

Tracking Implementation of the Ghana School Feeding Program

In March 2007 Ghana introduced a National Social Protection Strategy, which included the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP). The GSFP aimed to provide children in public primary schools and kindergartens in the poorest areas with one hot, nutritious meal per day, using locally grown foodstuffs.

The Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND-Ghana) used its Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) Framework to monitor the GSFP. It did this by working with ordinary citizens, who were organized into District Citizen Monitoring Committees (DCMCs).

The first step taken by SEND and its partners was to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the GSFP National Secretariat. The MoU gave SEND and the DCMCs the task of independent monitoring of the GSFP at the schools in 50 target districts. SEND insisted on having an MoU because it encouraged the official GSFP district structures to work with SEND and its network. The MoU also helped to solve the problem of access to information. SEND signed MoUs with the main civil society organizations in the target areas, with district assemblies, and with DCMCs.

SEND's next steps followed the four phases of its PM&E Framework. In the first phase SEND and its partners educated their staff, DCMC members and local staff members of government institutions on the school feeding policy.

For the second phase – participatory research – SEND trained the DCMCs on using the PM&E Framework and tools for data collection and then for analysis. District-based teams visited the beneficiary schools to see how GSFP was working. They also interviewed all the relevant local government agencies. Their monitoring revealed a large number of weaknesses in how the GSFP was being implemented. One important weakness was a lack of understanding among all the different actors about how the GSFP was meant to work. After analyzing the data, the DCMC members validated it with the executive committees of the district assemblies. This step was important because the district assemblies receive the program funding for the district.

The third phase, policy advocacy, involved presenting the findings of the participatory research to the schools, traditional authorities, and other leaders at the community level, and subsequently at higher levels. At the local level presentations, district and regional government officials described the challenges they faced. Their comments strengthened SEND's case. For the national level, the two national reports produced by SEND were especially important.

After the release of SEND's first report, the government changed the leadership of the GSFP and established a Review Committee to investigate problems that had been uncovered by SEND's monitoring. The government also co-hosted a National Policy Dialogue on the GSFP with SEND.

In the fourth phase, SEND and its partners did follow up to track whether the agreements reached in policy dialogues at the district, regional, and national levels were being implemented.

Overall, SEND's biggest contribution was at the district and regional levels. GSFP implementing structures that had previously been inactive started to meet regularly and perform proper monitoring. Their monitoring resulted in real changes, such as use of a water tanker to bring clean water to schools and a decision to purchase 80 percent of the food for GSFP from local farmers. More districts also began allocating budgets for GSFP instead of relying only on the national government.