

Implementers' Perceptions of the School Feeding Programme at Two Schools

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ABSTRACT

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The School Feeding Programme is used as a poverty alleviation measure to ensure that poor learners eat at least one meal a day to stay concentrated in school. The purpose of this study was to investigate implementers' experiences of the SFP. The study employed a qualitative approach and a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. The study utilised focus group discussions and observations as data collection instruments, and the data was analysed using content analysis. The study observed that the SFP has the potential to improve enrolment, attendance, and retention and reduce dropout rates among poor and vulnerable children, but was hampered by multiple challenges. It was recommended that monitoring and coordination be improved.

Keywords: implementers, school feeding programme, enrolment, attendance, poverty, nutrition, challenges

1.1 Background of the study

Education and health are two vital pillars of human capital that form the basis of an individual's economic productivity (Tomlinson, 2007). Early childhood education is specifically recognized as an integral part of basic education. The United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms the right of all people to education. Namibia has adopted the Education for All (EFA) goals. The EFA Goals address issues concerned with access, equity, quality, and democracy. However, poverty, food insecurity, inequalities, and imbalances reduce opportunities for children from extremely poor and vulnerable backgrounds to access education (Ellis, 2012). Millions of children in Africa do not attend school, and the majority experience malnutrition, stunted growth, or short-term hunger, which seriously affects their ability to learn (Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis, BIDPA, 2013). To make matters worse, the majority of African children are from poor families who cannot afford to send their children to school.

Many schoolchildren in Namibia experience food insecurity and remain out of school because their families do not have the means to support their educational needs. The Namibian School Feeding Programme (NSFP) was introduced in 1992 by the Government of Namibia in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) (Ministry of Education, 1993). The aim was to address past inequalities among children and relieve hunger caused by drought conditions. The programme was also aimed at expanding access to educational opportunities for all Namibian children, including poverty-stricken children as well as orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). These children are provided with a nutritious mid-morning snack during school days (Ministry of Education, 1993).

1.2 Problem Statement

The Namibian government introduced the NSFP, targeting schools in areas severely affected by hunger and poverty. Although the SFP was implemented, there is no detailed policy that guides its implementation. The absence of a comprehensive NSFP policy creates a gap and raises questions as to whether the national policy frameworks are effective. A knowledge gap still exists about the management of the school feeding programme (SFP) in Namibia. Added to that, Namibian research literature evinces a limited paucity of studies on the SFP. Since the introduction of NSFP in 1991 by the Namibian Government, a few case studies have been carried out by Ellis (2012), Sibanda (2012), WFP (2012), and Hamupembe (2016) to examine its functionalities and effects. The NSFP needs to be effectively managed so that it can lead to the desired outcomes. This study aims to examine the managers' effectiveness in the implementation of the NSFP.

1.3 Research Question

The main research question guiding the current study is: What are the experiences of the implementers of the school feeding programme in two schools in the Zambezi Region of Namibia?

2.1: Conceptual framework for a school feeding programme

The NSFP has been of vital importance to the Namibian nation in general and the Zambezi Region in particular. The Annual Progress Report (2014) on NSFP supports this point by emphasising that the programme has been used as a strategy to address inequality and other social injustices and to expand access to educational opportunities for all poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged children in Namibia, including the Zambezi Region. This implies that the NSFP has the potential to include those who were excluded from accessing education due to poverty and social vulnerability. A further illustration of the importance of the SFP is demonstrated in the conceptual framework (in Figure 1 below), where the relationship between SFP management, indicators, and potential outcomes is depicted.

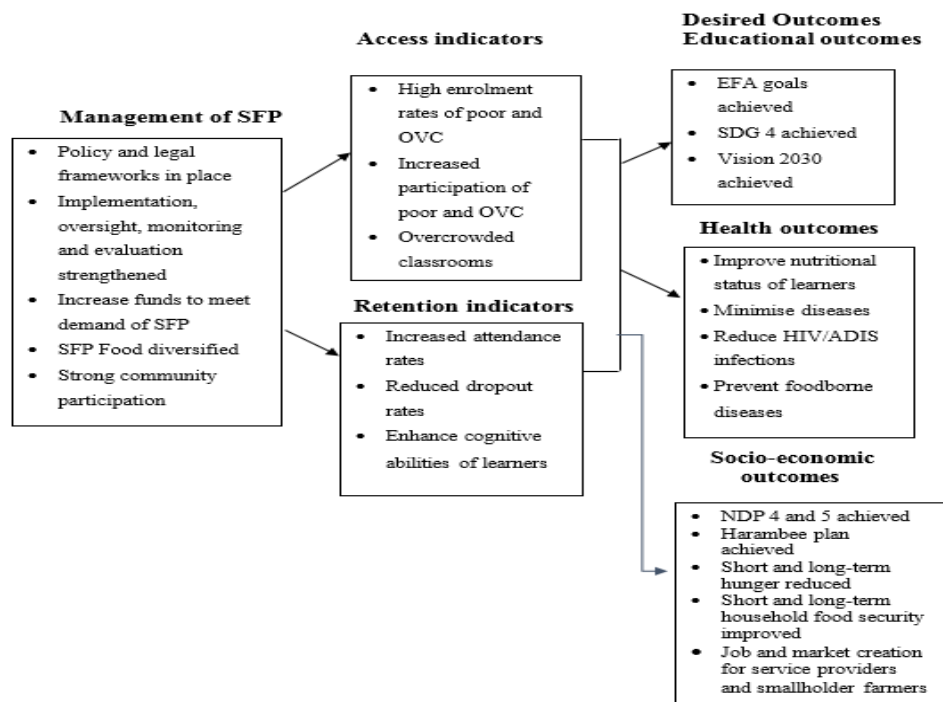


Figure 1: The conceptual framework for the relationship between SFP management, indicators, and potential outcomes. (Source: Khama, 2020)

2.2 School Feeding Programme

The Namibian Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture has made strides and realized that the quality of the NSFP has been compromised for a long time due to inadequate management, implementation capacity, and a lack of monitoring (Annual Progress Report 2014). To improve efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of the programme, the Annual Progress Report (2014) suggests that the focus areas should include, among others, developing an NSFP policy, improving programme design and implementation, strengthening institutional capacity, and developing a monitoring and evaluation system. Through the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, the Government of the Republic of Namibia aims to eliminate hunger by providing OVCs and learners from poor backgrounds with school meals. As a result, the NSFP has contributed to increased school enrollment, attendance, and retention in the country, including the Zambezi Region (Annual Progress Report 2014).

The World Food Programme (2014) estimates that 368 million children from poor and vulnerable backgrounds worldwide are beneficiaries of the SFPs. According to the WFP (2013), the objectives of the WFP's work in the SFP include providing a safety net for insecure households, supporting children's education through enhanced learning ability and access to the education system, enhancing children's nutrition by reducing micronutrient deficiencies, strengthening national capacity through policy support and technical assistance, and developing links between school feeding and local agricultural production. Food assistance was done by providing food items, either in the form of snacks or meals, to schoolchildren with the bold aim of reducing or eradicating hunger and enhancing the teaching and learning processes.

In 1991, the Namibian School Feeding Programme (NSFP) was introduced as a pilot school feeding programme in drought-affected areas of the country. The World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with the then Ministry of Education and Culture, initiated the programme by distributing over one year, the surplus military food rations from the United Nations operation, UNTAG, that supervised elections. The support was expanded to five schools in the area, and 400 to 500 children were fed (Ministry of Education, 1993). In 1996, the Government of Namibia took over full ownership of the administration and funding of the programme (WFP, 2012). Namibia embraced the advent of the SFP to benefit the poor, orphans, and vulnerable children, improve their health, and allow them access to education. The implementation and management of the NSFP are currently being carried out by the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture at both national and regional levels (MoE, 2012). The managers are also responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the SFP.

Following the success of the 1992 pilot programme, a four-year national SFP began in 1993, with funding from both the WFP and the Namibian government. The programme ran from 1993 to 1996. The WFP provided vegetable oil, dried skimmed milk, and cash to the poor and vulnerable children of Namibia. In addition to this direct assistance, the Government of Namibia implemented the programme under WFP guidance, and it was also accorded a budget line. Some of the vegetable oil was used to purchase maize meal and sugar, and children were fed a maize porridge meal mid-morning. Other donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided once-off equipment donations (Visser, 2005). The WFP's vision was and still is to eradicate hunger in people's lifetimes, with a bold aim that is outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 2, that of putting an end to hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture (WFP, 2012). A geographically targeted strategy was used to identify remote schools in drought-prone, poor-crop-producing regions, and a second-tier targeting strategy assessed vulnerable and needy children as beneficiaries within approved schools.

The OVC in drought-affected areas is regarded as poor due to inadequate access to food, education, healthcare, and quality of life. The purpose of introducing the SFP in those areas was to respond to the educational and nutritional needs of learners from extremely poor and vulnerable groups in drought-affected rural areas. The aim was also to mitigate the impact of inequality and poverty, enhance access to education, and improve nutrition (Ministry of Education, 2007; Visser, 2005). In addition, a case study of Namibia conducted by Ellis (2012) affirms this by explaining that the government introduced the programme to relieve hunger resulting from drought conditions and equalize educational opportunities for OVCs. Similarly, the Annual Report for the Technical Assistance to the NSFP for May 2013 to May 2014 indicates that the SFP is one of the strategies

promoted by the Government of Namibia to address inequalities and other social injustices that prevent Namibian children from accessing educational opportunities. The programme was gradually introduced in new areas. Regional workshops were held to educate the community leaders, parents, and teachers about the programme, and the most crucial outcome was the community's agreement to support the programme by providing firewood and labor, while food rations were used to pay cooks (Visser, 2005).

Since the inception of the SFP, there has been little, if any, thorough study conducted, especially on the implementation of the SFP in the Zambezi Region. Before this study, it was not clear whether the implementers of the programme were carrying out their roles and responsibilities as expected. Therefore, there was a need for a thorough study to be conducted to assess the impacts of the SFP in Namibian schools. Bundy et al. (2009) reveal that the SFP can benefit education (in this case, learners) through enrollment, attendance, cognition, and educational achievement. These researchers note that well-designed SFPs that include micronutrient fortification and deworming can provide nutritional benefits to younger children. In the same vein, Sibanda (2012) highlights the benefits of the SFP, some of which are increasing enrolment and attendance, alleviating short-term hunger, and improving the nutritional and micronutrient status of learners.

The implementation of the NSFP faces an array of challenges, which range from weak management, inadequate funding, a lack of coordination among all sectors involved, a lack of training, poor stock control, and inadequate standards for food handling, late deliveries, and incidences of malpractice (WFP, 2014).

3 Research Methods

3.1 Research design and approach

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach. The advantage of using the qualitative approach is that it helps the researchers get closer to the research subjects and understand the world through their eyes. Creswell (2007) explains that the observer is in a position to mirror things in the world. It therefore focuses on interpretive material practices "that make the earth that we live on visible." It focuses on in-depth descriptions and understandings of actions and events (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). A case study is an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence and seeking personal data from the interviewees. This is done through the use of multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews, observations, and content review. A case study seeks to collect detailed descriptions of a phenomenon to ascertain social realities by collecting data through multiple sources of information such as interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the case studies are the two selected schools, which are studied in depth to collect and analyses data that explains the experiences and challenges of the implementers of the SFP.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of the study comprised all ninety-two (92) primary schools that provide school-feeding meals in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. In this case, the population included all principals, teachers, and school board members of all these schools. All the coordinators at the head office and regional levels who are also managing the programme in case schools and all service providers who render services of the school feeding programme to the two schools in Zambezi Region also form part of the population. The sample for this study comprised two principals, five focal teachers, a focus group discussion comprising of two school board members, four coordinators—two at the head office and two at regional levels and one service provider that provides school feeding meals in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. Because this study is qualitative, purposive sampling procedures were adopted. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), purposeful sampling means that the researcher searches for information-rich key informants, groups, places, and events to study.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The researchers made appointments with the selected participants of the study. Participants' consent was obtained during the meeting. In this study, data were collected by employing an interview guide on a one-on-one basis with principals, teachers, coordinators, and service providers as implementers of the school feeding

programme in both schools. Focus group discussions were carried out with school board members, and some observations were made at the two sites. The researchers recorded the responses and took field notes at the same time. Permission was sought from participants to audio record the interviews and to take pictures at the sites.

Relevant documents, such as government reports and relevant policy documents, were used to support the data collected through interviews. This was also done to provide rich and valid data to reduce the risk of validity threats such as bias. In qualitative research, it is vital to be aware of the need to triangulate data by using multiple data sources. The purpose of using multiple methods during data collection is believed by Gay et al. (2009) to have the potential to obtain a more comprehensive picture of what is being studied and to cross-check information; the strength of one method compensates for the weakness of another.

3.4 Data Analysis

Three approaches to qualitative data analysis that were deemed appropriate in this study are content analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and semiotic analysis (see Du Plooy-Cillier & Cronje, 2014; Kuzu, 2016; Alase, 2017). The section below explains how these methods were applied and how they reinforced one another.

3.4.1 Content analysis

The data collected through the interviews and focus group discussion was analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic coding and categorizing approach used for exploring large amounts of textual information unobtrusively (Pope et al., 2006; Gbrich, 2007). White and Marsh (2006) explain that the data in a content analysis study need to be "chunked," that is, broken into units for sampling, collecting, analysis, and reporting. The data were presented in the form of tables in which they were ordered and sorted in a meaningful way, reflecting participants' codes, themes, and responses. The researchers read through the transcribed notes several times and identified the themes. Through this process, the researchers made comparisons of the collected and transcribed data to identify the appropriate and abstract categories and themes.

Participant Summarised responses

T1S1	The NSFP is good for most families in this community because most of them are from poor backgrounds and are mostly unemployed. However, there is less support from community members due to a lack of proper compensation.
T2S1	The programme is helping learners, especially those from poor families; they will have breakfast, and when they get into classrooms, their performance improves.
RT	The love of feeding the needy was priority number one. As teacher counsellors, these children were open to sharing their challenges with me.
T1S2	Is it just completing those forms and returning end-of-term reports for the NSFP? The programme has potential for learners' enrollment, attendance, and performance.
T2S2	Our SFP is okay; it helps our learners come to school.
C1HO	While the NSFP attracts learners to school, it also brings additional responsibilities on top of the teachers teaching loads.
C2RO	NSFP simply brings food to school-age learners. I support it fully. It is one of the initiatives that we should continue guarding jealously so that our children can learn well at school. Although it may appear that the procurement and management of the programme may not be as perfect as expected, I am sure that it is working in schools.

C3RO	The NSFP has really helped in terms of quality education. Learners participate very well because they have eaten something.
C4HO	There is more enrolment of learners in schools.
SBM1	The SFP is of paramount importance because it helps orphans and vulnerable learners who are struggling or whose parents cannot afford bread and butter on the table.
SBM2	SFP encourages learners to come to school every day, and they are happy because they enjoy the food.
SP	Many learners enjoy the feeding programme; they are happy at school, and it helps them to learn with fresh minds.

T1S1 The NSFP is good for most families in this community because most of them are from poor backgrounds and are mostly unemployed. However, there is less support from community members due to a lack of proper compensation.

T2S1 The programme is helping learners, especially those from poor families, they will have breakfast, and when they get into classrooms, their performance improves.

RT

The love of feeding the needy was priority number one. As teacher counsellors, these children were open to sharing their challenges with me.

T1S2 Is just completing those forms and returning end-of-term reports for the NSFP. The programme has the potential to improve learners' enrollment, attendance, and performance.

T2S2 Our SFP is okay; it helps our learners come to school.

C1HO While the NSFP attracts learners to school, it also brings additional responsibilities on top of the teacher's teaching loads.

C2RO NSFP simply brings food to school learners. I support it fully. It is one of the initiatives that we should continue guarding jealously so that our children can learn well at school. Although it may appear that the procurement and management of the programme may not be as perfect as expected, I am sure that it is working in schools.

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SP Many learners enjoy the feeding programme; they are happy at school, and it helps them to learn with fresh minds.

3.4.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions was analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Alase (2017) explains that interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative research that gives researchers the best opportunity to understand the innermost deliberation of the 'lived experiences' of research participants. As an approach that is 'participant-oriented', the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach allows the interviewees (research participants) to express themselves and their 'lived experience' the way they see fit without any distortion. This assertion means that the interpretative

phenomenological analysis has an idiographic focus and aims to offer the experiences of a given respondent. In this regard, the researchers examined the transcripts and presented the views of each respondent as obtained from them. After the presentation of these experiences are the interpretations of them.

3.4.3 Semiotic Analysis

The visual data was analyzed using semiotic analysis. The word semiotics is derived from the Ancient Greek 'smeion', which broadly means 'sign' or 'mark' (Kuzu, 2016). Moreover, the author explains that semiotics is the science of the structure of any kind of arrangement of signs and symbols used for communication. With regards to the current study, semiotics is the tool used for analyzing and interpreting the visual images or pictures depicting the physical characteristics and state of infrastructure at the two selected schools and other visuals depicting the school feeding programme. Semiotic analysis is relevant to this study because, during the observation sessions, the researchers took pictures to support the word data. The use of semiotics does not only portray the visual data but also attributes meanings to the visual images or pictures about the context of the school feeding programme in the two selected schools in the Zambezi region of Namibia. The interpretations attached to the visual data would

then be used to comprehend the reality of the SFP in two schools in the Zambezi region of Namibia as expressed by the research participants through the various data collection instruments. The purpose of semiotic analysis in this study is to support content analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

4: Presentation and Interpretation of the Results of the Study

The researchers present the views and perspectives of implementers that respond to the concerns of the abovementioned subsections, after which a holistic deduction is made. Because of the confidentiality agreement, the true identities of the participants are not disclosed in this presentation, and thus the presentation of data is done utilizing the participants' codes that are shown in table 2 below.

4.1 Implementers' Experiences

4.1.1 The general experiences of implementers of the SFP

The participants were asked to give their views on their general experiences of the SFP, and Table 3 shows their responses.

Table 3: The general experiences of implementers of SFP in participating schools in the Zambezi Region

Table 3 demonstrated that the NSFP is positively evaluated by most of the participants because it helps to feed children from poor backgrounds (T1S1, T2S2). The coordinators (C1HO, C2RO, C3RO, & C4HO) explained that the NSFP is of utmost importance as it attracts poor and vulnerable children to schools. The teachers and principals of both schools (PS1, T1S1, T2S1, T1S2, and T2S2) explained that the NSFP is good for children from poor backgrounds because they can get breakfast meals. The school principals shared their experience as follows: *"The NSFP is good for most families in this community because most of them are from poor backgrounds and are mostly unemployed. However, there is less support from community members due to a lack of proper compensation"* (PS1). Similarly, PS2 said: *"The NSFP is good for most families in this community because most of them are from poor backgrounds and are mostly unemployed. However, there is less support from community members due to a lack of proper compensation."*

SP submitted that the NSFP makes needy children happy, while RT observed that she loved to serve the needy and that doing so was her priority. Despite the positive benefits of the NSFP, some of the participants expressed negative views, noting that the NSFP is overwhelming in both the teaching and management of the feeding programme (C1HO). One of the coordinators explained that, though the programme seems to be helpful to learners, it might appear that the procurement and management of the programme may not be as perfect as expected (C2RO).

Theme: Respondent Code Description of responses

Roles: C1HO, C2RO, C3RO, To work on a strategy to improve the monitoring and evaluation of NSFP and the way it is managed and run, as well as the management of the procurement processes.

SP To provide transport for the NSFP meals to schools.

T1S2, SBM1 My key role is to monitor learners when they eat and to supervise how cooks are serving the food.

PSI, PS1, SBM2, T2S2, RT, C4HO, Not sure about their roles Training C1HO, C2RO, T1S1, RT, C3RO, SBM1: Received training on NSFP roles C4HO, PSI, PS1, T1S1, T2S1, SBM2, T2S2, RT I did not receive training regarding the NSFP roles.

From the above responses, it can be concluded that the participants have mixed experiences with the NSFP. Some of them view it in a positive light in that it helps children from poor backgrounds, while others view the NSFP negatively because it overwhelms them and complicates their teaching and management duties.

Theme	Respondent code	Description of responses
Roles	C1HO, C2RO, C3RO,	To work on a strategy to improve the monitoring and evaluation of NSFP and the way it is managed and run, as well as the management of the procurement processes.
	SP	To provide transport for the NSFP meals to schools.
	T1S2, SBM1	My key role is to monitor learners when they eat and to supervise how cooks are serving the food.
Training	PSI, PS1, SBM2, T2S2, RT, C4HO,	Not sure about their roles
	C1HO, C2RO, T1S1, RT, C3RO, SBM1,	Received training on NSFP roles
	C4HO, PSI, PS1, T1S1, T2S1, SBM2, T2S2, RT	I did not receive training regarding the NSFP roles.

Table 4: Experiences of implementers regarding their roles and training in two selected schools in the Zambezi Region.

As Table 4 demonstrates, the participants had various roles in the provision of the NSFP. For example, participants C1HO, C2RO, and C3ROs' roles are to work on the strategy to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the NSFP, the way it is managed and run, as well as the management of the procurement processes.

One of the coordinators stated:

My role is focused mainly on the national level, as you know, but it is still narrowed down to regions, service providers, and schools as well. So, from my side, I am mainly involved in ensuring that the SFP is improved from how it used to be in the past, to better the way it is managed and run, to prevent losses and better equip school feeding, implementers to play a better role, to make it more efficient, and to be able to track down the progress that we were making with the aims of the SFP (C1HO).

Some of the participants explained that their role was to provide transport for the delivery of the NSFP meals to schools (SP). Participants SBM1 and T1S2 explained that their key role is to monitor learners when they eat and to supervise how cooks are serving the food.

It appears that some of the participants (PSI, PS1, SBM2, T2S2, C4HO, and RT) were not sure of their roles. One of the participants explained: We need to know our roles so that when those parents come for cooking, we

can teach them how to do it, but now they just come cook and go; both of us are blind; we do not know anything (T2S2). Hence, it seems that although implementers of the school feeding programme seem to have a significant role to play in the running, monitoring, and evaluating of the management of the programme, some of them know what is expected of them while others do not. Those who were trained were confident about their roles. However, those who were not sure about their roles were not. This indicates a lack of clarity in terms of the participant's efficiency and effectiveness in their expected roles within the NSFP.

About the participants' views on training for the implementers on the NSFP, Table 4 shows two categories: those who received the training and those who did not receive any form of training. Participants (C1HO, C2RO, T1S1, RT, C3RO, and SBM1) received training on their roles in the NSFP. The following were some of the outstanding views:

Focal teachers, especially the ones who were not trained, need to undergo training. Our school principal does not have the know-how to, or rather, to operate this feeding programme, though we are assisting her, and school board members need to be capacitated. (SBM1).

Equally, PS1 shares the view and submits:

I think in the future, starting from myself as a principal, the teacher councilors, including one of the School Board members, and particularly the chairperson, should receive training so that we should know how to implement this programme fully. As managers, we need training, particularly on the preparation of food, so that we can be equipped on how to monitor parents who are handling the cooking part so that we can understand how to manage the programme (PS1).

Similarly, the SP had this to say: "The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture trained us in terms of the handling of bags in warehouses and schools; we were also trained not to throw bags when we were offloading."

C1HO reiterated:

We were trained on how to manage the school feeding programme at national, regional, and school levels so that we could assist those who are handling the SFP at different levels. The training enabled me to manage and track down food losses at the head office level and all other commodity movements throughout the NSFP food supply chain. (C1HO)

One coordinator who was capacitated emphasized the importance of meeting the training needs of all involved in the NSFP:

I think training needs to be conducted at all levels, and all the different stakeholders involved need to be capacitated. Even at Head Office, let me say, you have some senior officials who do not understand the importance of SFP. So, I understand that they too need to receive training or be given a background so that they understand what the programme is all about, especially those who are involved in the disbursement of funds. They should understand why it is important for us to fund this programme. In addition, those who are involved in procurement need training to understand why it is necessary for them to timely advertise, adjudicate, and award these tenders so that there is no disruption in the food supply. (C1HO).

Participants C4HO, PSI, PS2, T1S1, T2S1, SBM2, T2S2, and RT did not receive training on the NSFP. Some of the expressed views are as follows: No, I did not receive any training; I was only shown how to complete the end-of-term report, which I have to send to the Circuit Office at the end of each term, and how to order. It just took a few minutes. (T1S2).

One of the participants strongly felt that capacity development regarding the school feeding programme was of less importance to her. The participant was not willing to undergo any SFP training shortly. She, thus, asserted:

I am not willing to be trained, because, let me say, it is too much for me. I am a class teacher, and at the end of the term, I have to complete those end-term reports. I have a lot to do. This is additional work on top of my work. (T1S2).

Based on the above perspectives, it can be observed that there are participants who received training and others who did not receive any form of training regarding their expected roles in the feeding programme. Most participants valued training and suggested that there should be continuous training. Some participants did not see the value of receiving training, indicating that they were already overloaded with both their teaching duties and the supervision of the NSFP activities.

4.2 Observation findings

To strengthen the quality of the data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions, the researchers decided to use the observation chart to capture more data.

4.2.1 Observation findings for School 1

The researchers used an observation chart during school visits at meal times to have an in-depth understanding of the NSFP. The purpose was also to get answers to questions such as: What?, Who?, How?, Why?, and When? with regards to the administering of food to learners, the equipment used, the infrastructure in place, the type of fuel used, their source of water, the people who prepare and serve the food, the time when meals are given, and the behaviors of learners during meal times.

The researchers observed that bags of the maize blend were usually more than what the schools required for the term, and the bags were kept in a storeroom on pallets. She further noted that the storage facility was well maintained, even though it appeared to be small, as it was initially not meant for the programme but for other prior purposes. Furthermore, during the visit, the researchers also noticed that cooks were without aprons while preparing food for learners. Added to this, it was observed that the type of meal that learners were being served was soft porridge, which was served by the cooks under the supervision of the teachers. The researchers also noticed a heap of firewood in the kitchen, as seen in Figure 9 below. Finally, the kitchen was clean but was a temporary structure made of clay and wooden poles and required some improvements, as further revealed by Figure 9 below.



Figure 9: A heap of firewood used as a source of energy for the cooking of SFP at school during meal time.

Picture taken by Khama

The researchers observed that tap water and toilet facilities were available at the school. The plastic plates used by learners and the pots used in the preparation of the food were not enough to cater for a double session of school; spoons and serving utensils were few. The learners from poor and vulnerable families were the ones benefiting from the NSFP, while learners from better families brought their food from home, and others could afford to buy food from the tuck shop. The learners were seen adding sugar or sweeteners to their porridge. It was observed that only a few of the learners used spoons, while most of them seemed to be struggling as they ate hot porridge with their bare hands. It was further observed that the larger component of the learners washed their hands as most of them rushed to the kitchen.

Finally, the researchers observed that learners sat on the ground to eat and others ate while standing. This is because of the glaring absence of dining facilities. The school environment was wet but clean. The researchers also noticed an abandoned school garden with withered plants, as shown in Figure 10.

4.2.2 Observation findings for School 2

An observation chart was used during their visit to School 2 at mealtime to collect in-depth data that could aid in understanding the functionalities of the NSFP. The purpose was also to get answers to questions such as: What?, Who?, How?, Why?, and When? with regards to the administering of food to learners, the equipment used, the infrastructure in place, the type of fuel used, their source of water, the people who prepare and serve the food, the time when meals are given, and the behaviors of learners during meal times.

The researchers noticed that the bags of the maize blend in stock at the school were enough for that term, and they were kept on the floor in one of the classrooms. She further observed that the classroom was well maintained, but it was not a secure storage facility. Moreover, it was noted that the meal that was served to learners was soft porridge. It was also noted that the porridge was served by the cook at 10:00 a.m. (break time) and was supervised by a teacher on duty. The researchers observed a pile of firewood in the corner of the kitchen, thus confirming that the type of fuel used in the preparation of the food for learners was firewood. Also, the temporary structure used as the kitchen was clean. However, there was dust and rainwater in the kitchen. It was observed that only one tap was available for the whole school. Plates and pots were also available but were not enough; there were very few spoons and utensils. It was further observed that all learners benefited from the NSFP. Meanwhile, only a few learners washed their hands as the rest ran straight into the kitchen. A few learners were observed using spoons to eat, while most of them used their bare hands for eating.

It was observed that learners who received food sat on the ground in a circle while others ate while standing, as depicted in Figure 6. The researchers noticed that learners were sharing sugar, sweeteners, and slices of bread. At the same time, some pre-primary learners were unable to carry their plates and had to be assisted by older learners. Finally, it was observed that the school environment was kept clean but wet due to the rain.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The general experiences of implementers of NSFP at the participating schools in the Zambezi Region

In terms of the implementers' experiences of the NSFP, the results of the study demonstrate that the introduction of the NSFP in schools was of vital importance to assisting vulnerable and poor learners. Participants also revealed the importance of the NSFP by emphasizing that the programme helps needy learners and/or learners whose parents are unemployed to have at least a single guaranteed meal for consumption so that they can attend school and acquire an education (Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). The study also revealed that there is a need for the government, through the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, to provide meals to learners to encourage them to attend school. Consistent with this idea, Bundy et al. (2007), Darko (2014), Ellis (2012), Davies (2014), Hamupembe (2016), and Daitai et al. (2018), among others, assert that the SFP is of paramount importance as it has the potential to provide meals to needy learners to reduce hunger and improve the learners' nutritional needs, thereby enhancing the teaching and learning processes. This evinces that the NSFP is aligned with international trends that envision the eradication of hunger in people's lives (WFP, 2012).

Despite the positive experiences shared by participants regarding the programme, some of them revealed that the procurement and management of the programme seemed to not be in line with what was expected. Some of the participants further revealed that though the programme seems to be helpful to learners, there is limited support from community members due to the lack of proper compensation for community members who volunteer to cook the meals for learners (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). Regarding community/parent involvement, the NSFP Report (2013) indicates that, as much as community participation is considered to be an axis on which the NSFP should revolve, parents and communities are not aware of their roles and

responsibilities as outlined in the NSFP Reference Manual (n.d.). Additionally, the findings of the study indicate that most participants feel that the programme relies too heavily on community contributions without proper incentives. This was imagined to have contributed to the low level of participation from community members. Implied here is that the community seems to be overwhelmed by their anticipated roles, such as cooking, constructing kitchens and storerooms, and providing firewood.

5.2 Experiences of implementers regarding their roles and training at the two selected schools in the Zambezi Region

The participants of the study also shared their experiences regarding their anticipated roles in the NSFP. These functions include, among others, working on a strategy to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the NSFP and the way it is managed and run, managing the procurement processes, supervising and monitoring how cooks cook, and controlling learners during meal time (see Chapter 4, Table 3 section 4.3.1). Other participants indicated their role as transporting food consignments from warehouses to schools in the edifying of the implementation of the programme.

The results of the study evince, in this regard, the existence of two categories of implementers: those that received training and those that did not. Those who received training were confident about their roles and could articulate them well. Those who were not trained expressed the following reservation: We need to know our roles so that when those parents come for cooking, we can teach them how to do it, but now they just come cook and go; both of us are blind; we do not know anything (T2S2). Dei (2014) further indicates that the lack of capacity, knowledge, and skills of black role players in South African communities (including Namibia and South West Africa) would be attributed to their being disadvantaged during the apartheid era (WFP, 2014).

6.1 Recommendation to the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture

The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture is strongly encouraging the urgent development of a Namibian school feeding policy. The policy will then be used to address the following:

Help strengthen the NSFP's potential for sustainability and quality implementation. Develop an implementation plan for the programme. Develop a mechanism for monitoring policy implementation to ensure a link between policy and practice. Ensure guidance for the improved health and nutrition of learners through the provision of a fortified and diversified nutritious diet, which contributes to improved school attendance, participation, and progression into other grades. Ensure the sustainability of the programme by providing linkages between the NSFP and locally produced foods and supporting not only the poor and vulnerable children but the community at large. It is expected that the policy should mention and incorporate various beneficiaries, including smallholder farmers, and link them to the NSFP, thereby creating jobs and developing markets for their produce to improve livelihoods.

6.2 Conclusion

The general experiences of implementers of the NSFP in the participating schools in the Zambezi Region demonstrate that the introduction of the NSFP in schools was of invaluable importance to vulnerable and poor learners. The results illustrate the importance of the NSFP in that it has assisted needy learners and/or learners whose parents are unemployed and struggle to feed them. The NSFP has ensured that these groups of children can at least get something to consume (at least one meal per day) for them to stay in school and have access to an education.

Despite the positive experiences shared by participants regarding the programme, some of the participants revealed that the procurement and management of the programme were not in line with what was expected. Some participants further revealed that though the programme seems to be helpful to learners, the limited support from community members hampers the progress in implementing the programme.

It was also observed that some of the implementers are ignorant of their anticipated roles in the NSFP. Adequate training is thus required for implementers to understand their roles to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the NSFP and the way it is managed. The management of procurement processes, supervising and monitoring how cooks execute their tasks, and controlling learners during meal time need to be improved to facilitate the smooth function of the programme. Others indicated that their role in the programme was that of the company holder who transports food consignments from warehouses to school feeding schools, which facilitated the implementation of the programme, monitoring and evaluation, and management of the programme.

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