



Parent-led school feeding: Lessons from the SNV School Milk Programme

A 2017 national study on Uganda’s progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Number 2 on Zero Hunger reported that only 34% of learners were accessing a meal at school. School feeding and nutrition programmes serve a dual purpose of providing a channel for distributing food to children of low-income families and an incentive for such families to send their children to school. It also contributes to increased school enrolment and attendance while improving the health and nutritional status of the children. Girls enrolled in school are more likely to delay their first pregnancy, leading to better nutritional outcomes for mother and infant.

Background

In 1997, the Government of Uganda adopted the Universal Primary School Education (UPE) programme. The principal aim of the UPE reform was to enable all Ugandan children of school-going age not only to enter and remain in school but also to successfully complete the primary school level of education (MoES, 2004a). Under UPE, the government paid the children’s tuition fees through the transfer of a capitation grant (the UPE grant) to schools (Suzuki,2002). Following the UPE policy, primary school enrolment increased exponentially, from 3.1 million children in 1996 to about 10 million 2016/17.¹

In 2007, the government launched Universal Secondary Education (USE), a measure aimed at increasing access to quality secondary school education for economically

vulnerable families and communities. By the end of 2016/17, Secondary School Gross Enrolment Ratio for Uganda stood at an estimated 38%.

Although parents and guardians were required to take care of other schooling expenses, such as the cost of scholastic materials (books and supplies), uniforms and food, most parents/guardians interpreted the policy to mean ‘free’ education. Subsequently, a majority of school children attended school on empty stomachs. The lack of school meals threatens to reverse the gains made in both UPE and USE.

Many children drop out of school due to failure to get a meal while in school. Malnutrition weakens Uganda’s economy through losses in productivity due to poor

This policy brief:

1 Shows the rationale of the School Milk Programme implemented in South Western Uganda as a model based on the National School Feeding and Nutrition Policy Guidelines.

2 Highlights the main achievements, lessons learnt and emerging policy concerns of the programme.

3 Provides information to support the sustainability and scaling up processes of parent-led school feeding programmes Nationally.

physical status, low school performance, attainment of low levels of education or low grades as a result of impaired cognitive development.²

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation implemented a dairy project funded by the Netherlands Embassy in Kampala in seven (7) districts of Southwestern Uganda (2015-2019). The Inclusive Dairy Enterprise (TIDE) project enabled small and medium sized dairy farmers to improve their incomes and the nutritional status of their families.

In 2016, SNV signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Dairy Development Authority (DDA) to pilot a parent-led School Milk Programme (SMP) in the TIDE project area based on the 2013 National Guidelines on School Feeding and Nutrition Programme.

The TIDE project area is in the cattle corridor districts of Kiruhura, Mbarara, Ntungamo, Isingiro, Bushenyi, Sheema and Lyantonde, in Southwestern Uganda.

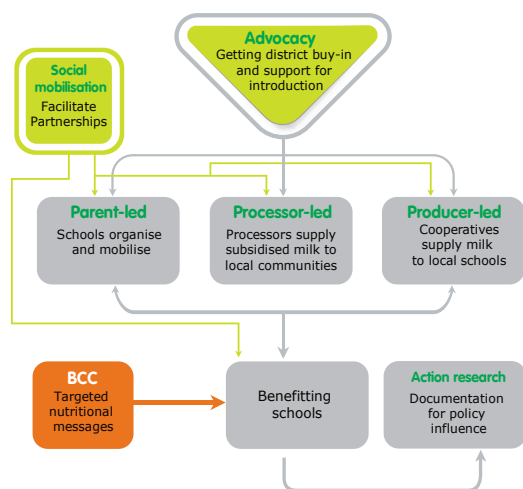
At the time the TIDE project was launched in October 2015, the majority of primary school going children in

Piloting the Parent-led Approach in the School Milk Programme

A daily school meal is a vital incentive to keep children in schools and it allows them to concentrate on their studies. School food is considered vital for achieving education for all (Drake et al., 2015). Schools also provide a huge opportunity to (re)set norms about healthy diets and good nutrition practices (IFPRI, 2016).

By bringing District local authorities, school foundation bodies, parents through Parent Associations and Dairy farmer co-operatives, the SMP targets vulnerable households and children using school milk campaigns to create awareness on the importance of school meals in improving their nutritional status.

The TIDE Milk Approach



the region were attending school without any prospects for meals. Over one-third of the children joined the school system stunted.

As such, school milk consumption was integrated as a social support investment to mitigate school hunger, improve education, increase income for dairy farmers and enhance the dairy value chain industry.

SNV's goal was to mobilise parents to contribute towards provision of milk as part of a hot midday meal for learners using a parent – led approach as prescribed in the 2008 Education Act.

In October 2017, the Hon. Minister of Education & Sports and the First Lady of Uganda, Janet Kataha Museveni, endorsed a National Declaration on Parent-led School Feeding.

This Declaration put parents at the center of school feeding for their children with options that include provision of home-packed meals, the contribution of fees for a hot meal, or fees for full boarding care including meals and payment in kind through physical food, labour and time.

The focus of the SMP developed by SNV/TIDE was to operationalize the national policy guidelines on school feeding and nutrition. The MoES developed the National School Feeding and Nutrition Policy Guidelines in 2013 to streamline school feeding and health. The programme was anchored on strengthening parental involvement to contribute towards the feeding of children at school on meals that included milk.

SNV supported the national and district level task forces and local actors contracted by SNV to promote school feeding by mobilising and sensitizing parents about the need to contribute to their children's feeding and nutrition while at school. This was carried out through face to face meetings with community members and parents and community awareness campaigns using mass media.

The parents were encouraged to contribute to the provision of milk either in cash or in kind. In each school, the parents agreed to contribute an agreed amount of money (ranging from UGX 10,000 to 15,000) per term or its equivalent in kind to buy milk and other consumables (e.g. maize flour, sugar and firewood to boil the milk). In most cases, milk was added to maize porridge thereby improving the nutritional value of the porridge.

Upon commitment by schools and parents (through Parents Teachers Associations), SNV/TIDE gave support through a matching grant to schools that attained 50% enrolment of learners consuming milk. The incentive included 50% financial support towards construction of improved kitchens, purchase of

SMP pilot objectives:

1. Promote milk consumption among school going children to reduce short-term hunger and improve their nutritional status,
2. Cultivate a milk drinking culture,
3. Create a new market for milk across the region through schools,
4. Use community nutrition approaches around the school to enhance dietary diversity in dairy farm households.

improved cooking , purchase of water harvest tanks, construction of fuel-efficient cooking stoves and installation of water purification systems.

SNV/TIDE also supported training of teachers on hygiene campaigns, establishment of vegetable and fruit gardens, as well as supporting the District Local Governments on deworming and vitamin A supplementation in schools.

The parent-led approach therefore had strong linkages with the community, Local Government structures and the private sector players, specifically milk co-operatives, milk collection centers, private sector companies that supplied inputs such as improved cookstoves using the SNV matching grants and the milk producers to harness the market linkages.

Muti-stakeholder contextualized model for the school milk program

At National level: A task force comprising of representatives from the MoES, MoH, DDA, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and SNV supported implementation through linkages and alignment to national-level policies and actions. They participated in joint supervision, monitoring, validation and verification of the programme in implementing schools.

At the District level: A district School Milk Programme Task Force was responsible for the sensitisation and mobilisation of communities to support the SMP, explain school feeding guidelines, and convene meetings of Parents-Teachers' Associations (PTAs) to convince parents to pay an agreed fee for their children to access a meal with milk at school.

At the School level: Headteachers developed their school feeding proposals and convened parents' meetings to sensitize the parents. They were responsible for the purchase of milk and administration of the scheme. The school management together with the PTA persuaded parents to pay for the milk. Schools established School Nutrition Committees to monitor the purchase of milk, preparation and feeding of the children.

At Parental level: Through PTA meetings and one-on-one contacts, parents discussed the proposals and committed to making termly payments for each of their children. They also agreed on an affordable fee to enable learners access a meal with milk.



At the Community level: SNV supported the provision of and marketing of milk by co-operative societies through the Local Capacity builders (LCBs). The LCBs also carried out community sensitisation, education and mobilisation on the nutrition and health benefits of milk and overall good nutrition for education and development. LCBs worked with the district school milk task force.

At the Individual Child level: Children were made aware of the nutritional value of milk (directly through improved nutritional status and physiological development or indirectly (improved cognitive development, learning capabilities and school enrolment).

Milestone – the National Declaration on Parent-Led School Feeding, 31st October 2017



First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Hon. Janet Kataha Museveni oversees the signing of the declaration on Parent led School Feeding

On the day the Honourable Minister for Sports and Education and First Lady of Uganda, Mrs Janet Kataha Museveni endorsed the National Declaration on Parent-led School Feeding, she also inaugurated a National Technical Working Group on School Feeding and Nutrition to pursue concerted efforts to end hunger and malnutrition of school children.

This gave the programme a boost and gave a policy guidance to all school feeding and nutrition programmes in the country.

This was followed by a National Flagship campaign by the Minister to all parts of the country during which she mobilised the masses about the benefits of good feeding, nutrition and care for children.

Sustainability and Scale-up

1. A parent led school feeding programme is a viable venture however, it calls for effective mobilisation and alignment with government policies from the start. This facilitates rapport and buy-in from the school head teachers, PTAs and the community leaders. This was a strong sustainability pillar for the programme.
2. The fact that the government and such a large number of schools bought into the SMP concept suggests that it is a very relevant initiative. However, the programme was not embraced by all parents and communities (with only 60% adoption) thereby limiting full adoption in all the schools. Follow up is needed to build an understanding about what demotivates or prevents parents and schools from participation, identify the barriers and enablers to effective participation at the different levels.
3. The evidence base generated by SNV TIDE on the implementation of the SMP indicates that the 2013 School Feeding and Nutrition Intervention Guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports are instrumental but need to be reviewed to address emerging issues around Home-Grown School Feeding, Nutrition-sensitive menu options, monitoring and reporting.
4. Whereas the SMP does seem a sustainable initiative given the strong buy-in at the various levels of the SMP and the link to national policy, the buy-in from schools seems to be largely driven by SNV's attractive matching funds for water purification installation, kitchen upgrading, and energy saving boilers. SNV also hired grass root organisations (commonly known as Local Capacity Builders) to support the schools in implementing the SMP. What would schools do without this support? There is need to rethink the school feeding policy to ensure its sustainability with or without support from development organisations like SNV.

Emerging Policy Issues

1. School milk is a viable market for development of the dairy industry and economy therefore procurement guidelines for school meals should be developed to link schools to co-operatives and organized small holder farmers.
2. Economic benefits from the school milk programme could be used as a yardstick for planning and budgeting.
3. Measures should be put in place to safeguard quality assurance and safety of milk used in schools.
4. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials should be developed to promote other milk products.
5. School menu options that utilise nutritious foods available in the different communities across the country should be developed and promoted across the country.
6. Parents are effectively mobilized when there is concerted effort and engagement by the district and community leaders.
7. A rewarding system through matching grants to progressive schools towards energy saving cooking stoves, safe drinking water facilities, biogas production facilities, and improved kitchens boosts programme

Reference

1. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2018. Uganda National Household Survey 2016/2017. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS
2. National Nutrition Planning Guidelines, National Planning Authority, Uganda 2015
3. SNV TIDE Review Reports, 2017, 2018 & 2019
4. Policy guidelines on school feeding and Nutrition of 2013

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Achievements

By the end of 2019



The School Milk Programme was successfully scaled up to **950** primary schools.



A total of **329,900** children (52.5% girls) were having milk mixed with porridge at school.



The proportion of learners taking milk in participating schools increased with some schools posting a **100%** coverage (private schools performed better than public schools).



The programme created a new local market for farmers' milk. With an average of **19,500** litres of milk consumed by the schools per day.



Dairy farmers are earning an estimated daily income of **UGX 21 million** (EUR 5,000) and **UGX 5.3 billion** (EUR 1.2 million) per annum in sales of raw milk through the programme

Lessons learnt

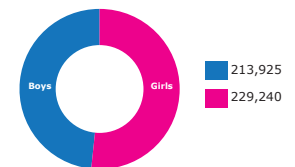
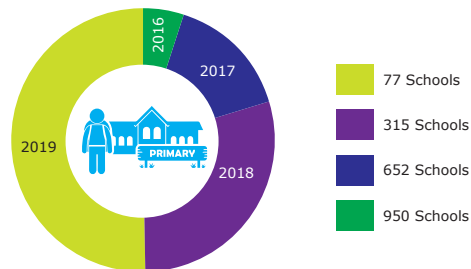
1. Parents are effectively mobilised when there is concerted effort and engagement by the district and community leaders.
2. Buy-in from School Head Teachers, Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) and the community leaders is a key entry point for sustainability.
3. A rewarding system through matching grants to progressive schools boosts programme uptake.
4. A national policy and statutory instrument on school feeding is of essence to guide on sustainable school feeding in all schools.

Lessons from the Implementation

1. A national policy and statutory instrument on school feeding is of essence to guide on sustainable school feeding in all schools of Uganda.
2. SNV TIDE generated an evidence base on the implementation of the SMP and it showed that the school feeding and nutrition guidelines developed by the government of Uganda are instrumental and practical as long as there is an organisation ready to support its implementation in the school.
3. The parent-led approach though understood is not always easy to practice especially in areas with poverty and food insecurity.
4. School feeding programmes should integrate health promotion action such as deworming and promoting safe access to water, hygiene and sanitation.

Key figures on SMP enrolment

Schools on the programme



(More Girls than Boys 229,240 vs 213,925)

Learners consuming milk at school

