

Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and Primary Education in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on primary education in Akwa Ibom State. The target population of the study comprised public primary school teachers in Akwa Ibom State, totaling 9168. The stratified sampling technique was used to select 342 public primary school teachers (149 males, 193 females) from the three senatorial districts of the state to form the sample. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. Data collection was carried out with the use of a researcher-developed instrument tagged 'Home-Grown School Feeding and Primary Education' (HGSFPE) Questionnaire. The instrument was duly validated by three experts from the Department of Curriculum Studies, Educational Management and Planning, University of Uyo. The instrument was trial tested on 30 respondents who were not part of the sample size but were drawn from the population of the study. Using Cronbach alpha reliability test on the data obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained. The research questions were answered using simple percentages, while the null hypotheses were analyzed using the independent t-test. The result indicated no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education and school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State. The magnitude of the mean responses of the two groups of respondents was above the 2.5 cut-off point indicating a high and positive impact of the programme on access to education and school attendance at the primary school level in the state. Based on the result of the findings, it was concluded that the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has a positive impact on primary education in Akwa Ibom State. It was recommended among other things that the programme should be effectively funded, managed and supervised for maximum results.

Keywords: Home-Grown, School Feeding, Access, School Attendance, Primary Education

Introduction

Education is a catalyst to economic growth and human development as it cures most of the societal ills, promotes employment, earnings, health and poverty reduction benefits of education spill over into social and economic realms for individuals and society as a whole. Investment in quality education is key to the attainment of almost all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This is due to the fact that education has been associated with improved well-being of every individual. Closing the education and poverty gap spurs society's innovation and fosters social cohesion. Hence, there is need for education

systems design mechanisms to eliminate all barriers that may hinder access to and full exploitation of educational opportunities by all individuals.

The challenges posed by hunger and malnutrition among African children have given the political leadership of the continent the clarion call to mitigate the alarming danger posed by poverty, hunger, and malnutrition among the children of African nations. And the most appropriate way to tackle these menaces is through school feeding programmes. School feeding programme has been adopted in many countries throughout the world to fight short-term hunger by ensuring at least one daily nutritious meal to support access to education. The high level of food insecurity, significant incidence of malnutrition and economic melt-down all combined to make school feeding relevant (Education Cluster, 2009).

For a child suffering from hunger, going to school is not as important as having enough food to eat. Among the poor, there is often not enough food at home, and most primary schools in Nigeria do not have canteen or cafeteria. On empty stomach, children become easily distracted and have problems concentrating on the school lessons (World Food Programme, 2009). School feeding not only nurtures children and improves their health, but is also key in facilitating access to education by increasing school enrolment, attendance and completion (Gelli, Meir & Espejo, 2017).

Childhood is an important stage for both physical and mental development and it is believed that properly nourished children are more likely to be regular in school and besides perform better academically (Power, Lake & Cole, 2017). This is why school feeding programme should be prioritized globally. A suitable diet should therefore ensure that all nutrient requirements are met in order to protect current and future health needs of the children. Nutrients requirement during childhood is at their highest, due to extreme physical changes, including increase in height, bone and muscle growth and also active participation in academics, sports and exercises, which results in increased demand for energy and specific nutrients. This study examined the impact of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme on access to education and school attendance at the primary school in Akwa Ibom State.

The Concept of School Feeding / Home-Grown School Feeding Programmes

School feeding programmes are generally considered to be education interventions aimed at facilitating access to education and increased attendance and retention rates, while improving the nutrition of school children. There is evidence that school feeding programmes contribute to children's learning and health, increasing their productive potential later in life (NEPAD, 2013). When school feeding is part of a larger package of investment in education, it helps maximize the return on this investment and contributes to reducing poverty in the long term (Alderman & Bundy, 2011).

School feeding benefits can be further increased by leveraging the institutional demand associated with school meals to support local smallholder farmer production through local purchases. Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programmes emerged as an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and local communities, and to strengthen the nexus between nutrition, agriculture and social protection (FAO, 2019). Linking schools to local production can complement other national efforts to strengthen food production and diversification, and can be an important element in the transition to sustainable national programmes that are widely supported by stakeholders in different sectors and at different levels.

There is a growing focus worldwide on delivering healthy meals to children, while at the same time stimulating local agriculture and economies through the procurement of food from local, small-scale producers. Countries increasingly recognize that social protection measures, including school feeding, are needed to reduce and/or prevent poverty and hunger, and that connecting programmes to agriculture through institutional procurement programmes can further increase benefits, particularly for family farmers who are the backbone of agriculture in low- and middle income countries but, nevertheless, are often poor and work on a small scale.

HGSF programmes enable the development of nutrition-sensitive and inclusive food value chains, which maximize benefits for all the involved stakeholders and play an important role in shaping and strengthening sustainable local and national food systems. As observed by Drake, Woolnough, Burbano and Bundy (2016), defining a national strategy for HGSF can help identify policy and investment entry points to mainstream nutrition-sensitive interventions along the value chain – with regard to how the food is produced, processed, marketed, distributed and consumed – and identify the collective and individual roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Moreover, linking school feeding programmes to local production and development also increases community involvement and support, which is a crucial element for long-term programme sustainability.

Linking schools to local production is not necessarily a new concept. Many countries have developed different ways of creating this link, depending on the context, the capacity of farmers to supply schools, and different degrees of community participation. He (2019) noted that the distinctive and innovative element of HGSF programmes, compared with traditional school feeding programmes, is the prioritization of smallholder farmers in a way that maximises sustainable benefits on prices, opportunities for commercialization, market linkages and access to productive assets for smallholders and other stakeholders along the value chain. HGSF is not strictly limited to the purchase of local products for schools from smallholders, but is usually designed to achieve nutrition-sensitive objectives and includes complementary interventions for farmers and communities. However, HGSF programmes support smallholder farmers and agriculture in two main ways: by establishing strategic procurement and creating a structured demand for locally produced food; and by integrating additional, complementary interventions in order to enable smallholder farmers to participate in school feeding markets.

Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) constitutes a school feeding model that is designed to provide children in schools with safe, diverse and nutritious food, sourced locally from smallholders (Home-grown School Feeding Resource Framework, 2018). By implication, HGSF:

1. promotes the design and adoption of quality and safety standards for fresh and local foods;
2. supports crop and dietary diversification;
3. integrates food and nutrition education for behavioural change, and to support culturally appropriate, healthier eating habits;
4. maximizes benefits for smallholder farmers, by linking schools to local food production;
5. strengthens the capacities of smallholder farmers and communities to produce food; and
6. contributes to rural transformation.

Even if only a percentage of food is purchased locally from smallholder farmers, a school feeding programme can be considered as “home-grown”, provided that local purchases are designed to support and foster local agricultural and food markets, and that these objectives are taken into consideration during programme design and implementation, and institutionalized in related policies and regulations.

National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)

In 2005, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the School Feeding Programme with the assistance of the United Nations’ Children Education Fund (UNICEF) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Many governments are increasingly sourcing food for school feeding locally from smallholder farmers in a bid to boost local agriculture, strengthen local food systems and move people out of poverty.

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is one of the components of the Federal government social safety programme being managed by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (FMHADMSD). It is part of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), inaugurated by the Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo in Abuja in 2016.

Home-grown school feeding (HGSF) is designed to effectively augment the impact of regular school feeding programmes with increased food production and diversification as well as economic benefits for local communities. The Federal Government of Nigeria has identified HGSF as a strategy to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2). HGSF also facilitates inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4) and contributes to the empowerment of girls (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and the reduction of inequality within and among countries (SDG 10). Finally, HGSF helps forge partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17)

The HGSF programme aims at providing one meal per school day to all primary school pupils in Nigeria with the objectives of improving the health of school children increase their enrolment, retention and completion rate. Since the introduction of this programme, the enrolment rate had increased while the attendance of pupils in school is stable especially among girls who used to leave school for street trading and house-help jobs (NEPAD, 2009).

The core objective of the NHGSFP is to provide nutritious, balanced meal each school day to 5.5 million pupils in classes 1 to 3 in public primary schools (National Social Investment Office, 2018). In addition, the programme develops a value chain by creating jobs for the cooks and ensuring a sustainable income for small holder farmers, thereby stimulating a ripple effect in the rural economy (National Social Investment Office, 2018). The end goal of the school feeding programme is to increase enrolment rate by mopping up the large number of out-of-school children in Nigeria while tackling early year malnutrition (National Social Investment Office, 2018). Although initially designed to target 5.5 million primary school pupils, over 9 million school children are currently benefiting from the social safety net programme from 54,952 public primary schools in 35 States (Buhari Administration, 2020)

Each child is provided with one cooked meal per day. A cook (commonly referred to as ‘food vendor’) prepares meals for an average of 50 pupils. In order to meet the dietary requirements of the menu, 40% of the programme funds for food purchases are spent on protein (poultry, chicken, and eggs), procured to the programme through consolidated farmer

associations at regional distribution centres. The remaining 60% is spent on non-perishable staples such as vegetables and fruit (National Social Investment Office, 2018).

NHGSF Programme and Access to Education / School Attendance

Access to education is a fundamental Human Right as outlined in the 1948 Human Rights Charter. The 1990 Jomtien conference on education for all declared the need for provision of education to every person irrespective of their circumstances, whether children, youths or adults. In fact, the Education for All second goal that emanated from the World Education Forum in Dakar urged countries to ensure that girls and children in marginalized conditions have access to free and compulsory primary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, the Education for All (EFA) goal number five focused on achieving gender equality through full participation in quality education among girls by 2015 (UNESCO report, 2010). Subsequently, the third of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focuses on ensuring that all children complete primary education of adequate quality (UNESCO, 2010). Similarly, in the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, goal number four puts emphasis on access to quality inclusive education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Infact, the plan of the first target of the fourth SDG is to ensure that all children, without discrimination based on gender, complete quality free primary and secondary education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2017). Realization of the goals implies ensuring school attendance and improving primary school completion rates (UNESCO, 2015), which is one of the objectives of NHGSF Programme.

According to classical liberal theory of equal opportunity by Horace Mann (Coombs, 1988), every individual is born with certain level of inherent capability that needs to be exploited. Ensuring that children from diverse environments complete each education cycle is vital. Studies have indicated that, inequality in access to education has remained an area of concern for many countries (UNESCO, 2017). Although many countries have made tremendous strides towards universalization of primary education, many children are still unable to complete the relevant level of schooling as a result of extreme poverty, conflicts, disasters, HIV and AIDS affected, and those discriminated on the basis of culture, religion and gender (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2017).

The 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report points out that the children from the poorest 20% of households in poor countries are five times unlikely to complete primary school education as those from the richest 20% of households, indicating high rate of internal inefficiency. Statistics globally indicates that millions of children are still deprived of their right to education. By 2016, more than 263 million children and youth of age 16 and below were still out of school. This includes 25 million children of primary school age from low- and lower middle-income countries who will probably never set foot in a classroom (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Furthermore, about 34 million girls are absent from secondary school while an estimated 24 million girls may never have the opportunity to enroll in school (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The regions with highest number (81 percent) of out of school children include sub-Saharan Africa, which Nigeria is a part.

One of the interventions employed by different countries in an effort to provide quality education includes school feeding programmes. The objectives of school feeding programmes include improvement of school enrolment and attendance, reduction of dropout rates and low academic achievement (Gelli, et al., 2017). School feeding programmes have been implemented in many countries, including Nigeria as one of the social safety nets for

child nutrition and improvement of learning and educational outcomes (Bundy et al., 2009). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, an estimated 842 million people are still facing chronic hunger and are not getting enough food to lead an active and productive life (Drake et al., 2016).

Feeding of children at school setting has been associated with educational attainment and learning and this has made some countries to implement the programmes to improve retention and completion rates (Bundy et al., 2009). Bundy et al. (2009) outlined five quality standards to measure the effectiveness of school feeding programmes and that include: Presence of a national policy framework; sufficient institutional implementation and coordination personnel; sustainable sources of funding; appropriate design for implementation. In order to be effective, school feeding programmes need to be implemented by knowledgeable staff and stable funding. Some of the school feeding initiatives entail the provision of food to school going children, either in school for short-term hunger reduction and improvement of nutritional status or allowing the children to take the food rations home (Bundy et al., 2009). According to Bundy et al. (2009), in-schools food is commonly served hot to all children within the institutions and that requires planning for provision of the food, infrastructure and labor costs and this call for community participation in planning and budgeting.

The impact of the provision of school meals cannot be under estimated. Studies indicate that school feeding programmes play a critical role in school participation (Meng and Ryan, 2013; Ahmed and Billah, 2014). A study conducted by Ahmed and Billah (2014) showed that the provision of school meals led to increased participation among preschoolers. Similarly, the World Food Programme [WFP] (2016) posits that school Feeding Programme serves as an incentive for vulnerable families to send their children to school. This view is supported by Buttenheim, Alderman and Friedman (2011) who associate provision of school meals with positive effects such as increased school participation and retention, improvement of child's cognitive abilities, increased attention span and reduction of vulnerability of infectious diseases that negatively affect school attendance. A study carried out by Ahmed (2014) on impact of School Feeding Programme showed that provision of school meals had not only enhanced learning of children but was also attributed to high retention rates in schools in rural areas.

Similarly, a study conducted in 32 sub-Saharan countries showed a positive relationship between school feeding programmes and increase in enrolments (Gelli et al., 2017). However, Alderman (2015) observed that for school feeding initiatives to be effective, the programmes should be planned in such a manner that the benefits outweigh household income generated through child labour. Empirical evidence suggests that school feeding has a positive impact on school participation and attendance in areas where initial indicators of school participation and attendance were low. Ahmed and Billah (2014) found that school-based food distribution increased enrolment by 20% as against 2% decline in non-participating schools. Similarly, the World Food Programme (2016) recorded 76% increase in enrolment while attendance increased by 95% after introducing a school feeding programme in Pakistan. Osei-Fosu, (2011) reported that the school feeding programme had a high positive and significant impact on school enrolment, attendance and retention. However, Adelman, Gilligan and Lehrer (2008) in a study did not find any evidence that school feeding has increased primary school attendance rates for all school-age children.

Empirical evidence suggests that school feeding programmes in various parts of the world have faced numerous challenges, in spite of its glowing benefits. The school feeding programme has been cited to increase the cost of schooling by requiring that beneficiary communities provide fuel for cooking as well as other items such as vegetables (Masset, Edoardo and AuloGelli, 2013). According to Tomlinson (2017), in South Africa, the school feeding programme was criticised for its poor management, poor coverage, inconsistencies and high-cost. Tomlinson further argued that an increase in enrolment meant that teacher-pupil ratio would subsequently increase, thereby putting pressure on teachers as well as learning materials. However, the findings of the present study were compared with those of the reviewed studies above to see what the situation is in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Determine the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State
2. Determine the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The study adopted the mixed method research design. Specifically, the convergent parallel mixed method design was employed to examine the impact of school feeding programme on access, attendance and retention of pupils. The rationale for using the mixed method design was to obtain a variety of information in order to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability of data and overcome the deficiencies of a single method studies (Creswell, 2014). The design, therefore, involved collecting data from selected sample through questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion and analysing the responses. The target population of the study comprised public primary school teachers in Akwa Ibom State, totaling 9168. The Taro Yamane sampling technique was used to select 342 public primary school teachers (149 males, 193 females) from the three senatorial districts of the state to form the sample. This technique was adopted because of the large population involved in the study. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. Data collection was carried out with the use of a researcher-developed instrument tagged

‘Home-Grown School Feeding and Primary Education’ (HGSFPE) Questionnaire. The instrument was duly validated and trial tested using the test retest reliability measure. This gave a reliability coefficient of 0.88. The research questions were answered using simple percentages, while the null hypotheses were analyzed using the independent t-test.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were analyzed using independent t-test analysis.

Research Question 1: What is the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to primary education in Akwa Ibom State

Teachers	Impact		No impact		Remarks
	No.	%	No.	%	
Male	108	72.5	41	27.5	High impact
Female	131	67.9	62	32.1	

$N_1 = 149; N_2 = 193$

Table 1 indicates that 108 out of 149 male teachers (72.5%) affirmed a positive impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State, while 41 (27.5%) out of 149 male teachers disagreed. Also, 131 (67.9%) out of 193 female teachers agreed to a positive impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State in the State, while 62 (32.1%) female teachers disagreed.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary education level in Akwa Ibom State

Teachers	Impact		No impact		Remarks
	No.	%	No.	%	
Male	112	75.2	37	24.8	High impact
Female	148	76.7	45	23.3	

$N_1 = 149; N_2 = 193$

Table 2 indicates that 112 out of 149 male teachers (75.2%) affirmed a positive impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State, while 37 (24.8%) out of 149 male teachers disagreed. Also, 148 (76.7%) out of 193 female teachers agreed to a positive impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State in the State, while 45 (23.3%) female teachers disagreed.

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Independent t-test Analysis of the mean rating of male and female teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to primary education in Akwa Ibom State

Teachers	n	\bar{X}	SD	t
Male	149	3.02	0.84	1.42
Female	193	3.17	0.96	

n = 342; Significant at 0.05 alpha level; df = 340; critical t-value = 1.96

Table 3 presents the calculated t-value as 1.42. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.96) at .05 alpha level with 340 degrees of freedom. The obtained t-value (1.42) was less than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the null hypothesis was retained. The result therefore means that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Independent t-test Analysis of the mean rating of male and female teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary education level in Akwa Ibom State

Teachers	n	\bar{X}	SD	t
Male	149	3.10	0.78	1.31
Female	193	3.19	0.82	

n = 342; Significant at 0.05 alpha level; df = 340; critical t-value = 1.96

Table 4 presents the calculated t-value as 1.31. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.96) at .05 alpha level with 340 degrees of freedom. The obtained t-value (1.31) was less than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the null hypothesis was retained. The result therefore means that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis one revealed no significant difference in the mean responses of the male and female public primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State. The calculated t-value was less than the critical t-value, hence the null hypothesis was retained. By implication, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has a significant positive impact on access to primary education in Akwa Ibom State. The finding agrees with that of the research question, and is in line with Vermeersch and Kremer (2014) who found out from their study that the provision of school meals led to increased participation in school among preschoolers. Similarly, the World Food Programme (WFP) (2008) posited that school Feeding Programme serves as an incentive for vulnerable families to send their children to school. This confirms the finding of this study that the National Home-Grown School Feeding (NHGSF) Programme increases access to education at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State. When pupils are fed with quality meals in school, the information spread to the out-of-school children increasing their propensity to enroll in school.

In analyzing hypothesis two, a significant difference was indicated in the mean responses of the male and female public primary school teachers on the impact of Home-grown school feeding programme on school attendance at the primary education level in Akwa Ibom State. The calculated t-value was less than the critical t-value, hence the null hypothesis was retained. By implication, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has a significant positive impact on school attendance at the primary school level in Akwa Ibom State. The finding is in line with that of research question two. This finding is supported by Buttenheim et al. (2011) who associated provision of school meals with positive effects such as increased school attendance, retention, improvement of child's cognitive abilities, increased attention span and reduction of vulnerability of infectious diseases that negatively affect school attendance. Ahmed and Billah (2014) found out that school-based food distribution increased enrolment by 20% as against 2% decline in non-participating schools. Similarly, the World Food Programme (2016) recorded 76% increase in enrolment while attendance increased by 95% after introducing a school feeding programme in Pakistan. Similarly, Osei-Fosu, (2011) reported that the school feeding programme had a high positive and significant impact on school enrolment, attendance and retention. This is confirmed by the finding of this study.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following conclusion was drawn. That the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme by the Federal Government of Nigeria has a positive impact on primary education in Akwa Ibom State. The programme leads to improvement in the access to education and increases attendance in school. It was also discovered from the study that the NHGSF programme reduces school drop-out rate and enhances retention rate.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should continue with, and besides widen the scope and covering of the programme to cover more schools and pupils.

2. Monitoring and supervision should be stepped up to improve and maintain the quality and quantity of meals serve to the pupils.
3. The benefits of the NHGSF programme should be effectively utilized by stepping up facilities and staffing of the schools to improve the quality of education given to the pupils for sustainable educational development in the country.
4. More of community involvement in the NHGSF programme should be encouraged so as to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.
5. State and local governments should be involved in the funding and execution of the programme to ease the burden on the Federal Government, while ensuring its continuity.
6. Appropriate legislation should be enacted by the national and state legislatures to give legal backing and sustain the programme.

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