms of external funding and implementation, it has been working with governments around the globe for over 45 years, but now shifting from a food aid organization to food assistance, working to move away from "individual, isolated projects to more strategic and comprehensive approaches (School feeding in low-income Countries, 2018). To foster government ownership of school meals, WFP has implemented eight quality standards that guide the design and implementation of sustainable school meal programs. They include:

- i. A strategy for sustainability,
- ii. A national policy framework,
- iii. Stable funding and budgeting
- iv. Needs-based, cost-effective quality programme design
- v. Strong institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring, and accountability
- vi. Strategy for local production and sourcing
- vii. Strong partnerships
- viii. Inter-sector coordination, community participation and ownership.

According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI,2020), there are two stages of school feeding. The first stage includes school feeding programs that rely mostly on external funding and implementation, while the last stage includes school feeding programs that rely mostly on internal government funding and implementation. Countries that are within the first stage include Afghanistan and Sudan, where country governments are unable to lead school feeding programs. Countries that are within the fifth stage include Chile and India, which have functional, country-led school feeding programs. Countries that are in the middle of the stages, such as Kenya and Ecuador may have some but not all of the governmental policies, financial capacities, or institutional capacities to operate school feeding programs without external funding or implementation. While there are school feeding programs in a number of countries, each program varies widely from country to country in design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Statement of Problem: Though the seventeen goals of the SDGs are being implemented, many Nigerians, especially the rural dwellers have not been aware of these goals, especially the goal four of the SDGs which is quality education. There has been skepticism about the real effect or impacts of these goals on the people, especially, the qualitative education. From goal one which borders on poverty reduction to goal seventeen that is on partnership, the impacts have not actually been felt by the people neither did the goals touch the lives of their children appropriately. What is more, the school feeding programme of the

All Progressive Congress (APC) government has not been noticed by so many people in the rural communities. As a result, vulnerable children, even scum of the earth among them and illiterate headsmen, etc, have not actually embraced this gesture of goodness. These pose great challenges to the authorities and government agents responsible for SDGs implementations. These challenges are administrative. Some of them are information network in terms of dissemination to the targeted audience, lack of assessment mechanism and monitoring, supply availability, handling of private sector involvement and lack of orientation to the public or community support, all of which the study tries to address.

Objectives: This paper examines the administrative challenges posed by the implementation of quality education to the people through schools feeding with a view to actualizing the SDGs targets in Nigeria and in Enugu state in particular. It also aims at evaluating the roles of partnership and the stakeholders in SDGs implementations. This study will help participants of school meal to effectively involve the vulnerable and all targets to utilize this all-important tool to enhance qualitative education and gender equality for all.

Theoretical framework: For the purpose of this study, Structural Functionalism is the theoretical discourse (framework) that is applied. Structural-Functionalism is a tradition of social analysis that sees society as a mosaic of functions and structures that perform them. For example, in order to survive, a society needs to reduce poverty, educate its children, produce goods, govern its affairs and provide security for its members. These are functions and they necessitate a number of structures such as institutions/agents, industries, parliaments, and so on. Gabriel Almond and James S Coleman developed structural functionalism in 1960 as a tool for political analysis in developing areas and a paradigm for comparison between different systems (Mbah, 2006). Almond et al argue that all political systems are expected to perform a specific set of task which normally should require input and output with outcome as a result and its effects. They likened Structural functionalism to David Easton model of Systems theory. Almond insisted that the input-output requisites are functions which normally are performed by different structures in the system such as political specialization, recruitment, interest articulation, aggregation and communication; While the output are such structure as, making of rules, application of the rules and rule-adjudication.

In Nigeria for instance, the ‘shared interests’ among the diverse and conflicting groups in the nation are the nucleus for survival. Structuralism also relates to transformative theory which addresses the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions and societies to change. It is the ability of functional and effective leadership that direct the affairs in organized system in which the people could react positively to issues that affect them. Functionalism presents a view of social world as essentially harmonious and stable for progressive change. According to Preston (1996), functional theory is the best system to analyze society and other general social system that comprises a set of subsystems that deals with various social sciences such as economics, sociology, politics and psychology. Prebendalism and even clientele loyalties are subjective functionalism. In applying functionalism to this work, the interactive activities of the government, the community leaders, and other stakeholders, such as parents, neighbourhood watch, are active structural implements for the function of school feeding. The structural system is such that it makes people react to exigencies within them and for the purposes of co-existence. The people’s reaction to innovation depends on how interactive/adaptive they are to a process they are made to be part of. Here, structural Functionalism ideology based on functional interactive methodology is an ideal theoretical discourse.

METHODOLOGY

Historical and empirical methods were applied in gathering data in this research. According to Kerlinger (1977), historical research is the critical investigation of event, developments and experiences of the past. The empirical evidence based on practical investigation of facts and observations were equally examined. Descriptive analytical methods were applied in analyzing data collected. We objectively drew our analyses from our close observation and from our non-participatory observations, our interactive engagement, especially, from interviews and visitations.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all children. The goals address the global challenges we face such as Poverty, Hunger, Health and well being, Education, Gender equality, Clean water, Affordable energy, Economic growth and job opportunities, Industry and infrastructural development, Reduced inequality, City development and sustainable communities, Consumption and production, Climate change, Good life on water and on land, Peace and justice and Effective partnership. These 17 Goals are all interconnected, interrelated, and viciously mingled with a view to achieving the target standard by 2030.

The near successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provokes the continuing implementation of the goals and a robust development of the solution for the exogenous societal problem. The United Nations, after evaluating the Millennium Development Goals, decided to continue with the improvement of the MDGs. In other words, the idea for the continuity of the MDGs was a unanimous decision for the sustainability of the United Nations' Development Goals, hence Sustainable Development Goals (UNC, 2000). The 2018 Sustainable Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty.

Education is also essential to achieving many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was effectively encouraged by Her Royal Highness Sheikha Bint who on 16th December 2018 SDG, Advocated for the continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for more robust participation of education programme. Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser who is the Founder and Chairperson of 'Education Above All Foundation' met with the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and UNICEF Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, to examine ways to sustain the millennium goals. It is within the foregoing context that the world's ever largest gathering of 189 member countries of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration in September 2000 in New York,, United States of America, by declaring as follows: "we will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected to" (Oladunni, 2004; Wikipedia, 2010).

The total number of countries embracing development programmes and the successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) led to the continuity of the development goals and a robust development of the solution for the exogenous societal problem. In view of this, the United Nations after evaluating the Millennium Development Goals decided to continue with the improvement of the MDGs. In other words, the idea of the sustainability of the MDGs was a unanimous acceptance based on the developmental impact of the MDGs in member countries of the United Nations' development goals (UNC, 2019).

Moreover, the 2018 Sustainable development Programme has seventeen goals agenda. These agenda include the following:

- Poverty Reduction or eradication of absolute poverty: this includes economic growth to provide sustainable jobs and promote equity
- Zero Hunger: here, the United Nations promotes food and agricultural productions as key to development and vital for hunger and poverty eradication
- Good health and Well being: These ensure healthy lives and well being for all ages as essential sources for sustainable development
- Quality Education: Obtaining quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development
- Gender Equality: This is very important as the fundamental human right and also for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world following the continual agitation for gender equality of Bergin conference
- Clean Water: Accessible Clean water for all and for sustainable world
- Affordable and clean Energy: The United nations believe that Energy is central to every major challenge and opportunity
- Decent Work and Economic growth: Sustainable economic growth will require the society to create condition that allows people to have access to quality jobs
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: These are very crucial to achieving sustainable development
- Reduced Inequality; Policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of the disadvantaged and the marginalized
- Sustainable Cities and Communities: There is a need to see communities and cities being able to provide opportunities for all to access basic services such as housing, energy, transportation, etc.
- Responsible Consumption and Production: working hard for sustainable development through production and responsible consumption
- Climate Action: Climate change is a global challenge that affects everyone everywhere
- Life below Water: Careful management of these essential resources for sustainable development
- Life on Land: managing Forests, control desertification, halt and reverse degradation, halt biodiversity
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Access to justice for all, building effective and accountable institutions at all levels
- Partnership: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

These programmes provide an opportunity for children to receive improved nutrition and educational opportunities while also allowing subsistence farmers to benefit from access to a market with stable, structured, and predictable demand. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) guided governments in Sub-Saharan Africa to include home-grown school feeding as a critical intervention for the food security facet of the Comprehensive Africa

Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). Several countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria are currently taking part in home-grown school feeding programmes.



Figure 1: School children posing with some official in one of the inspections



Source; Min of Education, Enugu.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals provide global blueprints for dignity, peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. A few years into the Agenda, we see how civil society, private sector, and governments are translating this shared vision into national development plans and strategies... Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility. In Enugu state, the government views it as a key to escaping poverty, hence, the introduction of feeding programme in schools. This apart, education is also essential

to achieving many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When people are able to get quality education, they can experience awakening or self-realization. Moreover, education helps to reduce inequalities and bring about gender equality. In fact, one extra year of education is associated with a reduction of the Gini coefficient by 1.4 percentage points. Education empowers people everywhere to live more healthy and sustainable lives. Education is also crucial to fostering tolerance between people and contributes to more peaceful societies (Wikipedia, 2010).



School children already being fed in their school







Children school feeding ongoing



Children already seated and ready to be fed in their schools

However, in the course of running the school feeding programme by the government of Enugu state, its agents have been observed to be lackadaisical with their responsibilities to the children. This then produces a butterfly effect on the frequency of meals given to the children,

the quality, and the impacts of the project. Apart from this, it is also an observation of the researchers that the government fails to create a monitoring team to oversee and coordinate this feeding project in Enugu state to ensure accountability. As a result, there is a kind of lack of community support and awareness, steady supplies of foodstuffs to ensure availability as well as lack of sensitization on the children themselves about the purpose of the programme. All these together have made the school feeding programme in Enugu state, Nigeria, the more you look the less you see, all tilting towards absence of governmental cooperation with private sector and community leaders at the local level, coordination, evaluation, sensitization and appropriate mobilization of resources.

Types of school feeding programmes

There are two main ways to distribute food through school feeding programs: on-site meals and take-home rations. On-site meals are foods that are distributed to children while at school during morning and afternoon meal and snack times, which may include a bowl of porridge or nutrient-fortified crackers. Take-home rations are a collection of basic food items, such as a bag of rice and a bottle of cooking oil, which may be sent home and transferred to the families of children who regularly attend schools (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_feeding_in_low-income_countries). While the food items needed for school feeding programs may be imported into the country from anywhere throughout the world, an increasing number of countries and organizations are looking to expand what is called "home-grown school feeding," which requires that provided food is produced and purchased within a country to the greatest extent possible.

These programmes provide an opportunity for children to receive improved nutrition and educational opportunities while also allowing small-holder farmers to benefit from access to a market with stable, structured, and predictable demand. No wonder the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) guided governments in Sub-Saharan Africa to include home-grown school feeding as a critical intervention for the food security facet of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

Need for school feeding programme in Enugu State

To salvage vulnerable children from the clutches of poverty

According to the United Nations World Food Programme, 66 million primary school age children go hungry every day. Furthermore, 80% of these 66 million children are concentrated within just 20 countries. Additionally, 75 million school-age children (55% of them girls) do not attend school, with 47% of them living in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Thus, the need to reduce hunger while increasing school enrollment in these children is evident, and school feeding programmes have been developed to target this multifaceted problem (wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa). Moreover, overall school feeding programmes have been shown to directly increase the educational and nutritional status of recipient children, and indirectly impact the economic and social lives of their families.

Nutrition and food security

School meals have been shown to increase the nutritional status of school-age children in a variety of ways. For example, there is a notable reduction in malnutrition via diet diversification and an increased absorption of micronutrients.

Sustainable future

Knowledge empowerment is a key component in school feeding programmes and global development. It is a fact that a more educated person has an increased amount of opportunities in life, earns more money, and has a higher standard of living compared to an uneducated individual. Outside this, school meals greatly impact recipient children's education status by increasing school enrollment and attendance, decreasing drop-out rates, and improving cognitive abilities and learning achievements. According to the former Prime Minister of great Britain David Cameron, 'Give the child quality education and the child would have gotten all necessary needs to become a success'

Gender equity

School feeding programmes have the capacity to increase gender equity in access to education, which allows for gender equity across all spheres of social and economic life. There are a variety of reasons that girls' education is impacted by factors on both the supply and demand side of schooling. These include gender-stereotyped curriculum and teaching practices, increased risks for girls' safety outside of the house, socio-cultural practices that cause girls' education to hold a very low value, and school infrastructure that is not suitable for girls for schooling, which prevents girls from very poor households from attending school. School feeding programs reduce the costs of sending girls to school and allow for an increased number of girls to be sent to school by their families. Furthermore, improvements in female literacy that come from increased education have been linked to declining rates of fertility, increased economic opportunities, and other markers of female empowerment.

Challenges to school feeding in Enugu State

While school feeding programmes have a variety of positive impacts, there are some possible negative impacts therein. For example, school feeding programmes can increase the cost of schooling. In Enugu state, the government expects a complementary role from local communities. The roles can come in the form of requiring communities to provide fire-wood for cooking as well as other items such as fresh-fruit, vegetables, and condiments. Communities are also expected to provide people who can cook these meals and maintain stores of all of the required food products, as well as kitchens and other fundamentals of meal provision. For these role requirements to increase in a given community, the net benefit to a community from school feeding programmes may be reduced. Because there is no monitoring and evaluation team, this expected collaborative arrangement is suffering without government or its agents knowing as to proffer urgent solutions. Apart from the above, school feeding programmes are very context-specific, and each community's programme must be altered based on the demographics, geography, and other patterns within and outside of schools. For this reason, there are a variety of challenges that emerge in the creation and implementation of school feeding programmes. To this end, successful programme requires that governments:

- Determine if school feeding is the most effective program to target needy children
- Define program goals and outcomes
- Select the type of food to serve
- Determine a food procurement method
- Plan for management, implementation, and monitoring within schools—and a variety of other concerns

Because school feeding programs are community-specific and require a great deal of planning, the sustainability of school feeding programmes is a main point of concern for many countries. Countries are very limited on the demands placed on the staff, resources, and infrastructures required for school-feeding programs, and often have to rely on outside financial and personnel help to continue programs for a significant amount of time. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2023 as assessed on 09/05 2024)

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that school feeding programmes arise as a result of the fact that human beings succeed in life through responses to a network of human needs. While Abraham Maslow, a psychologist and his counterpart in conflict resolution, John Burton share the opinion that basic human needs go beyond food, water and shelter, the theory of human needs reveals that the idea of basic human needs is linked to both psychological health and well-being. This is probably what the United Nations see and decide to initiate food security programme to cater for the vulnerable school children and their needs towards MDGs' achievement. This apart, in the discourse, it is also seen that MDGs cannot be realistic unless enabling environment is created. That is why the Enugu state government in a bid to key into Sustainable Development Goals four, decides to make school feeding programme a rallying point. However, this government school's intervention initiative runs into drags owing to lack of administrative creativity and innovation. This in turn, creates ambivalent reactions about the reality and viability of the programme. **Therefore**, the paper notes that when proactive actions are taken on the recommendation below, the programme's objective(s) will be achieved in no uncertain terms.

Recommendation

Following the discussion so far, it is good to note that Sustainable Development Goals four is pivotal to realizing the entire MDGs. It leads other goals. Therefore, getting it wrong will amount to a wild goose chase in educational development of any nation. The effort by the Enugu state government to get it right has culminated in adopting school feeding programme. However, the programme has been opaque owing to the way it operates. In the wake of this, the paper recommends that in the future, the government should realize that school feeding programme is a people-oriented project. There should be collaboration, coordination, and cooperation of all stakeholders from the government down to the community, locals, and the private sector. It is the position of the research that once this happens, effective monitoring and evaluation will not only be willing tools but also a means to an end in the programme.

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