SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM IN THE THREE POOREST REGIONS OF GHANA

Contributed by USAID/Ghana and Catholic Relief Services

Introduction
The northern part of Ghana has the lowest school enrolment (Gross Enrolment Ratio of 65% in 1998)\(^1\) and attendance rates of pupils of school-going age in the country. Completion rates are no better for the few who get enrolled. The possibility that a child enrolled will complete is barely 50% compared to a national average of over 74%. It therefore has a high illiterate population, which due to chronic poverty and ignorance does very little to encourage enrollment and retention of children in school more so the girl child. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) since 1997 through USAID PL480 title II\(^2\) resources has targeted the northern regions in a bid to increase enrolment and attendance especially for girls, sensitize communities (rural) and build their capacities to support their schools and assist communities to raise structures to house children in schools without shelter.

Beneficiaries

The school-feeding program benefits children in the primary schools (average ages 6-12) as well as those at the preschool level. Each child in a program school is entitled to a hot lunch a day and the girls who are able to make a monthly attendance of 85% or more are given a take home ration. A collaboration between CRS and Ghana Education Service (GES) is integral to the success of the Feeding program because CRS considers GES as central to the success of the program. In furtherance of this objective, CRS has one GES Partner Supervisor per district and one for each of the three regions. These Partner Supervisors have been assigned by GES to assist CRS in monitoring program schools.

Collaboration
CRS provides motorcycles to the Partner Supervisors on a hire purchase basis where monthly deductions are made by GES from the salary of the Partner Supervisor towards payment for the bike. The contract used to administer the motorcycle purchase also serves as a contract with the GES/Partner Supervisor where their responsibilities to CRS and the ESP Program are clearly

\(^1\) GLSS 1998 & 2000
outlined. Reimbursement for fuel, oil and maintenance is made per mile traveled to monitor the program. The Partner Supervisors submit monthly reports to both the GES Regional and District Offices and CRS, containing both information on their monthly activities and a reimbursement requests.

To ensure that all stakeholders are on board, CRS collaborates with other NGOs in taking a leading role in the North in establishing district roundtable meetings as well as Regional Education Forums. These fora, which consist of NGO staff and MOE/GES from all three northern regions meet regularly to discuss issues in basic education. CRS has contributed funding, materials and personnel to facilitate the success of these forums.

**Capacity building**

CRS Program Officers run initial two-day training courses on the management, record keeping and accountability aspects of the program for new entrants to the program and annual refreshers on same for Headteachers, teachers in-charge and community members.

Orientation courses are also provided for new Regional/District Partner Supervisors as well as annual refresher workshops.

All these are meant to empower them to be able to effectively manage the program

**Community Involvement in the Program**

In the school feeding program communities have the overall responsibility of ensuring safe, secure and leak-proof storage facilities for all commodities, providing safe and neat kitchens, volunteer cooks and cooking utensils and paying Canteen Fees from which they purchase ingredients and compensate the cooks.

As part of this involvement, communities are encouraged to contribute foodstuffs to supplement what CRS provides especially when CRS food resources run out and the next supply has yet to arrive. Some communities especially those in the more food-secure zones are doing this very well.

In the case of the Take-home Ration for girls, the mothers of girls who qualify are expected to ensure regular and punctual attendance of their daughters and to go to the school to collect the ration when their daughters qualify.

There is a Community Food Management Committee (CFMC) in each program school, which is supposed to oversee the use of all resources and also assist the teachers in the effective running of the program. Two CFMC members attend an initial training before a school joins the program and continue to attend refresher-training workshops taking turns throughout the program lifespan.

Under the Infrastructure Support component, Community members have the responsibility of providing all labor including artisans. CRS only provides roofing sheets, assorted nails cement and wood.
Before schools come on to any of CRS’ programs e.g. School Feeding, Take-Home Ration and Infrastructure Support, community members of beneficiary schools are usually sensitized on their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children in general and in particular the expectations of the intervention.

A sponsored Radio panel discussion on the Program, which centered on the importance of education generally and girls’ education in particular is carried out in seven major languages of Northern Ghana.

**What have been the results so far?** ²

In terms of enrolment, the average number of children enrolled per program primary school has increased from 52 – 219.

Program Objective 1
By end of program, the average enrollment and attendance level of rural primary school pupils in program schools will be 25% higher than baseline

Result
In terms of attendance, the average attendance rate in ESP schools during FY 97 was 56 %. This has increased to an average of 89 % as of now.

In 1997, 55,624 children were enrolled in 423 primary schools and received the hot lunch. Currently, 274,200 children in 1,096 primary schools and 50,200 children in 342 pre-schools attend school and receive the hot lunch each day.

Objective 2
By end of the Program, take-home rations will be provided to 20,000 families of girls who achieve 85% attendance every month.

Results
In 1997 an average of 5,400 girls received Take-Home Rations (THR) on the 85% attendance of the number of school days in each month. Currently over 74,389 girls are enrolled in 593 THR schools of which 63,260 girls achieve an 85% attendance rate thereby qualifying for THR.

Objective 3
By end of the program, 255 selected rural primary schools will have new or rehabilitated classrooms and/or furniture through the provision of building materials and/or furniture for community initiated school infrastructure projects.

Results
Over the life of activity, CRS/Ghana supported the construction/rehabilitation of 260 classrooms blocks, 21 teachers’ quarters and 2 community libraries while 134 schools have been provided with classroom furniture.

ESP support to improvements in school infrastructure has resulted in the creation of a more conducive learning environment, teacher motivation and increases in enrolment and attendance rates at program schools.

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Objective 1.4
By end of the program, 225 program schools will have PTAs that promote or support community level programs and projects that are of benefit to school-age children.

Results
Over the course of the DAP, CRS/Ghana provided training to about 5–7 executive committee members of 230 program schools and conducted PRA/PLAs around education issues to over 400 communities. Thus exceeding the program target of 225.

CRS/Ghana has observed an increase in the level of community commitment towards school development over the last five years. For example, several communities are supplementing CRS food supplies and have initiated projects such as school farms, small-scale tree plantations, animal rearing and constructed hand-dug wells.
What benefit does school feeding bring to the poor and marginalized in society?
Over the years of school feeding it has proved to be beneficial in ensuring short-term food security for children, siblings and parents,

- increased enrollment (even for shepherd boys), increased attendance and retention and last but not the least, it is a worthwhile bargaining chip to get girl children in school.

It must however be admitted that one of the biggest challenges of school feeding is its low sustainability index in rural food insecure communities. Persistent draught and poor soils makes it almost impossible for such parents to feed children once the program ends.³

³ Fortunately for these food insecure communities, USAID has given approval for the continuation of the program albeit few changes (DAP 2003-09).