



SEND-Ghana's campaign of budget monitoring and evaluation combined the efforts of citizens, government officials, and civil society actors to address inefficiencies of the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP), which was designed to provide school children in poor areas with a hot meal everyday and to increase demand for locally farmed agriculture.

Photo courtesy of SEND-Ghana.

The following case study illustrates how monitoring and evaluation tools that are often employed by advocates of budget transparency have been used to strengthen implementation of a national school feeding program. This is a summary of a more in-depth study prepared by Tony Dogbe and Joana Kwabena-Adade as part of the Learning Program of the IBP's Partnership Initiative. The PI Learning Program seeks to assess and document the impact of civil society engagement in public budgeting.

Download a PDF of the complete case study at <http://internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Long-Final-SEND-case-study-English.pdf>

GHANA: USING PARTICIPATORY MONITORING TO IMPROVE NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN AND SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS

Between 2007 and 2010, the Social Enterprise Development Foundation (SEND-Ghana) monitored the performance of the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP), a government program that was designed to provide children in public primary schools and kindergartens in the poorest areas of the country with one hot, nutritious meal per day using locally grown foodstuffs. The program was heralded as an ingenious way to provide a safety net to both children and farmers.

SEND-Ghana, however, discovered that that the school feeding program was not living up to its potential. By facilitating participatory research in 50 local districts around the country, SEND-Ghana found that good intentions were languishing in poor implementation. In short, local agencies were not fulfilling their duties to ensure that children and farmers benefited as intended.

SEND-Ghana's campaign has been viewed as unnecessarily antagonistic, especially by the government officials who have bore the brunt of the criticism, but for many involved in the school feeding program — and especially for those at the local level — the monitoring campaign has been essential for bringing partners and

stakeholders together with the focus and understanding needed to make the program a success.

THE ISSUES: WEAK INSTITUTIONS MAKE FOR A WEAK SAFETY NET

Ghana is a success story. According to government statistics, Ghana reduced overall poverty from 51.7 percent in 1992 to 28.5 percent in 2005/2006, making it one of the few African countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger by 2015.

Still, even while millions of Ghanaians emerge from poverty, some are sinking deeper, especially in the country's north, where livelihoods often depend on the timely arrival of a single, and increasingly erratic, rainy season. A recognition of the growing inequality led in 2007 to a joint plan between the country's government and international donors to weave together a series of programs that would constitute something of a safety net intended to protect the most vulnerable from falling into a vicious cycle as a result of some misfortune: a drought, a flood, an illness — any of the eventualities that can force a family to sell productive assets or pull a child out of school.

One of the central threads to this safety net is the Ghana School Feeding Program, which was designed to provide children in public primary schools and kindergartens in the poorest areas of the country with one hot, nutritious meal per day using locally grown foodstuffs. The rationale for the program is that it would do many things at once.

It would reduce poverty and hunger, incentivize children to attend school, and also (by virtue of sourcing the food locally) bolster demand for farm production, and thus incomes for local farmers.

However, constitutionally mandated institutions in Ghana, such as the Audit Service, the judiciary, and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), which are meant to ensure good governance and accountability, are severely under resourced and thus unable to effectively monitor government programs like the GSFP. Indeed, even before SEND-Ghana began its enquiries, auditors had uncovered rampant malfeasance in the GSFP.

In light of these frustrations, civil society organizations (CSOs) that had traditionally assisted the government in the provision of services, felt they would need a new strategy to bring about meaningful development. Recognizing that participation in policy and decision making is fundamental to ownership of development and sustainable progress, groups such as SEND-Ghana underwent a paradigm shift to focus on policy advocacy as a more effective way to realize long-lasting change in the lives of the poor and vulnerable.

THE CAMPAIGN

SEND-Ghana is the Ghanaian subsidiary of the regional organization SEND West Africa. It was initially founded in 1998 as a service provider but has since evolved into an advocacy and governance CSO with national recognition.

The transformation began unintentionally when in 2002 SEND-Ghana began to do budget monitoring, in effect, as a service to a donor-funded but government-implemented initiative. This was a watershed moment for the organization. By 2008 it had adopted a new mission focusing on research and advocacy to promote good governance and the quality of life for women and men in Ghana.

SEND-Ghana was listed as one of the many “strategic and technical partners” of the GSFP program, but the organization knew from experience that it would need a much stronger official endorsement for its plan to monitor implementation. It sought a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to this effect with the GSFP secretariat and did not relent for two years until that MoU was signed.

SEND-Ghana believes this was essential to its success. The MoU boosted the confidence of local officials and staff at schools who would have otherwise been more suspicious of SEND-Ghana’s intentions and, as a result, less cooperative.

The next step was to mobilize civil society actors at different levels. This was aided by SEND-Ghana’s previous experience; the organization had already assembled local committees of citizens to participate in its budget monitoring work. Each of these committees, made up of 11 individuals representing different stakeholder groups, is coordinated by a local civil society organization. Representatives of these local committees and of the local CSOs come together in regional committees, which also include regional representatives from two key civil society networks and two regional government officials. SEND-Ghana’s regional office acts as coordinator of these committees.

Each of these regional committees in turn sends their chairperson and one of the participating government officials to act as representatives

on the National Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Network, with SEND-Ghana’s Accra headquarters acting as secretariat. At the national level, the network also counts on the participation of representatives from three other national networks, from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and from various other CSOs that have strategic relationships with SEND-Ghana.

With the MOU lending much needed legitimacy, and relying on this extensive network, SEND-Ghana began to implement its strategy for conducting participatory monitoring and evaluation — a methodology that has been refined in its long history of use around the globe. As a first step, SEND-Ghana educated its staff and network members (including all the local committees) on the school feeding policy. This often required translating the GSFP policy documents into accessible language. They extended this training to staff members at the government institutions that are responsible for implementing the GSFP at the local level. SEND-Ghana organized separate sensitization trainings targeted at people with disabilities and women.

In the second phase, SEND-Ghana trained local committees to gather data on the school feeding program to inform the monitoring and evaluation. This entailed the development of tools and training manuals for participatory research on the GSFP.

With support for transportation costs, members of the local committees visited the beneficiary schools to collect data on agreed-upon indicators. Every school and district enrolled in the GSFP should have its own committee dedicated to ensuring proper implementation of the program: are these set up? Are stakeholders such as parents and local farmer organizations participating in decisions about, for example, the sourcing of food items? What is the quality of the meals served? Has the purchasing of the food followed established procurement practices? Have the funds been managed transparently? What is the effect of the program on school enrollment and on local food production?

The committees would also ensure that each school had the infrastructure needed to implement the program (such as a complete kitchen and a source of safe water) and that the direct purchase of food from nearby farmers was proceeding. They also confirmed whether farmers in the area were receiving the necessary credit and extension services, whether schools were training their cooking staff in proper hygiene and providing the required health services to students: body mass index measurements and de-worming among them. They also looked generally at whether the program was being sufficiently publicized. Collecting data on all of these issues required interviews with a broad range of stakeholders in each district.

The investigations found a series of problems plaguing the program. The agencies responsible for implementing the program were often not aware of their duties. Major stakeholders had often been marginalized from the decision-making process. Accountability mechanisms and transparency were found to be weak; accepted procurement procedures were frequently violated.

As a result, the program was not being implemented as envisioned. The basic infrastructure required for the program was often not in place; indeed, access to basic water and sanitation facilities was inadequate in over 50 percent of the schools. Complementary health services — such as the de-worming — were generally not being provided. Generally, district teams were failing to produce from local sources.

But not all the issues were merely a matter of poor implementation. In its conception, the program had not considered the need to boost resources as school enrolment rose. Schools could not afford to feed the children returning to school, thereby undermining efforts to achieve one of the primary objectives.

Armed with this evidence, SEND-Ghana's network began its advocacy campaign. At the local level, the committees presented their findings to the relevant government authorities and to school management. The findings were also collated and presented to regional officials. In both of these cases, members of SEND-Ghana's network tried to encourage stakeholders to find a way forward from the current problems.

The various meetings and workshops at the district and regional levels provided a platform for those who implement the GSFP at these levels to state — without fear of reprisal — their frustrations and dissatisfaction with the lack of resources and information necessary for them to carry out their work. In this regard, the officials tacitly formed an alliance with SEND-Ghana and its partners to influence the central government. This is because the district authorities, while they may be aware of some of the shortcomings of the program, cannot carry out the necessary changes at their level without approval and resources from higher levels. Their comments also confirmed the findings, thereby strengthening the validity of the information SEND-Ghana was taking to the national level, making it difficult for national authorities to refute the findings. The fact that SEND-Ghana was eventually able to come out with a second report testifies to the cooperation and confidence it enjoyed at the district and regional levels.

At the national level, the members of the network sought to draw the central government's attention to the evidence that had been gathered at the grassroots level by people on the ground and validated by district and regional government officials. SEND-Ghana produced two national reports on the GSFP: "Whose Decision Counts?" and "Challenges of Institutional Collaboration." However, to ensure that the quality of the reports was of the highest standard — and would be able to withstand criticism from the government and the ruling party — independent academic experts and consultants reviewed and strengthened aspects of the analysis. The reports were released in a fashion that sought the attention of the national press.

SEND-Ghana later followed up with public duty bearers to track whether promises made during these dialogues were being delivered. This was done through quarterly meetings at the local level and a national multi-stakeholder meeting on the GSFP. And to continue to exert pressure, SEND-Ghana provided the media with evidence-based stories that brought to light the challenges they had uncovered and produced policy briefs on the GSFP targeted at members of the parliament. SEND-Ghana also partnered with a media CSO, the Rural Media Network (RUMNET), to publish a free newsletter that both reported on the network's activities at local, regional, and national levels and enlisted the help of the Ghana Community Radio Network, getting community radio stations to raise awareness and encourage discussion about the GSFP.

CHANGES DUE TO THE CAMPAIGN

The work done by SEND-Ghana and its partners to monitor the GSFP is widely acknowledged. Organizations like the Home Grown School Feeding and Partnership for Child Development describe the efforts as being of "high importance" to the GSFP's implementation, as opposed to the "moderate" to "low importance" grade they gave to the work



TACTICS FOR IMPROVING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GHANA'S SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM

- Signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ghana School Feeding Program's National Secretariat.
- Formed a network of citizens, government officials, and civil society actors at the local, regional, and national levels.
- Educated members of the network on the school feeding program.
- Trained the network to carry out participatory research to gather evidence on all aspects of the school feeding program across the country.
- Undertook policy advocacy using the evidence gathered to encourage constructive discussions to find solutions.
- Followed up on the commitments made by duty bearers at the different levels to make sure they were fulfilled.
- Implemented a communication strategy that included a quarterly newsletter, community radio, national reports, policy briefs, and a prolonged media campaign.

done on the GSFP by others in the nonprofit sector. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to directly attribute the changes at the GSFP National Secretariat to SEND-Ghana's campaign, and many Ghanaian government officials deny the importance of SEND-Ghana's work, alleging that the school feeding program would have inevitably improved with time.

These are many of the same government officials who claim that SEND-Ghana failed to share its reports before making them public. SEND-Ghana denies this, noting that it provided a draft copy of the report to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (which administers the GSFP) long before its final release.

And in several instances the government appears to have acted in response to SEND-Ghana's reports. After the release of SEND-Ghana's first report, for example, the leadership of the GSFP was changed, and a five-member GSFP Review Committee was established, which took up some of the very issues that had been raised by the participatory monitoring. Later, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, together with the GSFP's secretary, cooperated with SEND-Ghana to host a National Policy Dialogue on the GSFP focused on how to increase participation in the program among local stakeholders. Various government commitments emerged from this gathering that aimed to resolve problems identified in SEND-Ghana's reports.

Following up on the issues raised at the National Policy Dialogue, the GSFP held a "Partners' Conference" that brought together relevant Ghanaian ministries with development partners such as the World Food Program, the World Bank, the Dutch Embassy, and others. The government again promised to ensure effective collaboration with

implementing agencies through a number of notable changes. These included a promise by the government to review and simplify the GSFP implementation manual and an offer by the World Food Program to purchase locally produced rice for distribution in Ghana's three northern regions, among other important commitments.

OUTCOMES OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER IMPLEMENTATION OF GHANA'S SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM

- Improvements in basic infrastructure, such as safe and hygienic water sources, toilet facilities, urinal and hand-washing facilities, and adequate kitchenware.
- Better agricultural services, such as the direct purchase of food from local farmers, extension services, farming inputs supply, and the formation of farmer-based organization.
- Improvements to health services, including training cooks in hygiene and nutrition, teaching pupils about health, and providing de-worming, among other kinds of check ups, to students.
- Improvements to education services, such as support for parents to supervise their children's education, adequate teachers, adequate stock of textbooks, and access to equipment for extracurricular activities.
- Improved capability in local communities to participate in and monitor the GSFP program.

The greatest impacts of SEND-Ghana's efforts, however, may have been at the local level. In the words of one local committee member from the Dodowa district in Ghana's Greater Accra Region:

"SEND needs to be commended. If it hadn't been for them...we saw problems but we didn't know how to tackle them. We didn't even have the audacity to question authority on certain issues, but SEND educated us and made us aware of our rights. They are the driving force behind this operation."

At the local level, many of the implementing structures of the program that were formerly inactive began to meet regularly and improved their oversight of the GSFP; there are at least six districts where this was clearly the case. In an example from one district, the attention brought by GSFP's work enabled schools which had previously lacked clean water to gain access the district's only water tanker. In another

example of how local authorities responded to the work, district assemblies in two regions committed to purchasing 80 percent of foodstuffs for the GSFP from farmers in the beneficiary communities, which not only helped boost the local economy but also streamlined GSFP service delivery. And several more districts have begun providing for the GSFP in their annual budgets rather than relying on the national government for all of the resources as a result of the local work.

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the campaign, SEND-Ghana had already developed a national network that extended from grassroots groups around the country to national government officials to international development partners. The organization had previously used this network to carry out a participatory methodology for monitoring and evaluation that had been tried and tested elsewhere.

Because of its experience, SEND-Ghana was aware that a memorandum of understanding would be critical to its success, that its claims must be rigorously evidenced to maintain credibility at the national level, and that a multi-pronged communication strategy at many levels would be necessary to spark action at any level — among other important lessons.

SEND-Ghana is also in an enviable position with regard to funding. The organization has strived to diversify its funding base and now enjoys support from a wide range of organizations that allowed it to sustain such a large campaign over several years.

The successes of the campaign may also owe to a factor of good timing. The campaign built upon previous work by the auditing firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (with funding from the Dutch government) and by the national Auditor-General that uncovered rampant malfeasance in the GSFP. This had built a certain amount of debate and agitation around the program prior to the beginning of the campaign. Still, these investigations did not delve into the actual implementation of the GSFP and did not contribute, as SEND-Ghana did, to building the local capacity to ensure a collaborative effort aimed at resolving the shortcomings of the program.

Overall, though many of the changes in the policies of the GSFP cannot perhaps be attributed directly to SEND-Ghana's campaign, there is ample evidence to show that it did have significant impact with regard to improvements in governance, accountability, and equity, particularly at the local level.

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