

## **Social Investment Policy of the Buhari Administration and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: An Assessment of the Homegrown School Feeding Programme in Taraba State**

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### **Abstract**

The National Home Grown School Feeding Programme is a component of the National Social Investment Programme initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016. The objective of the programme is to promote primary education while reducing the scourge of poverty among the beneficiary communities through the promotion of local agricultural production, creating employment and stimulating economic activities in the beneficiary communities. Communities, especially the local farmers, local traders, and local caterers, are through this programme, expected to derive some benefits. The study was anchored on the HGSF Theory of Change by Sumberg and Sabates-wheeler, (2010). Mixed methods of research were adopted for the purpose of data collection and analysis. Primary data were collected using interviews. It was revealed that in spite of the over five years of the implementation of the HGSFP, poverty remains a persistent feature in Taraba State. The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has not made significant contribution in reducing poverty among the beneficiaries in Taraba State. There is improvement among caterers and aggregators who benefited from the programme. The agricultural products used in feeding the pupils are largely imported from outside the beneficiary communities. The study recommends that the Federal and State governments should review the food procurement strategy to enable the caterers to purchase the food items directly from local farmers, government should change the policy from the presidential intervention to a statutory agency by ensuring that Social Investment Bill (2022) is passed into law in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme so that caterers, traders and farmers, who are the target (beneficiary communities) benefit substantially from the programme.

**Keywords:** Social Investment, Poverty, Homegrown, School Feeding Programme.

### **Introduction**

Globally, poverty remains one of the most disturbing social problems affecting many societies today. The rate of poverty and its devastating impact across the world has remained substantially high, especially among developing countries where rising cases of unemployment, lack of income to ensure sustainable livelihood, ill-health, hunger, mal-nutrition, homelessness, lack of inadequate access to quality education and insecurity have become a common occurrence (Ogbe, 2015). In Nigeria for instance, reports from the National Bureau of Statistics recently released in 2021 on *Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria* indicates that 40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million people live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) per year. This is significantly higher than the figures released in 2010 and 2015, which indicated poverty rate of 17.6 and 23.8 million respectively (NBS, 2021). Similarly, the World Poverty Clock (2018) stated

that Nigeria assumed the shameful position of being the poverty capital of the world after overtaking India, with about 86.9 million of her population living in extreme poverty.

This reality has compelled several national governments, international development agencies and policymakers to formulate and implement policies, programmes and projects that would reduce its severity among people in various communities and societies around the world. The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) is one of such policies that have been established in several nations in direct response to the need to reduce rising poverty in poor communities across middle and low-income countries by supporting local agriculture, maximizing its positive impact on local economies, and creating direct jobs for the local populace. Amongst other reasons, the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme is a deliberate social investment programme established to ensure the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The programme is specifically linked to SDGs 1 and 2 (End Poverty and Hunger). (World Food Programme, 2018).

In Nigeria, the present Home Grown School Feeding is a component of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which was launched by the federal government in collaboration with the Imperial College Partnership for Child Development (PCD), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the World Bank Group (WBG), and the Vitol Foundation (VF) to address primary school enrolment and retention issues. After an initial attempt to run a national school feeding programme in 2005, a redesigned programme was launched in 2016 by the Buhari administration. The new national HGSF programme is one of five Social Investment Programmes (SIPs) with one of its main objectives to tackle poverty. Others include, Trademoni, N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer and Market Money. Currently, the SIPs are domiciled in the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management being headed by Honourable Minister, Hajiya Sediya Umar Farouk with the aim to address a range of poverty-related problems simultaneously, including youth unemployment, low agricultural productivity, child nutrition, primary school attendance, and gender inequality (NHGSFP, 2016).

Taraba State is among the states in the country that has benefitted and still benefitting from the Home Grown School Feeding programme. According to report by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (2018), a total of N120, 284,500 was paid and 171,835 pupils have thus far been fed, with a total of 2,596 cooks paid. Therefore, apart from encouraging parents to enroll their wards in public primary schools, promote regular attendance and address specific micronutrient deficiencies among school-aged children, the programme targets community poverty reduction by encouraging them to purchase their homegrown agricultural goods, employing them as vendors and caterers, and stimulating economic activities that will reduce the level of poverty among the members of the community. Based on this background, the present study is designed to assess the Home Grown School Feeding Programme in relation to its impact on alleviating poverty in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Fundamentally, the study is set to assess the impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on poverty reduction in Taraba State, examine the effect of procurement of home-grown agricultural produce on poverty reduction among farmers, investigate the effect of catering jobs under the home-grown school feeding programmes on poverty reduction among caterers, examine the effect of the value chain of home-grown school feeding programme on poverty reduction among traders in Taraba State and identify the various challenges affecting implementation of the home-grown school feeding programme in Taraba State, Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **The National Social Investment Programme**

The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) is a social investment programme initiated by the Buhari administration and officially launched in 2016. The programme was initially domiciled under the office of the Vice President but later reassigned to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management headed by Honourable Minister, Hajjia Sediya Umar Farouk with the aim to address a range of poverty-related problems simultaneously, including youth unemployment, low agricultural productivity, child nutrition, primary school attendance, and gender inequality. The programme is also intended to address poverty among local community members, increase income to stimulate business activities and encourage entrepreneur among Nigerians (NHGSFP, 2016).

The social investment programmes are distributed across five components, including Trademoni, N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer, Market Money and the Home-grown school feeding programme. They have also been widely implemented across all the states of the federation including Taraba. The HGSF programme constitutes one of the five components of SIP. Its strategic plan stipulates that it will provide one meal per school day to all primary school pupils in primary 1 to 3 in Nigeria. The first funds were disbursed in January 2017 to five states: Anambra, Ebonyi, Ogun, Osun and Oyo. By August 2017, a total of 14 states had begun the national HGSF programme. Today, the programme is being implemented in the 36 states of the federation and FCT. However, little has been done to appraise such programmes even at the level of poverty in the country has remained embarrassingly high. Thus, an appraisal of the programme has become imperative.

### **Concept of Poverty**

Research into poverty has a long history, exemplified by the seminal work of Booth and Rowntree who studied poverty in England in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Ruggeri Laderchi et al., 2003). Both defined poverty as being more than simply lacking financial resources: adverse living conditions were also an important feature. A lack of financial resources was accompanied by poor health and housing, a lack of education and few services (Shucksmith, 2012).

Poverty is a widely used term, but one that is given many meanings: the definition of poverty is often contested and the concept has evolved and changed over time (Pantazis et al., 2006). Misturelli and Heffernan's discourse analysis (2010) of 159 documents focusing on poverty in developing countries demonstrated how usage differed over time and between stakeholder groups, and how many different constructions of the problem were to be found under the rubric of 'poverty'. Pragmatically, Van den Bosch claims that 'it cannot be defined in any way one likes' and goes on to propose the 'everyday meaning of the word' as most appropriate (quoted in Veit Wilson (2006; p.318). Veit-Wilson sees this customary meaning as 'the enforced lack of resources demonstrably needed for respect and inclusion' (Veit-Wilson, 2006; p.318). However, the UN uses a different, but also commonly accepted, definition of poverty as 'a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information' (United Nations, 1995; p.57; Madanipour, Shucksmith, & Talbot, 2015). Poverty within the context of this study refers to a state or circumstance in which individuals, groups, or communities lack the financial means required for a basic quality of life.

## **Concept of Poverty Reduction**

Poverty remains one of the most disturbing socio-economic problems bedeviling most nations of the world today. The devastating nature and effects of poverty can be seen virtually in all societies, the worst being among the developing nations (third world state) including Nigeria (Ogbe, 2015). The concept of poverty reduction has therefore become very important and attracted the attention of both international and national scholars over the years, leading to different definitions. For example, Sindzingre (2008) defines poverty reduction in the broadest sense as increasing income, consumption, and human development. This means that, poverty reduction implies an improvement in the standard of living of people through increased income, increased expenditure, increased consumption, access to health and education. In a specific sense, Abang, (2015) sees poverty reduction as a physical decrease in the incidence of poverty in number and size. According to him, poverty can be reduced through provision of empowerment opportunities and capacity building in a favourable environment. In a similar way, Slikkerveer (2019) conceives poverty reduction, or poverty alleviation to mean a combination of largely economic or humanitarian measures, which are intended to lift people permanently out of poverty (Slikkerveer, 2019). The aim of poverty reduction is to raise the standard of living of people living in a condition regarded as undesirable to a condition considered desirable. Within the context of this study poverty reduction is operationalised to mean the process of alleviating people or community from condition that keep them in perpetual lack and penury or a state of improving the financial means required for a basic quality of life of a people or a community.

## **Conceptualizing Home Grown School Feeding Programme**

The conceptualization and understanding of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme have been complex and dynamic, as many scholars, agencies, and countries defined it following their understandings, orientations, and local content; as a result, the concept has defied universal acceptable definition. According to Munuhe (2014), for example, home-grown school feeding is a programme that provides food produced and purchased within a country to children attending public schools. He noted that the World Food Programme's Home Grown School Feeding programme focuses on producing and purchasing food for the school feeding programme from local smallholder farmers. According to this viewpoint, the home-grown school feeding programme aims to improve children's well-being while also promoting local agricultural production and development by providing a steady market for small-scale farmers.

Similarly, the African Union Commission defines Home Grown School Feeding as a programme that promotes local economic development and agricultural transformation. More specifically, the union defines homegrown school feeding in its study document thus:

...produced and purchased locally (food), that is, nearby the area of the schools served under the programme. The main objective of HGSF programmes is to link school feeding with local agricultural production, building upon the assumption that households, local farmers and small businesses may benefit from the structured market that a school feeding programme presents to sell their goods. Therefore, in the set-up of HGSF programmes, procurement mechanisms must be designed to increase the farmers' and producers' ability to access the market. Moreover, additional support for farmers and producers to increase and optimise their production could be planned in coordination with an HGSF strategy, including for instance agricultural extension services and the establishment of linkages to a country's industrial strategy (African Union Commission, 2018, P.11).

According to the African Union Commission, the goal of a home-grown school feeding programme is to reduce poverty and promote local economic development. Home-grown school feeding programmes are critical programmes and policy interventions that have been implemented in many countries to address the issue of extreme poverty, increase school enrolment, and stimulate pupil performance, particularly among children attending public primary schools. In many nations such as Ghana, the concept and objectives of school feeding programme are to provide one hot, nutritious meal per day to children in public primary schools across the country using locally grown foodstuffs. Furthermore, the programme objectives are amongst others, to reduce hunger and malnutrition by providing a nutritious meal to all primary and kindergarten pupils in public schools every school day, to increase school enrolment, attendance, and retention, and to boost domestic food production by sourcing school feeding meals locally and providing a sustainable market for local farmers (GSFP 2007 cited in Sulemana, Nga & Majid, 2013).

From the objectives, it can be seen that the programme is concerned or aimed at ensuring economic and technical transformation of small scale agriculture. The Nigerian home-grown school feeding programme was designed to connect the demand for food provided by school feeding to the supply of food by small-scale farmers via local procurement procedures. Demand for home-grown food is expected to stimulate local market forces of demand and supply, as well as inspire small-scale farmers to increase production. The programme is expected to achieve its objective of increasing domestic food production, increasing school enrolment and retention, improving child health and nutrition, increasing local agricultural production, creating jobs, and improving the micro and macro-economic activities (NHGSFP, 2016). So far, about eight (8.5) million children in primary schools are served free meal from home grown school feeding programme (Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Management, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The analysis of social investment policy can be explained using a mirage of theoretical perspectives. Consequently, this study is anchored on the "HGSF Theory of Change" by Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler (2010). The HGSF theory of change propounded by Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler (2010) underlies the importance of home-grown school feeding programmes for agricultural development, social protection and poverty reduction. The theory has been previously used in Africa, particularly in Swaziland by Mamba (2015) on the “comparative perceptions of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme versus the Non-Home Grown School Feeding Programme on the aspect of learners’ performances and food security.” For this reason, the research believed that its applicability in this study is justified.

The Home Grown School Feeding Theory of Change was developed by Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler (2010) in their work: *Linking Agricultural Development to School Feeding*. The growing interest in contemporary home-grown school feeding by many countries and the academic community inspired James Sumberg and Rachael Sabates-Wheeler to develop the HGSF-Theory of Change to provide theoretical lenses for the working and implementation of home-grown school feeding programmes. This theory is linked to two broad concepts: social protection objectives and agricultural and economic development objectives (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2010).

The main idea behind the HGSF theory of Change is that the social protection benefits and agricultural development benefits associated with homegrown school feeding will be strong enough to kick start the transformation of agriculture and, by extension, rural livelihoods in Sub-

Saharan Africa (Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, & Martinez, 2010). As adopted by many national governments in Sub-Saharan Africa, a homegrown school feeding programme is a "localised or domestically" food sourced programme. It is a type of "structured demand programme" that empowers the local population by purchasing local agricultural products from smallholder farmers. This initiative offers a "localized procurement model," "demand-assisted growth," "structured demand", multipliers, and spillovers to the beneficiary communities. It is structured in such a way that with the programme, local production of agricultural products is encouraged, which also helps to generate income for the farmers and improve their standard of living.

Therefore, the theory examines the direct and indirect agricultural development benefits that are likely to be associated with home-grown school feeding, as well as the factors that may influence the magnitude and distribution of these benefits. According to Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler (2010), these benefits and factors include: the agricultural sector and the livelihoods of small-scale farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa can be transformed for the better, primarily through greater market engagement. However, the failure of input and output markets, poor infrastructure, and suboptimal use of productivity-enhancing technology are currently limiting this transformational potential. School feeding programmes, on the other hand, can be used to kick start this market-based transformational process by "structuring" demand in ways that make it easier, less risky, and more profitable for small-scale farmers to engage with markets, as well as by providing a variety of complementary services (training, credit, access to technology) (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2010). The HGSF Theory of Change examines the transition of the school feeding programme from a social security-based model to one based on structured demand and development initiatives aimed at reducing poverty in the beneficiary communities.

In addition to the above-mentioned arguments about agricultural growth and poverty reduction, the growing interest in homegrown school feeding programmes is related to current academic and policy debates, as well as increased activism around public procurement and localization. This is based on the idea that public procurement of locally produced goods stimulates local economic activity and increases demand for locally produced goods and services. As a result, a homegrown school feeding programme would result in what is known as "demand-assisted growth" (Tendler and Amorim, 1996 cited in Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2010). The basic idea behind purchasing locally produced goods is that the state's enormous purchasing power can be used in a proactive, innovative way to favour different suppliers, regions, and products, ultimately transforming outcomes when compared to more traditional "least cost" or "value for money" approaches (Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, 2010). According to the theory of change, the agricultural and economic development benefits potentially associated with homegrown school feeding can be classified as direct (arising from food expenditure and additional marketing and income opportunities for food producers and suppliers) and indirect (arising through spillover and multiplier effects). This means that HGSF extends benefits to food suppliers, such as local aggregators, as well as food producers, such as caterers.

In an attempt to summarize the concept of the HGSF Theory of Change, Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler, (2011) stated that the HGSF Theory of Change combines ideas from two sources. The first is essentially the current orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan African agricultural development, while the second is a set of ideas centred on the strategic use of public procurement, "demand-assisted growth," and economic localization. The theory of change combines elements from these two sources in the following eight logical steps:

- i. Broad-based poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa requires agricultural growth.
- ii. Agricultural growth will occur as a result of increased involvement in input and output markets, which will stimulate technical change and result in increased productivity.
- iii. The greatest poverty reduction impact of home-grown school feeding programmes will come via a focus on smallholders or family farms.
- iv. A major impediment to increased market participation by smallholder farmers is the fact that in much of rural Sub-Saharan Africa, input and output markets are thin, seasonal, and poorly governed; infrastructure is inadequate, and so on. The assumption is that HGSF will alter the preceding narrative by stimulating economic activity in rural Sub-Saharan Africa.
- v. These market constraints can be addressed by driving a demand-assisted agricultural growth strategy with public sector demand for food associated with social protection programmes such as school feeding.
- vi. Social protection programmes, such as school feeding, are excellent options for a structured demand approach. This means that programmes like HGSF are ideal for providing local communities with a predictable market.
- vii. The provision of complementary services (training, credit, access to inputs and technology) can be linked to the process of structuring demand.
- viii. Therefore, using structured demand to supply school feeding programmes is an appealing avenue for kicking off a process of agricultural and livelihood transformation (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2010).

Sumberg and Sabates-Wheeler (2010) stated that there is clear resonance between the HGSF theory of change and the literature on balanced and unbalanced growth, particularly concerning structured demand; the importance of the state's involvement in this structuring; the multiplier effects or value chain; and the presumed supply response. In effect, the dominant assumption underlying HGSF's success is that output incentives will induce an investment response, resulting in growth both within and outside the agricultural sector of the economy. (Sumberg & Sabates-2010). Therefore, this theory will provide explanation on the study variables, helping to account for how procurement of HGSF programme, catering work by vendors and the value chain of homegrown school feeding programmes contribute to poverty reduction in Taraba state.

### **Homegrown School Feeding Programme in Taraba State. An Assessment.**

This part of the research discusses the findings from both secondary source as well as interview conducted about the impact of Homegrown School Feeding Programme in Taraba State.

### **The impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on poverty reduction in Taraba state**

This initiative has achieved tremendous and unquantifiable direct and indirect benefits according to respondents interviewed. They posit thus:

Buying of local food creates stable market, boosts local agriculture, impacts rural transformation and strengthens local food systems and that all the purchases of school feeding in the state come from smallholder agriculture and these farmers are often parents with school children where it helps them break intergenerational cycles of poverty in Taraba State. The state focal person Hon. Beatrice Kitchener in 2018 was quoted to have said that Federal Government initiative in the state which commenced in the State in July

2017 has 5,000 food vendors spread across the 16 Local Government Areas of the State which are paid directly by the Federal Government into their personal bank accounts and can be said to have impact on the economy thereby reducing poverty. (interview with government official, December, 2022).

A focus group response indicated that the impact of homegrown school feeding programme on poverty reduction in Taraba state is less because of interference of politicians in the selection of caterers and food vendors and how the whole program is handle in Taraba State is against the objective of the program by the federal government. This data corroborates with the position of Jumare (2020) and Daily Trust (2019) thus:

The selection of caterers and food vendors appears to be one of the issues impeding the impact of Nigeria's homegrown school feeding programme on poverty reduction. With great dismay, it is discovered that the majority of those chosen to perform the services were chosen for political reasons. The implication of this is that these individuals proceeded to provide the children with less qualitative and unsanitary food or even denied them access to the food itself. Because of this single reason, it has been blamed on the failure of those put in place to monitor the strict implementation of the program not able to carry out their function. This mechanism in place was intended to ensure transparency and accountability at the local and community levels, but the monitoring and evaluation group has failed.

### **Effect of procurement of home-grown agricultural produce on poverty reduction among farmers in Taraba State**

According to the World Food Programme (2018) homegrown school feeding benefits smallholder farmers and agricultural development in two ways: by creating strategic procurement plans and establishing a structured demand for locally produced food; and by incorporating additional, complementary interventions such as credit facilities to enable smallholder farmers to participate in school feeding markets (WFP, 2018).

Field data from the respondents revealed that the food used in feeding the pupils were not sourced from local agricultural goods produced within the communities by the local farmers. Majority of the local farmers said that "we do not have any knowledge of how they (the caterers) sourced the food items used in cooking the food. They don't patronize our locally produced goods" (interview with local farmers in Ardo kola, November, 2022). This means that the homegrown school feeding programme has not assisted local farmers to generate income through the selling of their agricultural produce for the programme. An official of homegrown school feeding programme at state and local government level confirmed this by saying thus:

The strategy used in procuring food items in Taraba State is that aggregators and local suppliers are selected by the state office to distribute the food items to each local Government office so that there will be positive impact of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme on poverty reduction in Taraba State. However, this has invariably led to the failure of the programme to promote local agricultural production. Thus, the food procurement strategy in Taraba State is akin to deviation from the intention of the programme of promoting local agricultural production. Therefore, the HGSF programme did not provide a market to local farmers to sell their homegrown agricultural produce and thus, did not reduce poverty among farmers in Taraba State (interview with State and local government official, November,2022).



According to the African Union Commission (2018), homegrown school feeding is an example of “structured demand programmes” that connects large and predictable sources of demand for agricultural goods to smallholder farmers. In theory, this reduces risk and encourages improved quality, leading to improved food systems, increased income, and reduced poverty, and, in the long run, increased food security among beneficiaries. When it comes to the rural nature of the African economy, the African Union Commission has made the following observations:

Incorporating local, agricultural production into school feeding programmes makes particular sense in the African context, as nearly two-thirds of the population live and work in rural areas, and over 65 per cent of the population rely on agriculture as their major occupation. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) Framework for Africa's Food Security includes HGSF programmes under the objective of 'increased economic opportunities for the vulnerable,' while the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) endorsed the HGSF programme's potential to contribute to long-term development goals (AUC, 2018, p.23).

Responses from the interview conducted with respondents corroborate the above findings. Local farmers across the selected communities do not expand their farmlands due to homegrown school feeding programme. A "programme which is not patronizing our resources cannot affect the size of our farm. “They are not buying our rice, beans or even yam”’. “They don’t buy from us" the local farmer said in answering this question via the interview. This means that homegrown school feeding is no more 'homegrown' because the idea of making it a homegrown programme was to derive anything to be eaten by the pupils from the core beneficiary community. By importing food items into the beneficiary community under any other arrangement is akin to deviation from the real idea for establishing homegrown school feeding programmes.

### **The effect of the value chain of home-grown school feeding programme on poverty reduction among traders in Taraba State**

Meanwhile, interviews conducted with local traders supported the assertion that value chain of home-grown school feeding programme has little effect on poverty reduction among traders in Taraba State. Many of the local traders interviewed were of the view that the value chain of the Home-grown school feeding programme does not spur economic activities in their communities. A local trader said,

"Homegrown school feeding programme is an intervention that was established to enrich the selected few in the community. The programme does not spur economic activities in our community. There is no increase in the purchase of foodstuff since the commencement of the programme. We only experienced an increase during the purchase of our goods on a market day" but not due to patronage from vendor/cooks participating in the homegrown school feeding programme.

The above argument, presents the inability of the homegrown school feeding programme to stimulate economic activities in the beneficiary communities of Taraba State.

Another respondent posited that “even though some of the condiments used for homegrown school feeding are largely purchased from local traders, there are others who believed that caterers

purchased most of what they needed at the metropolis in Jalingo”. When asked whether this has made any difference on their income, a trader who was interviewed opined that, "the purchase of condiments did not generate any meaningful income to me." This means that the value chain of the homegrown school feeding programme did not contribute to the generation of income among traders in the area under study in order to reduce poverty and enhance their income as envisaged. Therefore, the idea that homegrown school feeding will stimulate economic activities could not be achieved due to sharp practices of those entrusted with the responsibility of implementation.

### **The effect of catering jobs in home-grown school feeding programmes on poverty reduction and improved standard of living among caterers in Taraba State**

Interview conducted with the beneficiary caterers further supports the assertions. Caterers from the selected communities attested to the fact that catering jobs in homegrown school feeding programmes generated income for them. The caterers in Jalingo, Lau, Bali, Gasol, Sardauna and Wukari communities confirmed that their "involvement in the programme has helped us earn money that enabled us to solve some of our financial problems." One of the vendors, Tracia Tyowua from Takum said, she has expanded her business due to income from the Homegrown school feeding programme. This implies that homegrown school feeding programme helped caterers generate income through the catering jobs they were involved in by the government in Taraba State.

On the issue of reducing poverty another field data revealed that the employed caterers were members of the beneficiary communities. Although many see the interference of local politicians in their selection, majority of community inhabitants agreed that the caterers were selected from their communities. "Most of them are from here, but they are daughters, wives and relatives of politicians." In an attempt to hear from the officials, State Programme Manager said "It is the responsibility of the local office to select caterers, not our office." The Local Government Desk said that "there is political interference in the selection of caterers. You know you can't separate this type of exercise from politicians”. They will force their candidates on you." Although, some extort from the beneficiaries during payment, on a whole it has improved their income.

### **Challenges affecting implementation of the home-grown school feeding programme in Taraba State.**

Field data revealed that several challenges affect the implementation of the programme. State and local government officials of the programme in the state interviewed stated thus:

Access to funding, misappropriation of funds released by the higher authority, choice of caterers and cooks, purchase of food from neighborhood "smallholder farmers," community involvement, ineffective and inefficient monitoring and supervision, and even choice of beneficiary communities for program implementation are all challenges that affects the homegrown school feeding programme in Taraba State (Interview with homegrown school feeding programme officials in Taraba State, December, 2022).

This corroborate with the position of Mbunje, (2018), who posited that, the success or failure of any programme is determined by several factors and preconditions. These factors and preconditions may or may not help in the achievement of the programme objectives. Several challenges make the implementation of homegrown school feeding programmes in Nigeria and

many other countries less successful or completely unsuccessful. Access to funding, diversion of funds released by the higher authority, selection of vendors and cooks, purchase of foodstuff from local "smallholder farmers," community involvement, ineffective and inefficient monitoring and supervision, providing the approved diet to children, and even selection of beneficiary communities for programme implementation, are all hindrances to the success of the programme in Taraba State.

## **Conclusion**

This study assessed the effect of the National Homegrown School Feeding Programme on poverty reduction in Taraba State. Based on the above findings through the interview conducted and other secondary sources, it can be concluded that National Homegrown School Feeding Programme has not made significant contribution in reducing poverty in Taraba State. This is because, it is only caterers and aggregators that benefited massively from the programme. From the data collected and analysed, it can be seen that the home grown school feeding programme did not benefit the local smallholder farmers and most of the local traders. Thus, even though the programme has reduced poverty among caterers and aggregators, the result from the study showed that the homegrown school feeding programme has no significant effect in reducing poverty among local farmers because the agricultural goods used in feeding the pupils are largely imported from outside of the beneficiary communities. This, therefore, negates the provision of the policy document which prescribes the procurement of the agricultural goods from local farmers of the beneficiary community.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following:

- i The Homegrown school feeding program in Taraba State should determine and adopt food procurement tactics that will effectively and efficiently benefit the target groups so as to assist the State's effort to reduce poverty.
- ii The program's implementation should be maintained by the Taraba State government, in ensuring that the objectives of the Homegrown school feeding programme are achieved. The majority of the grievances considered focused on the inconsistent nature of the release of funds and other logistics and the excessive political interference in its execution, in order to achieve its objectives.
- iii For the value chain of homegrown school feeding programme to be achieved in reducing poverty among the traders and local farmers of the beneficiary communities, all the food items required in preparing the food should be purchased directly from local farmers within the communities and schools in Taraba State.
- iv The government should guarantee that the selection process is conducted on the basis of merit and not political consideration. The National Homegrown School Feeding Programme proposed Bill by the Executive arm of government at the federal level be given special attention by the National Assembly and passed into law. It is only by doing

so that the program's activities will be sustained and its objective of reducing poverty among beneficiaries in the Local Government Areas can also be achieved.

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