

SCHOOL FEEDING IN UGANDA

Report for the Global Child Nutrition Forum 13th – 19th July 2006

Background

Uganda is a small landlocked country located in Eastern Africa. The total population is 26,533,329. The country offers Universal Primary Education (UPE) since 1997 where four children of school going age in each family benefit. To date there are 14,287 primary schools with a total enrollment of 7,631,052 (3,871,386 boys and 3,759,666 girls), and 2700 secondary schools with a total enrolment of 683,609.

It is to be noted that although Uganda has one of the highest rates of economic growth over the last decade, 35% of the population still lives below the poverty line. In addition 1.6 million people in the North and Northeast of the country live in Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps with no access to suitable means of economic livelihood. At the same time, at least 42% of households in Uganda support a person orphaned by HIV/AIDS, malnutrition or conflict.

SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES: GENERAL

With the introduction of UPE, government expects parents and caretakers to take on the responsibility of feeding their children. A number of the UPE schools have private feeding programs but many parents particularly in the rural areas cannot afford to pay even the minimal cost of the simple meal of maize meal porridge. A recent study carried out shows that 26% of Day schools provide at least one meal at school.

Pupils attending day schools in urban settings often take a packed lunch according to what is available in their homes or may buy snacks from vendors within the school compound. This cannot be said of schools in the rural areas. Both primary and secondary schools provide all meals at school. Parents pay for the meals through the school fees every term. The diet in boarding schools commonly consists of maize meal porridge for breakfast and maize meal pap with beans for the other meals of the day.

The School Health Section in the Ministry of Health was established in 1999 and has been endeavoring to carry out advocacy for improvement of school health services in general. A video film entitled "United we stand" was produced in 2002 and highlights the situation of school health services including feeding in schools. A School Health Policy under which feeding in schools is highlighted has also been drafted but is still under discussion.

Under this policy, the Ministry of Education and Sports as well as the Ministry of Health are expected to provide guidelines on feeding in schools, encourage parents and schools to provide at least one hot meal a day, provide micro nutrient supplements for pre-primary schoolchildren.

The Pre primary school children are actually already benefiting from an ongoing national Child Days initiative where all children from 6-59 months receive Vitamin a supplementation and Deworming every six months through the health services.

A study entitled "Costing of Uganda School Health Program" was completed in September 2005 with the overall objective of ascertaining the cost of providing a school health package

and help in the advocacy and mobilization of resources for school health. In this study, provision of school feeding is also included.

SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES IN TARGETED DISTRICTS

Despite the above information the government implements selective school feeding programmes with assistance from the UN World Food Programme in the districts of the North and Northeastern Uganda which are in a conflict situation and therefore needy.

Karamoja Region is located in the Northeast of the country, is inhabited by a large tribe of pastoralists and is drought prone with frequent inter tribal clashes and cattle rustling episodes that make the region insecure and lagging behind in development. Thus the region has the lowest school enrolment and literacy rates that qualified it for targeting with school feeding programs.

The WFP and Government of Uganda currently cooperate in two major programmes. The Development Programmes and the Protracted Relief and Recovery Programmes (PRROs). Each of these major programmes has different components some of which relate to school feeding. Thus the CP 10019.0 programme includes a component of school feeding in Karamoja, whereas PRRO 10121.0 has the following:

- Component I: Food for Assets
- Component II: School Feeding
- Component III: Social Support Components

The school feeding component in the above context addresses the feeding of school children in schools operating in the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps and in Refugee-Hosting Districts.

The School feeding in these districts involves the school management committees. Parents contribute firewood. In most schools here a hot breakfast and lunch is provided.

PRRO COMPONENT II: SCHOOL FEEDING

WFP under this component supplied 42,108 metric tons of assorted food items mainly maize meal, beans and vegetable cooking oil. Although originally designed as part of a recovery strategy, it was changed to relief due to the continuing civil conflict by the Lords Resistance Army in the region.

School Feeding coverage in needy districts is low and not all schools in each district or even sub-counties are covered. An Elaborate strategy for roll-out of school feeding to districts in need, supported by clearly defined criteria failed to take due to the collapse of implementation arrangements for an expanded school feeding programme that would target 20 districts.

SUCSESSES

An independent evaluation in April 2005 reported 88% performance in the attainment of school feeding targets. Meals were generally rated as of good quality, culturally acceptable and considered tasty by the children.

Enrolment and attendance figures reported in the Education Management Information system statistics show general over-achievement.

The food assistance programme has also been credited with the following:

- Reduction of gender disparities in the lower primary classes. The provision of Girls' Take Home Rations has increased the ratio of girls from 44% to 52% of the pupils enrolled in Primary 1.
- Increase of sustained school attendance from 20% of the pre-project school age population to 40%
- Reduction in fees payable in boarding schools, resulting in 63% increase in enrolment.
- Improvement of the school environment through tree planting, school gardens, fuel efficient stoves and so on.

PLANS FOR 2006-2010

KARAMOJA REGION

The Executive board of the UNWFP has approved US\$ 24,585,082 for 40,859 tons of food commodities to be served over the next five-year period from 2006-2010. The special focus of food assistance will be on girls' education, within the overall objectives of;

- 1) Increasing enrolment and attendance of both boys and girls
- 2) Reduction Of Drop Out Rates

To reduce the gender gap in the higher classes, from 4-7 girls will receive 25kgs of fortified corn soy blend and 3.7 litres of fortified vegetable cooking oil for 80% attendance in the school term.

OTHER REGIONS

Consultations started early this year to design a programme that would be run by Government but with a 50% buy in by UNWFP. If agreement is reached, this programme is to:

- 1) Target 20 districts characterized by high food insecurity and conflict or post conflict history
- 2) Have 80% of all food requirements purchased locally
- 3) Have phase one characterized by the supply of milk
- 4) Have 563,300 beneficiaries in the first year, rising to 2,500,000 in Year 5.
- 5) Cost US\$ 184 million.

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve quality education for all, school feeding is an essential component. The country still has the challenge of passing the policy and developing guidelines and minimum standards for implementation. Through continued advocacy efforts and support by more partners, feeding of all school children in the country will be achieved.