

Poverty affects about 27.6% of households in Namibia with most poor households concentrated in rural areas. Food security remains a major issue for the people of Namibia; in recent years, up to a third of the population has needed humanitarian food assistance. About 35 per cent of Namibia's population lives on less than \$1 a day and about 155,000 children under age 17 have lost one or both parents as a result of HIV and AIDS. The poorest parts of the country are most vulnerable to malaria and chronic drought and have the highest rates of HIV and AIDS. About three-fifths of primary school learners (about 270,000) are estimated to come from food insecure families. In 2008, some 128,357 orphaned children were enrolled in school, accounting for 21.9% of total learners. Children from these vulnerable settings are usually at risk of dropping out early partly due to the cost of education. Poor households often face competing choices for their expenditures, with education being only one among others such as food and healthcare. When experiencing a shock that may lead to food insecurity, households will typically concentrate all their energy on trying to cover their food needs, foregoing other expenditures such as education, often because they are perceived to be more discretionary. Children, withdraw from school because their parents can no longer afford even the most minimal educational expenses and need their help at home. Although the elimination of education-related expenses may help the family meet immediate needs, it can jeopardize longer-term food security and lifetime earning potential.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia, in its commitment to reach the Millennium Development Goals, has set goals to ensure that by 2015, all children, including those in difficult circumstances have access to compulsory quality primary education. The Namibian School Feeding Programme (NSFP) is considered as one of the strategies for addressing the inequalities in education and expanding educational opportunities for disadvantaged Namibians. The NSFP is one of the biggest food-based programmes run by the government. The programme targets an estimated 270 000 needy primary school learners (mainly orphans, marginalised children from poor households, learners staying with elderly grandparents and unemployed parents/guardians, food insecure learners, including those with signs of malnutrition). It seeks to promote access to education by enhancing enrolment, attendance and completion by orphans and vulnerable children and this includes those who are food insecure and HIV/AIDS affected children.

The Ministry of Education took over the management of the school feeding programme from the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1996 and has made good progress since then. In 1996 only 78 000 children were enrolled into the programme, sixteen years later the programmes reach has nearly tripled. The estimated 270 000 children reached, represent over 50% of children attending primary school education. With an annual budget of about US\$8 million, the school feeding programme provides a mid-morning meal to learners in the hope that their concentration and performance levels will improve and ultimately influence their learning process. School feeding is also considered as a reliable source of nutritious food for disadvantaged children with limited access to adequate food diets.

School feeding is embedded in several national policies and national strategies including the National Development Plan 3, which is indicative of strong political support for the SFP. The Ministry is the institution mandated to implement school feeding and there is a structure in place at central, regional and district/circuit level including school boards. Government commits funds every year for school feeding under the ministry's budget, as the objectives of the programme are relevant to Namibia's context (i.e. increasing access to education for vulnerable children).

The geographical targeting of school feeding is well coordinated, as the schools with high food insecurity and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are being reached. The food basket supplied (composed of a fortified maize blend) is generally accepted and appreciated by the children and the community. The nutritional value of the fortified maize blend is adequate.

The programme relies on local food purchases and has institutional arrangements for implementation. Although these aspects are strong prerequisites for the sustainability of Namibia's School Feeding Programme, there is still the need to further strengthen partnership and inter-sector coordination, as well as needs analysis for targeting and community participation, which are also key elements of any sustainable school feeding programme.

At a glance, Namibia's School Feeding Programme appears to meet the eight WFP quality standards for sustainability namely: strategy for sustainability; sound alignment with national policy frameworks; stable funding and budgeting; needs-based and cost-effective programme design, strong institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring and accountability, strategies for local production, strong partnerships and inter-sector coordination and lastly, strong community participation. The programme however reveals that some of these prerequisites for sustainability have not yet been fully achieved and will need to be addressed if the programme is to fulfil key elements of a viable programme.

In June 2011, Namibia hosted an International Conference on Education, during which a number of resolutions were made, including the need to expand the NSFP. However, the Ministry Of Education (MOE) had observed that there were a number of challenges affecting the implementation and expansion of the NSFP. The Ministry has since taken a number of measures to address these challenges:

- A presentation done by the Ministry of Education to Namibia Dairies on school feeding;
- In turn Namibia Dairies presented the need for food fortification to the ministry; On-site visit to Namibia Dairies with the Hon. Minister of Education, Dr. A. Iyambo
- regarding food fortification and possible replacement maize blend.
- Namibia Dairies supplied a proposal, dated October 2011, to do a survey among learners in the Khomas region to evaluate and test their current product
- Data-baseline checklists has been prepared by the ministry in collaboration with WFP to determine the absence, performance and preference of the maize blend.

Additionally, to address these measures, the MOE (PQA) sought technical support from the UN World Food Programme. In May 2012, the MOE formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding with WFP. The technical assistance seeks to enhance the efficiency of the NSFP and it covers the following:

- Knowledge transfer and learning (through studies and training) and cost analysis
- Hands-on support in monitoring and evaluation and strategic planning
- Awareness creation and advocacy, and
- Systems development and enhancement.

In April 2012 the MOE with WFP conducted an inception workshop where two consultants were hired to conduct studies focusing on:

- Tracing the historical transition of the programme from inception to the present focusing on best practices and lessons learnt so that other countries could draw lessons
- Carrying out an operational review of the NSFP as it is today, focusing on the strengths and challenges facing the NSFP. This part would inform the planned expansion and efforts by the MOE to improve the NSFP and ultimately access to education for OVC's

The findings of the consultants were validated at a workshop in July. Using five quality standards for sustainable school feeding programmes (developed and published by the World Bank and WFP under their publication "Rethinking School Feeding..." (2009). These findings have served as a guide to the way forward to further improving and expanding the NSFP.